

# Chillin' in Another World

WITH LV 2

# SUPER CHEAT POWERS



15



Story by Miya Kinojo  
Illustrations by Katagiri



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# Characters

Chillin' in Another World with  
Level 2 Super Cheat Powers



**Flio**

Former Hero Candidate and  
General Store Proprietor.



**Rys**

Flio's wife, a lupine demon.



**Wyne (Human Form)**

Freeloader with high stats  
and a big appetite.



**Levana**

Proud leviathan girl.



**Garyl**

Flio and Rys's son. Always  
worried about the Maiden  
Queen.



**Elinàsze**

Flio and Rys's daughter.  
A real daddy's girl.



**Rylnàsze**

Elinàsze's little sister. Flio and  
Rys's youngest daughter.



**Ben'ne**

Psychic remnant of a swordmaster  
who haunted Ijo Bridge in the  
Land of the Rising Sun in search  
of a worthy opponent.



**Hiya**

The Djinn who Commands the  
Origin of Light and Darkness.



**Damalynas**

The Grand Magus of Midnight.  
In training in Hiya's mindscape.



**Belano**

A quiet, shy, and skittish teacher.



**Belalio**

Minilio and Belano's child.



**Blossom**

A former knight of Klyrode.  
Works hard on the farm.



**Ura**

An oni with a strong sense of justice.  
Chief of a demon village who lost their  
place in the world.



**Kora**

Ura's daughter. A quiet  
girl who's often lost in  
her own world.



**Telbyress**

Drunkard of a no-goodness who  
was exiled from the Celestial Plane.  
Lodging with Hokh'hokton.

Chillin'  
Another  
World  
Maiden  
Queen

Super Cheat Powers



# Characters

Chillin' in Another World with Level 2  
Super Cheat Powers



**Ghozal**

Once known as the mightiest  
Dark One in history.



**Uliminas**

Ghozal's former confederate in  
the Dark Army and current wife.



**Balirossa**

A former knight of Klyrode  
and wife of Ghozal.



**Folmina**

Ghozal and  
Uliminas's daughter.



**Ghoro**

Ghozal and Balirossa's son.



**Calsi'im**

Former Dark Regent now  
staying at Flio's house  
along with Charun.



**Charun**

Magic doll who became  
Calsi'im's wife. Specialist in  
preparing tea.



**Rabbitz**

Calsi'im and Charun's  
daughter. Loves to climb on  
top of Calsi'im's head.



**Greanyl**

Shadow demon working for the  
Fli-o'-Rys General Store.



**Sleip (Human Form)**

Former member of the Infernal  
Four living in sin with Byleri.



**Byleri**

Former archer of Klyrode  
living in sin with Sleip.



**Rislei**

Sleip and Byleri's daughter.



**Ellie (The Maiden Queen)**

Hardworking queen of the  
Magical Kingdom with a strong  
sense of justice.



**Leusoc (The Second Princess)**

Laid-back princess who  
handles foreign diplomacy.



**Swann (The Third Princess)**

Bright-eyed princess who  
handles domestic affairs.



**Tanya**

An amnesiac maid who showed  
up uninvited (Disciple of the  
Celestial Plane).

Super Cheat Powers





# Characters

Chillin' in Another World with Level  
Super Cheat Powers



**Hero Gold-Hair**

On the run from the law despite being the "hero."



**Tsuya**

Hero Gold-Hair's partner in crime. Worried about the group's finances.



**Valentine**

A beguiling djinn and former Evil General of the Realm of Evil. A big eater despite her looks.



**The Shadow King**

The former King of Klyrode, and head of the Shadow Conglomerate.



**Aryun Keats**

Member of the rare carriage djinn species, but her magic power is nothing to speak of.



**Wuha Gappoli**

Member of the rare mansion djinn species, but no use at all in a fight.



**Dawkson**

Ghozal's younger brother. Newly crowned Dark One and a believer in camaraderie.



**Phufun**

Dawkson's minion, a succubus, and an extreme masochist.



**Belianna**

A foulmouthed devil who loves her little sister.



**Irystiel**

Garyl's classmate and Belianna's little sister.



**Salina**

Garyl's classmate. Seems to have feelings for him, but...



**Sybe (Unicorn Rabbit Form)**

Flio's household pet. Mate of the Unicorn Rabbit Shebe.



**Shebe**

Unicorn Rabbit who became Sybe's bride.



**Sube**

Child of Sybe and Shebe. Unicorn rabbit with slightly upturned eyes.



**Sebe**

Child of Sybe and Shebe. Well-known for the adorable faces it makes.



**Sobe**

Child of Sybe and Shebe. A unicorn rabbit with coloration reminiscent of a psychobear.

Chillin' in Another World with Level  
Super Cheat Powers

Super Cheat Power



# Chapter 1: Flio's House in the New World

The world of Klyrode is a world of swords and sorcery, home to magic beasts and demihumans of every shape and size. In this world, humans and demons had been at war since time immemorial, until at last the greatest of the human kingdoms, the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, made peace with the Dark Army, the most significant institution among demonkind.

In the days since, humans and demons alike have begun to adapt to a life of peace. At first, the dangerous malicism particles produced by demon physiology were a major problem limiting the amount of exchange and intermingling that was possible between them and humans. Recently, however, the situation has begun to change with a new magic item introduced by the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode: the Malicism Neutralizer. This item had been in use on an experimental basis until recently, when the kingdom finally approved it for use by the general public.

The Malicism Neutralizer was able to counteract the harmful effects of malicism emission without purging the malicism that made up the bodies of the demons themselves, with a radius of effect that could encompass an entire city. With them in place across the land, relations between humans and demons have entered a period of rapid transformation.

As for Flio, the manager of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store—the very company responsible for the production of these remarkable devices—it has been one busy day after another for him, his wife Rys, and everyone lodging at his house. Between their work delivering Malicism Purifiers to cities across the land at the behest of the Magical Kingdom and Dark Army alike, they have had their hands full running not only the Fli-o'-Rys General Store itself but the newly opened Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall as well. And in the midst of all that, Flio's Household had been undergoing many a change as well...

And with that the stage is set. The curtains slowly rise...

◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇



It was nighttime in Houghtow City, a city of merchants located near the border of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, far to the west of Klyrode Castle, which stood at the center of the kingdom.

Flio's house stood on a hill some distance outside of the city proper. Once upon a time, the building had been a cozy single-story cottage. It had been empty when Flio found it, the house's original inhabitants having abandoned it to flee from an invasion of magic beasts back when the Magical Kingdom and Dark Army had still been at war. Flio had purchased the empty building initially to use it as a base for hunting the magic beasts that the Dark Army had released in the nearby forest.

At first, Flio and Rys had expected to be the only two people staying at the house, but they were soon joined by the knight Balirossa and her company when Flio saved them from a magic beast attack, and later by Sybe the psychobear, who surrendered to Rys rather than face the two of them in combat and became the family's pet. Next came Hiya, the djinn who commands the origin of light and darkness, and Damalynas, the Grand Magus of Midnight. Later still, Ghozal, the Dark One at the time, abdicated his throne and came to join them as well, along with a number of his companions. And as the household grew in size, Flio began using his magic to expand the house.

Then there was Sleip, the former member of the Dark Army's Infernal Four, as well as his entire elite guard; Wyne, Flio and Rys's adopted first daughter, who had once been a warrior of the Dark Army's strongest division, the Legion of Dragons; Tanya, who was originally an angel in service to the Celestial Plane; and Calsi'im, who served the Dark Army as Dark Regent and was eventually even made the Dark One; as well as his minion at the time, the magic doll Charun. By the time all of these people were living together at Flio's house, it had grown to three stories tall, not counting the expansive basement. Moreover, Flio used his magic to expand the space inside the building as well, making the interior many times larger than it seemed from the outside.

Even the humble vegetable garden to the side of the house had grown larger and larger thanks to the efforts of Blossom, who originally hailed from a farming family, with help from the former Dark Army goblin foot soldiers Maunty and Hokh'hokton among many others, until now it had become a vast and



productive farm. Byleri, meanwhile, who excelled when it came to handling horses, had built a ranch in the space between the house and the farm, which she now ran alongside the lichsteed Sleip and his former Dark Army subordinates. And in the space at the far side of the farm, Flio had used his magic to transplant an entire mountain where the oni Ura, a former Dark Army partisan, had built a hidden village together with his band of demons fleeing the ravages of war. Now Ura and the other villagers spent their days cheerfully working on Blossom's farm.

Finally, Flio and Rys had three children in their time living together: Elinàsze, Garyl, and Rynàsze. Ghozal, Sleip, and even their pet, Sybe, had children of their own as well.

Flio sat in a chair in the living room of the house, staring in thought at the empty single-legged chair beside him.

Flio was a merchant from another world, originally summoned as one of the candidates for the role of Hero. He had been blessed with a powerful ability that gave him mastery over every magic spell and every skill to exist in the world he was in. Now he lived with his wife, Rys, a former demon soldier, and spent his days working as the manager of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store.

Rys, who had just finished setting the large table in the middle of the living room with food for the night's supper, looked curiously over at her husband. "My lord husband?" she said. "Is something on your mind?"

Rys was a lupine demon, originally a soldier in the Dark Army. After her defeat at the hands of Flio, however, she had made the choice to walk alongside him as his wife. She was a doting wife who loved her husband more than anything in the world and a mother figure to everyone living at Flio's house.

"Oh, you know..." Flio said, forcing a smile as he looked up at his wife. "It's nothing, really..."

"I know what it is!" Rys said, her face breaking into a sudden beaming smile as she pressed her hands up against both sides of her face in adoration. "You've been thinking about our date this morning!" By *date*, of course, Rys meant that the two of them had gone hunting together in the nearby forest. Just



remembering it sent her into a fit of joy—squeezing her hands together next to her cheek, she kicked at the floor in a happy little dance, color rising to her face. “We’ve been so busy lately that we’ve hardly been able to go out hunting together anymore, but that just makes the times we *do* all the sweeter! I’ve scarcely felt such ecstasy as the moment the two of us defeated that enormous serpent of a magic beast. It was a formidable creature to be sure, but that thing was no match for our combination clothesline of love! Yes—love, love, love!!!”

Flio smiled in fond amusement at his wife’s display of jubilation. “It *has* been a while since we’ve gone on a hunt like this morning’s,” he said. “And it was a successful one too. But what’s been on my mind is more...well... When we first came to this house it was just the two of us, you know? It feels like it grew to an entire crowd in the blink of an eye...”

“You’re right,” Rys said with a smile. “Our pack grew to be very large before we knew it. And we have a goodly amount of fighting strength at our disposal to boot! As your wife, it makes me very proud.” Rys, a lupine demon, thought of the people living in Flio’s house as a pack, with her husband in the center as the pack’s leader. It was, you could say, a natural proclivity of her species.





*A goodly amount of fighting strength, hm...? Flio thought to himself, as Rys puffed out her chest proudly beside him. Well, I certainly can't deny that. Between the former Dark One, Ghozal, the famous djinn, Hiya, and the Archmage of Midnight, Damalynas, to name just a few, this house is basically a collection of some of the top-class fighters in this entire world...*

"And as the wife of the leader, making sure that none of these people go hungry is one of my most important duties!" Rys continued. "On that note, I must finish setting the table with all of this delicious food before the others arrive." She turned, heading back towards the kitchen.

"Oh," Flio said, rising from his seat to follow after Rys. "Here, let me help."

Rys, however, held out her hand, stopping him in his tracks. "My lord husband, you are to sit right there and greet the others as they arrive for dinner. That is the role of the leader of the pack. Preparing the meal is my job, as your wife!" Smiling, she bowed deeply and hurried on towards the kitchen.

Just as Rys approached the kitchen door, Byleri appeared out of it carrying a large platter in both arms, piled high with stir-fried meat and vegetables.

Byleri had been an archer serving in Balirossa's company of knights, but she had since quit the knighthood along with the others and now lived in Flio's house, where she put her talent for tending to horses to use caring for equine magic beasts on the ranch outside. She and Sleip had ended up living as husband and wife, although they had never had a legal ceremony, and they had a daughter by the name of Rislei who filled their days with happiness.

"Oh, Byleri!" said Rys. "Set that platter right in front of my lord husband, would you please?"

"Like, right away, Lady Rys!" Byleri said, placing it on the table with a cheerful, "And there we go!"

At that very moment, Rislei entered the living room. "I'm home!" she declared, evidently in high spirits.

Rislei was the daughter of Sleip and Byleri, making her half lichsteed and half human. She was a serious-minded girl, and something of a leader for the younger children in Flio's house.

“Rislei! Like, welcome home!” said Byleri. “How was your day at the races?”

“Well, there was only one race for those of us in the beginning racers category...” Rislei said, beaming with satisfaction. “But I took first place by a mile!”

“Attagirl, Ri—” Byleri began, smiling back at her daughter, but before she could finish, Sleip came bursting into the room from the same hallway that Rislei had just emerged from herself.

Sleip was a mighty lichsteed and a former member of the Dark Army’s Infernal Four from back when Ghozal had still reigned as Dark One. These days he lived at Flio’s house and ran the ranch outside along with his wife Byleri when he wasn’t running in the races over at the Fli-o’-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall.

“P-Papa!” Rislei cried out in distress as her father made a beeline straight her way and picked her up in his muscular arms, holding her tight above his head. “W-Wait!”

“Attagirl, Rislei!” Sleip cheered as he lifted his daughter up into the air. “You were on fire in today’s race! And the way you took that corner at the very end—no ordinary racer could ever make a turn like that!”

“W-Wait! P-Papa, wait!” Rislei protested from within Sleip’s arms. “I-I’m glad you’re happy and everything, but this is super embarrassing!”

“Ha ha ha!” Sleip laughed, holding her high for all the living room to see. “No need to worry about something like that!” Looking at his face, it was hard to imagine that this was the demon who once struck terror into the hearts of the Klyrode Army as a member of the Infernal Four.

The next person to arrive in the room was the oni Ura, chief of the nearby village and proud father. He had been raising his daughter Kora as a single father since the death of her mother, a fairy folk, while also looking after a band of wayward demons he had taken under his wing. Ura was a man of unshakable principles and deep emotion, whose physical strength was great enough that he was considered a leading candidate for the Infernal Four back in the day of Dark One Gholl.

“Ah ha ha! You two are as close as ever, I see!” Ura said, laughing as he took



in the sight of Sleip doting on his daughter.

“You’re one to talk!” Sleip shot back with a grin, pulling on Rislei’s cheeks without a care in the world. “The two of *you* are every bit as close, by the looks of things!” Sure enough, Kora was riding on her father’s shoulders.

Kora was Ura’s one and only daughter, whose heritage made her a hybrid of fairy from her mother’s side and oni from her father’s. She was an excruciatingly shy and self-conscious girl, but over time she had come to open herself up to the members of Flio’s household.

As Sleip turned his gaze her direction, Kora flushed bright red and shyly hid her face behind her long hair. “D-Don’t look...”

“Ha ha ha!” Ura laughed, patting his daughter on the head. “Come now, Kora! There’s nothing to be ashamed of!”

“That’s right!” Blossom concurred as she followed Ura and Kora into the living room. “After all, you like getting piggyback rides from your old man, don’t you, Kora?”

Blossom was another member of Balirossa’s old company, serving as a heavy knight. She and Balirossa were best friends, so naturally she quit the knighthood as well and came to live at Flio’s house alongside her. Blossom came from a farming family and was skilled in all kinds of agricultural work, which she now put to use managing the vast tracts of farmland outside Flio’s house.

“Yes...” Kora admitted, burying her head against Ura’s. “I do...”

Ura carried Kora over to their pair of seats, as Blossom went to take her own seat beside them as usual. Before she could sit down, however, Hiya appeared right behind her back.

Hiya, the djinn who commands the origin of light and darkness, was a being of enough magic power to destroy the entire world if they desired, but after their defeat at the hands of Flio they had come to worship the merchant as the so-called Exalted One and took up residence in his house.

“Exalted One,” Hiya said, “I have returned from my errand.”

“Hello, Hiya,” said Flio. “Were you out with Elinàsze again today?”

“Indeed,” Hiya intoned, bowing gravely. “I journeyed with your esteemed daughter to the north, at her request. Damalynas accompanied us as well.”

At this, Damalynas appeared, taking physical form beside Hiya. Damalynas, the Grand Magus of Midnight, was a master of the dark arts who had long since abandoned her corporeal body, living on as a psychic construct. Ever since she had been bested by none other than Hiya, she resided inside the djinn’s mindscape as their beloved training partner.

“She can be a demanding little princess, though, can’t she? Taking us from the very east end of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode all the way to the very west on a single whim, I mean,” Damalynas complained, resting her head back against her hands with a sigh. “Of course, when you’re as good at Teleportation as I am, a trip like that’s no problem at all!”

“Hah,” Hiya laughed. “That only speaks to the faith the daughter of the Exalted One has in you, does it not? One such as her would be easily capable of casting the spell Teleportation on her own, and yet she entrusted this duty to you. You should take it as an honor, and hold your head high.”

“I-I guess you’re right...” Damalynas said, blushing despite herself and awkwardly rubbing the tip of her nose at Hiya’s praise. “When you put it like that, it doesn’t sound so bad, does it?”

As the two were talking, Elinàsze herself arrived on the scene. “Papa!” she said, bounding down the stairs. “I’m home!”

Elinàsze was one of Flio and Rys’s children, the older twin sister of Garyl. She had grown into a studious and committed magical researcher, although her love for her father—which had always been rather extreme—had developed into something truly pathological. Recently, she had been spending every free moment she had collecting magic grimoires in order to experiment with putting the magic spells she found to practical use.

At the moment, Elinàsze was dressed not in the unassuming full-length skirt and long-sleeved shirt she favored while she was busy researching in her room, but a gorgeous dress with an exposed back. The only time she dressed this way, in fact, was when her father, Flio, happened to be present. Elinàsze had almost no regard for anyone else’s opinion, but she did want her beloved father to



think of her as at least a little bit pretty.

*I had hoped the daughter of the Exalted One might show some improvement now that she has graduated from the Houghtow College of Magic...* Hiya thought, frowning as they watched Elinàsze descend the stairs. *But alas, her fixation on her father seems to be greater than ever before...*

“By the way, Elinàsze,” Flio said as his daughter sat down at the table. “Miss Zofina is going to be arriving from the Celestial Plane tomorrow to pick up her usual shipment of medicine. Is everything ready to go?”

“Yes, it’s all set,” Elinàsze said. “But our stock of Beasts of Disaster materials is beginning to run rather low. I’ll have to ask her for permission to take another trip to Dogorogma when she comes to visit.”

“All right, I’ll leave that to you,” said Flio. “Although, we did happen to capture a Beast of Disaster just this morning. Could you use that one?”

“What was that?” Elinàsze blinked. “There was a Beast of Disaster after all? But I spent all day searching with Hiya and Damalynas, and we never sensed anything that seemed at all promising! How could we have overlooked it, I wonder...” she said, folding her arms in thought.

“It seems like this one was moving about underground,” Flio said with a reassuring smile. “It might have been hard to find if you were looking on the surface.”

Here, Tanya stepped up to offer her insight to the conversation. Tanya, whose original name was Tanyalina, was an angel and disciple of the Celestial Plane who had been sent to keep an eye on Flio due to his extraordinary magic power. On her way, though, she had suffered a freak midair collision with Wyne, resulting in the loss of much of her memory. Now she resided at Flio’s house, working as the household’s live-in maid.

“Pardon my interruption,” Tanya said, “but perhaps I can explain this. Beasts of Disaster are beings known to destroy planetoid worlds in their entirety. For that reason, the Celestial Plane uses their magic to detect them in their infancy and capture them before they grow large enough to present a threat. They transport these juveniles to the subterranean world of Dogorogma, which exists beneath the space occupied by the many planetoid worlds. I am certain the

Celestial Plane must be in an uproar as well, for creatures they would go to such lengths to subdue to be appearing with such frequency...”

“I see...” Flio and Elinàsze said, nodding along to Tanya’s explanation. The two of them took a good long look at Tanya for a moment before sharing a glance.

“Papa...” Elinàsze said, sending her father a telepathic message. *“Didn’t Tanya lose her memories when she had that collision with big sis Wyne...?”*

“So she did...” Flio replied. *“But every now and then she’ll say something that makes it seem like she remembers things from before...”*

“A-Ah!” Tanya exclaimed, interrupting Flio and Elinàsze’s telepathic conversation. “Th-This is just supposition, of course! I certainly haven’t regained my memories or any such thing, I assure you!” She held her head in her hands as if it were in pain, but something about the gesture seemed like a deliberate affectation. Flio and Elinàsze could only smirk in wry amusement.

“Dada! Eli-Eli!” cried Wyne, running up from behind with a great big grin on her face. “I’m home-home!”

Wyne was a young but extraordinarily powerful dragonewt, said to be the strongest warrior among all of dragonkind. Flio and Rys had once rescued her when they found her collapsed from hunger at the side of the road and adopted her into their family. She was a devoted older sister to Elinàsze and the rest.

“Welcome home, Wyne,” said Flio. “How far did you travel today?”

“Well...” Wyne began, hugging Flio tight around the shoulders and happily nuzzling her cheeks against his. “I flew-flew to the racing hall and watched some races from the sky...and then I followed along with some of the Enchanted Frigate flight-flights!”

*In other words, Flio thought, smiling his usual easygoing smile, she did her job like I asked her to, providing security for the racing hall and the Enchanted Frigates...* “You’ve become quite the hard worker, haven’t you?” he said. “Although you’d never guess from how you act in the mornings...” he added, his smile shifting to an amused smirk.





That morning, the sun crested over the peak of the mountain, shining its light onto Flio's house. In one of the rooms on the second floor, Wyne lay asleep, snoring in the middle of an oversized bed.

"Mr... Nghff..." the dragonewt moaned, a crease forming in her forehead as she thrashed her arms from side to side. It seemed she was having a lot of trouble sleeping.

Eventually, Wyne sat up in bed, looking groggily from left to right with heavy-lidded eyes. She frowned, the crease in her forehead growing even more pronounced. "Mrh..." she grumbled, pawing at the empty bed to her right. "Fol-Fol's gone-gone..." She repeated the gesture to her left, adding, "And Gho-Gho's gone-gone too..."

Years ago, Wyne used to sleep in the same bed as Garyl, Elinàsze, and Rislei. Now that those three had grown up she had taken to sharing a bed with Folmina and Ghoros instead...but now, her bedmates were nowhere to be found. Frowning, Wyne began to sniff at the air like a dog, looking all around the room.

Wyne pulled off the mattress to look under the bed. She searched every hidden nook and cranny. Finally, she heard the sound of the bedroom door creaking open. "Fol-Fol! Gho-Gho!" she cried, her face lighting up immediately. She leaped through the air, bounding towards the door.

"No," said Tanya, as expressionless as always as she stepped into the room, holding a broom in her left hand. "It is Tanya."

"Fwagh! T-Tan-Tan?!" Wyne cried, her eyes going wide at the sight of the maid. She flailed her arms and legs in midair, trying desperately to reverse direction and return to the bed. It was too late, however—Tanya had already caught her by the leg.

"Honestly..." Tanya chided her. "I've told you, haven't I? You must wear your nightclothes when you sleep, young mistress."

Just as Tanya said, the dragonewt currently squirming in her arms was as naked as the day she was born.

As a wyvern dragonewt, Wyne had an organ in her body that enabled her to

breathe fire. As a result, however, her body temperature was quite high, giving her an aversion to wearing clothing in her human form. Whenever she was given an opportunity, she would immediately strip out of her clothing entirely.

This was why Wyne was so upset to see Tanya—it was Tanya who would force Wyne to put her clothes back on each and every time.

Reaching into her skirt pockets, Tanya produced a pair of underwear and slid it up Wyne's legs with astonishing speed. Next, she used her magic to manipulate the clothing that Wyne had left strewn all over the bedroom floor.

"No! Nooo!" Wyne wailed, contorting her body in a desperate attempt to escape.

"Young mistress, please stop that!" Tanya commanded, as she struggled to put the clothes on Wyne's body.

Soon, the sound of their struggle echoed throughout the room and down the hall.

#### ◇Meanwhile—Flio and Rys's Room◇

"Wyne and Tanya are at it again..." Flio said, smirking as the sound of their wrestling match came from the second floor above them.

"They've been doing this every morning, lately, haven't they..." Rys said, smirking as she looked up at the ceiling. "Well, I suppose there's nothing we can do about it..."

"I guess not," Flio said, nodding. "Now that Folmina and Ghoru are going to the Houghtow College of Magic, they've started sleeping in their own beds more often...leaving Wyne all alone after she got used to the three of them sleeping together every night..." *She's been working diligently at the jobs I've been giving her*, he thought, smiling fondly, *but in a lot of ways, she's still a child, I suppose.*

"She used to share a bed with Garyl from time to time..." Rys said. "Lately, though, he's had his duties at Klyrode Castle..."

Flio nodded. "You know...I was surprised that it happened so soon. I thought he was going to enroll in the Klyrode Institute for Chivalric Education first..."



## ◇Klyrode Castle—Knight Dormitories◇

“Achoo!” Garyl rubbed his nose, startled by the sudden sneeze. “That’s strange... I don’t *feel* sick,” he said, before brushing it off just as quickly. “Oh well, no use worrying about it!” With that, he flipped himself upside down into an effortless handstand.

Garyl was the son of Flio and Rys, and Elinàsze’s younger twin brother. His easy smile and good humor along with his physical prowess, which could only be described as utterly outlandish, had made him a celebrity among the students of the Houghtow College of Magic.

At the moment, Garyl was wearing nothing but a pair of pajama pants with his upper body completely exposed as he began a set of one-handed handstand push-ups. By the looks of things, he had only just gotten out of bed himself.

As Garyl held his one-armed handstand, a cloud of mist appeared behind him, forming into a woman. This was Ben’ne, a legendary swordmaster from Hi Izuru, the Land of the Rising Sun, who had abandoned her flesh to live on as a psychic construct. Garyl had once defeated her in one-on-one combat and, impressed by his phenomenal strength, she resolved to serve him as his familiar.

“Beginning as soon as you awaken from bed?” Ben’ne said. “I see you are as devoted to your training as ever, my master.”

“Good morning, Miss B,” Garyl greeted her. “And, well, they accepted me into the Order of Klyrode, you know. Now that I’m a knight, I figure I’ve gotta train even harder than before.”

“I commend your spirit,” said Ben’ne. “Although I must say, none of the knights of this kingdom could hope to match you in combat as you are already...”

“Not at all!” Garyl insisted with a look of determination, continuing his push-ups even as he spoke. “Danger always strikes when you least expect it! And when it does, I want to be at my best. I can’t let myself be satisfied with where I am right now if I want to keep improving my mind and body!”

Ben’ne watched on, nodding in approval as Garyl performed his exercises.

“Still...” Garyl added with a frown. “It is kind of a pity how things went with the Klyrode Institute...”

◇Klyrode Institute for Chivalric Education—Headmaster’s Office◇

“I refuse to accept this!” Lulun, the president of the Klyrode Institute student council, burst into the room, storming with rage.

Lulun was part succubus, making her a human-demon hybrid. She had been invited to study at the Klyrode Institute for Chivalric Education as part of the project to deepen friendly relations between humans and demons. She was a gifted student and well-liked, so naturally enough she had been appointed president of the student council.

Right now, however, Lulun had begun pounding her fists on the table in the headmaster’s office, her long purple hair, which she wore done up in pigtails, in wild disarray.

“H-Hey now!” said Headmaster MacTaulo, smiling even as he leaned back from Lulun’s display of rage. “What’s gotten into you, Lulun? I can assure you, there’s no need for all these theatrics!”

In his day, MacTaulo was known as the greatest knight of the kingdom—a champion of humanity fighting the Dark Army on the front lines with scarcely a moment’s rest. Now that the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode had achieved peace with the Dark Army, he had retired from combat to become the first headmaster of the Klyrode Institute for Chivalric Education, devoting himself to passing on his wisdom to the next generation.

“No need for all these theatrics, he says... Hmph!” Lulun fumed, adjusting her false glasses and fixing the headmaster with a deadly glare. “How come Garyl won’t be joining us at the Klyrode Institute? I know for a fact that he finally graduated from the Houghtow College of Magic and took our school’s entrance examination!”

“Ah, well, no helping that one...” MacTaulo said, giving his student a knowing smile. “I’m sure you saw Garyl’s examination results, didn’t you, Lulun? His written exam was merely above average, but his performance on the practical test was absolutely perfect—so perfect, in fact, that in the mock battle, he faced off against no fewer than ten active duty knights and defeated the lot of

them without breaking a sweat. With abilities like that, it was only natural that he'd be inducted into the knighthood on the spot."

"I-I suppose I can understand your logic, Headmaster...but still!" Lulun said, gritting her teeth and scowling furiously. *I-I thought Garyl and I would finally be classmates...* she thought. *This is simply unfair!*

Yes—Lulun had fallen in love at first sight the moment she set eyes upon Garyl, and had been waiting patiently for him to join her at the Klyrode Institute for Chivalric Education.

"W-Well, in any event, it won't help anything to lose your temper about it," MacTaulo said. "Garyl will be sitting in on classes and lectures at the Institute between his knightly duties, at the boy's own insistence. And I've asked him personally to join us as a special instructor for the occasional lesson in swordsmanship. So—"

"R-Really?" Lulun demanded, grabbing him by his lapels and interrupting the headmaster midsentence. "You aren't lying to me, are you? That's the absolute truth?"

"Y-Yes, absolutely!" MacTaulo said.

"Absolutely, positively, one hundred percent?!" Lulun said, questioning MacTaulo with desperate ferocity.

"Y-Yes! It's absolutely, positively, one hundred percent true!" MacTaulo insisted. "Now, would you get your hands off my shirt?"

Lulun, however, wasn't listening at all. *Yes!* she thought, lost in a feverish fantasy of her and Garyl enjoying school life together. *I'll have Garyl as a classmate after all! And if I play my cards right, perhaps I could even become his girlfriend...*

◇Meanwhile—Outside the Headmaster's Office◇

While MacTaulo and Lulun carried on with their loud conversation, Salina waited outside the door, listening in.

Salina had been one of Garyl's classmates back at the Houghtow College of Magic. The daughter of a wealthy family, she had been an arrogant and high-



handed girl when she first joined the class, but over time, her infatuation with Garyl had softened her personality considerably. Her specialty was infusing songs with magic power, which she could use to attack in combat.

As she listened to MacTaulo and Lulun speak, Salina couldn't help but pump her fists in victory. *Yes! she thought. When I first heard Lord Garyl's performance on the entrance examination had been so outrageously outstanding they skipped him straight to graduation and made him a knight on the spot... Well, my first thought was that it only goes to show just how amazing my Lord Garyl is! But after that I started to wonder what I should do now that I passed the test, since I only took the entrance examination here to follow him! I had worked myself into quite the frenzy over it, to be perfectly honest, but if Lord Garyl is to make appearances from time to time at the Klyrode Institute, then it's no problem! My plan to become Lord Garyl's bride can continue apace!*

She pumped her fists in front of the door for some time, lost in thought. Needless to say, the sight attracted more than a few curious looks from students and faculty alike as they made their way down the hall.

#### ◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

"Well," said Rys, proudly puffing out her chest, "Garyl is the son of myself and my lord husband, after all. It's only natural they would skip him through the Klyrode Institute entirely and appoint him to knighthood!"

"You're right." Flio nodded, smiling his usual easygoing smile. "Garyl takes after you in his physical abilities—it's no wonder he did so well."

"Preposterous!" Rys declared, grabbing her husband tight with both hands. "Garyl takes after *your* kindness, *your* wisdom, and many, many more of your wonderful traits besides! Really, my lord husband, you're far too modest! Too much modesty can be just as much of a problem as not enough, if you ask me!"

"I-I guess so..." Flio admitted. "All right, I'll try to be mindful of that."

"Of course..." Rys said, blushing softly and looking up at Flio with her adoring puppy dog eyes. "I'm the one who knows your good qualities best of all. If I say you're good enough, it means you are."

"Rys..." Flio, wrapped his arms around her, pulling her in. Their faces drew

close, lips just about to meet, when—

“Papa! Mama! Good morning!” Suddenly, the couple was interrupted by the sound of their daughter Rylnàsze’s cheerful voice.

Rylnàsze was Flio and Rys’s youngest daughter. She was born with an incredible talent for taming, giving her the ability to befriend magic beasts of every sort. These days, she put her abilities to work as a staff member at the Houghtow College of Magic’s own magic beast ranch between attending classes.

“R-Rylnàsze!” said Flio, hastily separating from Rys and turning to face his daughter, smiling as naturally as he could manage. “G-Good morning!”

“You’re taking your friends for a morning walk, I assume?” said Rys, her own face bright red.

Behind Rylnàsze was a herd of magic beasts, led by Sybe in his psychobear form and Tybe, the Bear of Misfortune.

Sybe was originally a wild psychobear Flio had met in a random encounter. Realizing he had no hope of winning against the omnipotent merchant, Sybe surrendered on the spot and lived at Flio’s house as a family pet ever since. He spent most of his time transformed into a unicorn rabbit, a form Flio had given him using his magic.

Tybe, meanwhile, was a Bear of Misfortune cub who had become attached to Rylnàsze during one of the family’s trips to Dogorogma and ended up following her all the way back to the world of Klyrode. Now he served as one of her familiars.

Behind the two ursine magic beasts was Shebe, a wild unicorn rabbit who joined the family as Sybe’s mate after the two of them became close, and their children—Sube, Sebe, and Sobe—all hopping around happily on their two hind legs. Sube and Sobe both took after their mother’s unicorn rabbit features, while Sebe had more in common with his father, Sybe the psychobear.

“That’s right!” Rylnàsze chirped, beaming from ear to ear. “We’re about to go on a walk! And on our way back, we’re going to get some fresh veggies from Miss Blossom!”

Behind her, Sybe and Tybe both stood up tall and thumped their chests with their paws as if to say, “Leave the lifting to us!”

“Take care not to be late for school!” Flio said, waving his daughter and her companions goodbye with a smile.

“I will!” said Rynàsze, waving back before disappearing out the front door. “Let’s go, everyone!” The magic beasts who had been waiting for her all cried out happily in reply.

“You know, speaking of which...” Rys said, cocking her head to the side as Rynàsze headed off. “There’s still quite some time left before the school day begins, isn’t there? Why did Folmina and Ghoro head to school so early today?”

“Oh,” said Flio, a smirk coming over his face. “That would be because...”

### ◇Meanwhile—Houghtow College of Magic—Arena◇

This early in the morning, the Houghtow College of Magic was nearly empty aside from a scant few members of the school’s faculty going about their business. Near the middle of campus was an arena, built for use in practical magic combat training. Flio had constructed it himself, under contract as a representative of the Fli-o’-Rys General Store, and it came equipped with an impenetrable magic barrier so that students could practice magic spells of considerable power without fear of affecting the surrounding area.

Inside the arena that morning were three combatants—Folmina, Ghoro, and their father, Ghozal.

“Come on, Ghoro!” said Folmina. “Today’s the day we land a hit on papa!”

“Okay...” Ghoro said. “I’ll do my best...” He flexed, and his arms grew enormously large past the elbows until his fists resembled two enormous hammers.

Folmina and Ghoro were Ghozal’s two children. Folmina was his daughter with his wife Uliminas, making her half demon royal and half hellcat, while Ghoro was his son with his other wife Balirossa, making him half demon royal and half human. Both children, however, were equally attached to both Uliminas and Balirossa as their mutual co-mothers. Folmina was an outgoing girl, while Ghoro was quiet, withdrawn, and very fond of his older sister. The



two of them had recently begun attending classes at the Houghtow College of Magic, alongside Rynàsze.

Standing before the siblings was their father, Ghozal. Ghozal had once been known as Gholl, the Dark One, until he surrendered his throne to his younger brother, Yuigarde, and went off to live as a human, freeloading at Flio's house. In his time living there, he and Flio had become something akin to best friends, and eventually he took Uliminas, his former confederate from the Dark Army, and Balirossa the human swordswoman as his two wives.

Ghozal smiled, spreading his arms wide. "Ha ha ha! That's the spirit! Come at me whenever you're ready—I'll give you some proper practice!" He seemed to be standing at ease, but in fact the former Dark One's stance was calculated not to reveal any openings to his opponents. Young as they were, Folmina and Ghoros seemed to have realized this. They crept forward, careful not to make any unwise movements.

Or at least, they started out that way at first...

"Ugh!" After a few moments of their cautious standoff, Folmina lost her patience completely. "All these mind games are a waste of time!" she declared, leaping into the air towards Ghozal. "Come on! We gotta move!"

"Papa!" said Ghoros, focusing his magic power into his right arm and swinging it towards his father, going low and sliding swiftly along the ground as his sister attacked from above. "Get ready!"

"Hrm... Going for the high-low mix-up, eh? Too bad your combination needs a bit of work!" With his right hand he launched a magic bullet, blasting Folmina out of the air, while simultaneously interrupting Ghoros's slide attack with a sharp kick, effortlessly knocking him away. Ghoros had been charging his way with no small amount of force, but Ghozal's kick sent him flying back far enough to smash into the wall of the arena. Folmina, meanwhile, spiraled out of control through the air, impacting the wall directly opposite Ghoros with a tremendous, explosive crash.

"Well?" Ghozal asked. "Had enough?"

"No way!" said Folmina. "We're just getting started!"

“That’s right...” Ghoros added. “We’re just getting started!”

The two made a second charge towards their father, who once again adopted his leisurely fighting stance.

Outside the arena, a small group stood looking in on the fight. One of them, a man dressed in work overalls, was clutching his head in distress as he watched Folmina unleash a barrage of magic bullets that burst violently against the arena walls. This was Taclyde, an ordinary human who worked as the administrator for the Houghtow College of Magic. In addition to his regular duties, he also handled cleaning and maintenance, contacting parents and guardians, and negotiations with outside institutions. In fact, nearly all of the work that went into keeping the school afloat rested squarely on his shoulders.

“N-Now wait just a minute!” Taclyde protested, looking between the women standing beside him as the sound of explosions rang out one after another from inside the arena. “I believe I’ve asked you to please do your individual training at your own house, didn’t I? So why must you keep coming here to train each and every single morning?! Well, Miss Balirossa? Miss Uliminas? I understand there’s no risk of damage to the surrounding area with that incredible barrier Mister Flio made for us, but—”

“Sssilence!” snapped Nyt, looking away from the action to glare angrily at Taclyde.

Nyt’s true name was Yorminyt, the Serpent Princess, and she was once one of the Infernal Four in the time of Dark One Gholl. After quitting the Dark Army, she disguised herself as a human named Nyt, and after one thing led to another, she was eventually made headmaster of the Houghtow College of Magic.

“H-Headmaster Nyt?” Taclyde said, blinking curiously at his superior’s sudden burst of rage.

“Ssso? Isss there a problem with providing thesse ssstudents a venue to build rapport with their father?”

“A-A venue to build rapport...” Taclyde repeated. “B-But this level of rapport is a little—”

“I sssaid, sssilence!” Nyt snapped once again, to the bewilderment of Taclyde. “Besssides, I myssself gave them permisssion to ussse the arena in the hoursss before the ssschoool isss open. I will not permit a word of dissssent!”

“B-But...” Taclyde stammered. “Wh-What if some other student wanders into the arena while they’re fighting like that...?”

“Preventing that isss precisssely why I! Myssself! The headmassster of the Houghtow College of Magic! Perssssonally! Have been ssstanding here watching over them each and every morning!” Nyt replied. “Well? Are you ssstill not sssatisfied?!”

“I-I mean...” Taclyde managed, overwhelmed by Nyt’s forceful words. “W-Well, I suppose that’s true, but...”

Uliminas, who had been standing to the side of Taclyde and Nyt, snickered to herself at the exchange.

Uliminas was a hellcat who had been Ghozal’s closest confederate back when he was Dark One. When Gholl relinquished the throne, she quit the Dark Army alongside him and had since become a key employee of the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. She was one of Ghozal’s two wives and the mother of Folmina.

“Nyt’s got a lot of impurrtant-sounding reasons,” she said to Balirossa, who was watching alongside her. “But the truth of the meowtter is she just wants to watch Ghozal show off.”

“O-Oh? Does she really...?” Balirossa said with a frown.

Balirossa had originally been a knight from Klyrode Castle, but one day she left knighthood behind and moved in to Flio’s house and began working at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. She was Ghozal’s other wife, and the mother of Ghoros.

“Nyt always had a special admewration for Ghozal’s style of fighting back when she was in his Infurnal Four,” Uliminas told Balirossa. “That’s why she’s lending him the arena for his bouts with the children. If mew need puroof...well, just look at her!” Smirking, she pointed with her thumb over towards where Nyt stood besides them.

Balirossa stole a glance in Nyt’s direction. Between her bouts of verbal sparring with Taclyde, Nyt’s eyes would turn at every opportunity towards the



battle unfolding in the arena, her cheeks flushing red and her eyes going heart-shaped as she watched. Sometimes she would even clasp her hands together in front of her chest like a maiden in love.

*Yesss, yesss, yesss!!!* Nyt thought. *Oh, how I have longed to sssee my Lord Gholl in battle! To think that the day would come that I could witnessss hisss sssplendid gallantry once more! I wasss sso missserable when I wasss firsst made headmassster of the Houghtow College of Magic, but now I can only feel that I have been blesssed. Ahhh, what blissssss!*

“I see...” said Balirossa, smirking at the sight of Nyt staring into the arena with glazed-over eyes. “Yes, I believe I understand.”

The small audience outside the arena watched as Ghozal’s sparring match with Folmina and Ghoro continued...until suddenly, without any warning, a magic beast burst from the arena floor.

“*Grghaaah!*” it roared, its massive serpentine body writhing as it erupted from the ground behind Ghozal. Before it could emerge completely, however, Ghozal reached swiftly back behind him, grabbing the snake’s head firm with a single hand.

The snake, not expecting to be grabbed so suddenly, squirmed and writhed in a desperate bid to escape. Ghozal’s grip, however, showed no sign of faltering. His expression was cool and relaxed, a far cry from the magic beast frantically struggling in his grasp.

“Listen up, you two,” Ghozal said, plucking the serpent from the depths of the earth and holding it up for Folmina and Ghoro. “In a fight, the situation is always changing from moment to moment. There’s no way to predict when something you don’t expect might happen, like an unknown element coming out of nowhere to join the fray. That’s why you need to maintain an awareness of your surroundings at all times in combat!” He gesticulated with one hand to punctuate his lecture, holding the serpent tight in the other.

“Wow, papa, that was so cool!” Folmina gushed, stars in her eyes at the sight of her father effortlessly vanquishing the intruding magic beast. “I can’t believe you were able to sense that magic beast coming in the middle of fighting me

and Ghorol!”

“Yeah...” Ghorol nodded, leaning in to make sure he didn’t miss a single word of Ghozal’s speech. “We have a lot to learn...”

Outside, the onlookers stared dumbfounded at the scene in the arena.

“M-Madame Uliminas...” Balirossa ventured. “Were you able to sense that magic beast’s presence, by chance?”

“M-Meowt really...” Uliminas admitted. “I thought I could feel *something* nearby...”

“I suppose you were able to sense it, of course, Headmaster Nyt?” asked Taclyde.

“O-Of coursse I wasss!” Nyt insisted. “Don’t assk ridiculousss questionsss, Taclyde!”

“Oh really?” wondered Uliminas. “Mew seem rather surpurised to me, for somemeown who saw the snake coming...”

“Uliminasss!” Nyt objected. “I sssee *you’re* being quite ridiculousss as well!”

The conversation would continue on for some time yet...

Inside the arena, Ghozal paused in the middle of his lecture on the philosophy of combat. *But you know...* he thought. *This magic beast is a dead ringer for the Hydrana, the Beast of Disaster from the legends... Only, the descriptions of the Hydrana passed down in the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode is supposed to be an enormous monster with nine heads, and this beast’s only got the one. For that matter, it’s quite a bit smaller too... About a ninth the size, come to think of it...*

“Well then,” Ghozal said, clearing his throat. “Let’s leave the lecture there for today and get back to our training, shall we? It’s getting close to our time limit for using this arena!”

“Yes, papa!” Folmina and Ghorol answered in unison, assuming combat stances and advancing towards Ghozal, who grinned cheerfully as the children approached.

*Kaboom!*

The sound of yet another explosion rang out from inside the Houghtow College of Magic arena. It was muffled thanks to the barrier, preventing the noise from being heard in the more distant parts of campus, but inside the school store, which was situated right next door, the blasts were clearly audible.

“This morning too...” Irystiel muttered, looking up from the merchandise. “They’re really amazing...”

Irystiel was one of Garyl’s old classmates at the Houghtow College of Magic. After her graduation, she was hired by the Fli-o’-Rys General Store, and now she worked at the College of Magic school store. Irystiel was a shy girl—so shy, in fact, that she was unable to speak to others without using a doll as an intermediary. She was also part devil, and the younger sister of Belianna, one of the current Dark Army’s Infernal Four.

And let it not go without saying, she too harbored amorous feelings for Garyl.

As a member of the Fli-o’-Rys staff, Irystiel was wearing a company apron, although underneath she was still dressed in her usual gothic lolita style dress. The Fli-o’-Rys General Store had been given special permission to operate the school store at the Houghtow College of Magic out of the two-story building that served as the school’s student dormitory.

Irystiel, incidentally, had initially wanted to follow Garyl, her classmate and the object of her infatuation, to the Klyrode Institute for Chivalric Education. However...

“If only you passed that test...” Irystiel’s stuffed cat lamented, Irystiel herself using her impressive ventriloquism abilities to project her voice, making its mouth open and shut in time with her words. “We might be together with Garyl in Klyrode Castle even now, mreowr...” The doll slumped its shoulders, heaving a heavy sigh.

Irystiel had a keen mind and a remarkable level of understanding of the academic study of magic, but due to her naturally weak constitution, she had set a new record for the poorest performance ever recorded in the practical



portion of the examination and ended up with a failing grade. Elinàsze, however, recommended her to the others in the Fli-o'-Rys General Store staff, saying, *"This girl's knowledge of magic is quite extraordinary, you know. Perhaps we could hire her for the store?"* And with her recommendation, Irystiel was brought on board and assigned to the Houghtow College of Magic school store.

"That's right!" said Irystiel's stuffed cat, as the girl thought back to what had led her to this point. "You can't let Elinàsze down after she gave you that recommendation, can you, Irystiel? Mreowr!" Smacking herself lightly on the cheeks to bring herself back to reality, Irystiel stepped into the store stall to get to work.

Outside, meanwhile, Irystiel's older sister, Belianna, peeked in through the window. Belianna was a full devil, one of the Dark Army's Infernal Four known for her prowess with the scythe, whose duties had her traveling by the day to every corner of the Dark One's realm.

At the moment, Belianna was concealing her identity as best she could, wearing a large hat, dark sunglasses, and long trench coat to hide her body. She looked for all the world like a suspicious intruder on the campus, but she had in fact come here to check on Irystiel, who had been in a deep funk at home ever since she failed the Klyrode Institute entrance examination. Avoiding suspicious looks was the furthest thing from Belianna's mind.

*Poor Irystiel...* Belianna thought, sniffing sadly as she looked in through the window, tears welling up in her eyes. *If only your damned older sister hadn't gotten every last bit of the athleticism in the damned family...*

Truly, there were all sorts of people out on campus in the early morning at the Houghtow College of Magic.



Back in front of Flio's house, the equine magic beasts and horse demons ran about freely around the pasture, keeping watch while the others were busy with their various tasks. Into that scene, a woman descended from the sky, alighting by the front entrance.

"This really is a wonderful place," the woman remarked, a gentle-seeming

smile on her face. “It always makes me happy to see humans and magic beasts living side by side. In many worlds, creatures such as these would be seen as nothing more than livestock to be exploited...”

“Ah!” said Flio, stepping up to greet the woman. “Miss Zofina!”

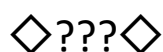
Zofina was an angel—a disciple of the Celestial Plane in the service of the goddess responsible for governing the world of Klyrode. She sometimes took on the role of the Contract Executor to enforce Blood Oath Contracts, in which occasions she would appear as half skeleton, half maiden. Her favorite food was zenzai, a sweet red bean soup popular in certain planetoids during wintertime.

“Hello, Mister Flio,” Zofina said, lowering her head. “Thank you once again for all of your assistance. I have come to retrieve the usual shipment of medicine.”

“Of course,” said Flio. “Elinàsze’s been preparing the medicine for us lately, so if you will come right this way...” He held out his hand, conjuring a magic circle and casting a spell that produced a single ordinary-looking door.

“Are we not going inside?” Zofina asked. “Usually you produce the medicine in the workshop behind your house, do you not?”

“Well, yes,” Flio said as he opened the door and led the way through. “Lately, though, Elinàsze’s been doing her work somewhere else...”



Zofina followed Flio through the portal, looking curiously around the new environment. “Where are we...?” she wondered. On the other side of the door was a large interior space lined with bookshelves on every wall, each packed full of tomes of every description. Zofina’s eyes went wide as she looked over the shelves. “Magic grimoires from all over the world of Klyrode...and not only that, there are grimoires pertaining to the Midnight Arts... There are even some from other worlds entirely...”

Flio led on ahead to a large desk, where a girl was sitting engrossed in her work. “Papa!” the girl said, removing her wide-rimmed glasses when she saw who was here. “Welcome!” She ran over, grinning from ear to ear as she hugged Flio tight.

Flio returned the hug, smiling his usual easygoing smile. “Sorry to drop in

without any warning, Elinàsze,” he said. “I hope now’s a good time?”

“Of course it’s a good time, papa!” Elinàsze replied, happily burying her face against her father’s chest. “For you, I would happily drop everything at *any* time!”

“Well, I realize this is a bit sudden,” Flio said, “but Miss Zofina is here for her usual order of medicine.”

“Of course!” Elinàsze said. “I have it right here!” She snapped her fingers and suddenly, a bag appeared in Zofina’s hand as she stood behind Flio, examining the bookshelves.

The medicine Zofina had come to purchase was made using parts taken from very rare magic beasts which none other than Flio and Elinàsze were able to process, but its restorative power was exceptionally high. The goddesses of the Celestial Plane, however, desired it principally for the de-aging effect it had on the skin, to the point that so many goddesses had taken descending without permission to the world of Klyrode hoping to get their hands on some for themselves that it had become something of a problem. Ordinarily, the only goddesses allowed to appear on a planetoid world were the ones involved in its governance, after all.

In light of the situation, the higher-ups in the Celestial Plane adopted a system where Zofina, as an angel in service of the goddess ruling over Klyrode, was appointed to serve as a point of contact for the entire plane, with the medicine she brought back to be distributed by them.

“Th-Thank you again, as always,” Zofina said, slightly taken aback by the bag suddenly appearing in her hand.

“It’s my pleasure!” said Elinàsze, hugging her father tight even as she replied to Zofina. “I’m always happy to do whatever I can if it will help papa out with his work!”

“Thank you, Elinàsze. This was a big help,” Flio said, patting her on the head and making her face light up even further. She was so elated, in fact, that the jewel on her forehead began to shine with amber light.

*You know...* Zofina thought as she watched Elinàsze shower her father with

affection. *Miss Elinàsze was given the blessing of the goddesses of the Celestial Plane upon her birth, wasn't she. Come to think of it, in all my long years serving as a disciple of the Celestial Plane, she is the first such individual I've actually met...*

Just as she had that thought, Elinàsze turned to look in Zofina's direction. "Oh, yes!" she said. "By the way, I have a question for you, Zofina, if you don't mind..."

"You do?" said Zofina. "What is it?"

"Well, I was wondering..." Elinàsze began. "The Teleportation spell papa and I use is celestial magic, correct? That's a higher tier of magic from the spells originating in the world of Klyrode, I believe..."

"Yes, that's right," Zofina confirmed. "You and your father have both transcended the laws of the world of Klyrode, and so you were able to master the use of celestial magic through the spell Epiphany. You are the only two in this world who could have performed such a feat."

"Well then..." Elinàsze nodded. "It strikes me as a little odd. The various planetoid worlds are constantly in motion, orbiting around the base of the Celestial Plane, meaning papa and I have been unable to target them from the world of Klyrode with our Teleportation spell. So how is it that you are able to make your regular visits to our world, Zofina? I assumed it was a capability of the celestial version of the Teleportation spell, but when I tested it out for myself, I wasn't quite able to make it work..."

"Oh!" said Zofina, holding up the pendant she wore around her neck. "That would be thanks to this." At the end of the pendant was a magic gem set in a disk-shaped decoration. "This is a World Log, a magic item only the highest ranking goddesses of the Celestial Plane are able to create. As long as I have this, I can use the celestial Teleportation spell to travel to any planetoid world recorded within."

"I see..." said Elinàsze, reaching out to touch the World Log and examining the object closely. "So that's the system you use..."

"Hold on," said Flio, cocking his head in confusion as he too took a look at Zofina's World Log. "In that case, how come Elinàsze and I are able to travel to



Dogorogma with only our Teleportation spells?”

“That’s simple enough,” Zofina explained. “Dogorogma is situated in the Subaltern Plane, far beneath the planetoid worlds, making its position fixed in space.”

“Huh,” Flio said. “So because it isn’t in motion, we can get there using our magic alone?”

“Yes, that is correct,” answered Zofina with a nod of her head.

While the angel and Flio had been talking, Elinàsze had been touching the World Log all the while, staring at it intently. Suddenly, Zofina felt a pang of unease. *Now that I think of it, she thought, I seem to recall hearing a rumor about a mage who once managed to analyze a World Log and used it to create a Super Teleportation spell that allowed them to move freely between planetoid worlds... Miss Elinàsze couldn’t be trying to analyze the World Log herself, could she...?*

Realizing the urgency of the situation, Zofina hastily stuffed the World Log back into her garment, doing her best to affect a cheerful smile. Elinàsze returned the smile as if nothing at all was wrong.

*She can’t have analyzed the World Log already in such a short time, can she?* Zofina wondered. *But she doesn’t seem at all inclined to ask me for more time to analyze it further... Perhaps I am simply overthinking things. I-In any event, I should change the subject!* She cleared her throat, looking up to meet Elinàsze’s gaze. “B-By the by, where are we, exactly? This doesn’t seem to be the usual workshop you use for magic research...”

“You’re quite right!” Elinàsze said, nodding happily. “Before, I was using a room in papa’s workshop for my experiments, but I had already expanded the interior space as far as I could manage using my magic, so I created another workshop just for myself beneath papa’s!”

“Then...we’re underground?” Zofina asked.

“We are!” said Elinàsze. “With an underground workshop, I can expand its dimensions however much I like, although for now I’m fairly satisfied. That being said, it’s somewhat hard to detect Beasts of Calamity when they appear

from all the way under the earth, especially when they use Concealment magic. It's been causing me a bit of trouble lately. But, you know, I wonder..." At this, Elinàsze folded her arms, muttering something complicated indistinctly to herself.

"M-Miss Elinàsze?" Zofina asked, startled by her host's sudden change in behavior.

Elinàsze, however, seemed to be ignoring her completely. "You know," she said again, apparently to herself, "I believe there might be something about this in one of the books I got from the Oldwass College of Magic..."

Zofina could only watch in distress as Elinàsze carried on talking to herself, as if she were alone in the world.

"Ah ha ha..." Flio laughed, smiling wryly as he stepped up beside the angel. "Sorry about that. When Elinàsze gets like this, she won't listen to a word anyone says. Perhaps I can offer you a cup of tea up in the main house in the meantime?"

"O-Oh! Thank you!" Zofina nodded. "I believe I will take you up on your offer."

Flio led Zofina out through the Teleportation Portal they had used to enter the space, leaving Elinàsze behind in the workshop.

As soon as she was alone, Elinàsze abruptly stopped muttering to herself and cleared her throat. "Well..." she said. "Now I know the secret behind traveling between different planetoid worlds." She held up her right hand and spoke a quick incantation, summoning a massive wall of text that appeared in the air in front of her, containing so much information that it stretched all the way up to the room's ceiling and even higher out of sight.

"Perfect!" Elinàsze said. "It looks like I was able to learn it properly. Now all I need to do is find a magic gem capable of encoding all of this..."

Yes—in the short time Elinàsze had spent with the World Log, she had already finished her analysis.

Elinàsze read through the wall of text, nodding along as she went. The look on her face resembled nothing so much as a child who had just received a brand-

new toy to play with.





## ◇Klyrode Castle—Throne Room◇

The Maiden Queen sat on her throne, listening to a report from a knight who had arrived from the countryside.

The Maiden Queen—full name Elizabeth Klyrode, Ellie to her friends—was the reigning monarch of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. She had first taken the reins of the kingdom when her father, the former King Klyrode, was driven from the castle for his many crimes. Due to her fastidious lifelong devotion to art of statecraft, she had never before found the time to take a lover in all her thirty-odd years of life.

“Goodness...” the Maiden Queen muttered at the knight’s report. “What tidings...”

“The origin of these frequent earthquakes threatening the north of the kingdom is yet unknown...” the knight continued. “I have come on behalf of the residents of the area to beg Your Majesty for assistance in identifying the source of these quakes and quieting the earth.”

A furrow formed in the Maiden Queen’s brow. *If these were ordinary earthquakes, it would be simple enough for a group of mages to resolve the matter with a Quell Earth spell, she thought. But I can’t help but notice that the area affected by these quakes is quite near to the region where a Beast of Disaster is said to have been sealed—the very beast of legends who struck terror across all the land of Klyrode!*

As the Maiden Queen ruminated, the Second Princess, who had been standing by to the right side of the throne, leaned in to whisper in her sister’s ear.

The Second Princess was the Maiden Queen’s younger sister. Her actual name was Leusoc Klyrode. As the right arm of the Maiden Queen, she spent her time engaged in diplomacy with the other human kingdoms, a role she had been in since the days when her father was on the throne and the land was still at war. She had a frank and outspoken personality, and wasn’t afraid to speak her mind even to the Maiden Queen herself.

“Sister...” the Second Princess whispered. “The area that knight’s talking

about... Isn't that...?"

"Yes," the Maiden Queen replied. "I am afraid I share your misgivings..."

The two shared a meaningful look and fell into a tense silent, beads of sweat forming on their brows. Finally, the Maiden Queen spoke. "We must summon the Oracle!"

The Oracle was a mage of the kingdom possessing the rare skill Divination, which gave her the power to foretell what was to come.

"Understood, Your Majesty," the Second Princess said. "I will make the arrangements at once!" With that, she bolted from the throne room, not wasting another second.

The Maiden Queen watched her sister go, covering her mouth with both hands. *To think such a thing would happen now, when the war with the Dark Army is finally over...* she thought, heaving a heavy sigh. *If only our people could simply rejoice in their newfound peace!*

◇Some Time Later◇

The Second Princess returned to the throne room, accompanied by a single woman of clearly advanced age. The woman stepped in front of the throne and bowed deeply. "Your Majesty," she began, "it brings me great joy to be summoned to your presence. Ah, but perhaps this is not the time for such pleasantries, is it? After all, the Queen of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, greatest of the magocratic kingdoms of this world, has seen fit to call upon this old crone of a magus and her paltry Divination."

"Oracle, there is no need for such modesty!" the Maiden Queen said. "Your Divination skill has saved the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode on many occasions!"

The Oracle nodded grimly and sat down nearby the Queen at the table that had been provided for her. "Her Highness the Second Princess told me what was happening on my way here," she said, producing a deck of cards from her pocket and arranging them in front of her. She closed her eyes, touching the index finger of her right hand to her forehead, and began to chant. At once the cards began to shine with light and rose up into the air, flying above the table.

"Alas..." the Oracle said, looking over the cards floating in the air in front of

her. “The thing you fear will indeed show itself once again. The earthquakes are a portent of its coming...”

“I-It can’t be...” the Maiden Queen despaired.

The Second Princess looked up to the ceiling above. “Well, crap...” she said, letting a bit of her true personality slip out from behind the mask of formal language she wore during public appearances.

“Oracle,” the Maiden Queen said, “can you tell us in what land the Beast of Disaster will arise? And what must we do to restrain such a monster?”

At the Maiden Queen’s question, the Oracle turned again to the cards. With each one that was revealed, however, the Oracle’s expression darkened further. “I apologize, Your Majesty, but it seems my power is not enough to learn more of this Beast of Disaster we face... But what could it mean to draw the very same card nine times in a row?” she wondered, muttering to herself and shaking her head as she looked over the cards. “Are there nine magic beasts? No, that would hardly explain it...” She sighed, furrowing her brow in frustration, unable to make heads or tails of what she was reading in the cards no matter how long she thought. Finally, she cleared her throat and turned back towards the Maiden Queen. “Your Majesty, perhaps you ought to ask my teacher to perform these divinations?”

“Your teacher?” the Maiden Queen asked, frowning and shaking her head in a bit of a panic. “That would be the woman calling herself Sage Star-Reader, would it not? The fairy folk who was summoned to this world as a Hero in the distant past and took on the title of sage upon concluding her duties?”

“Yes, the very same,” the Oracle confirmed. “I am certain she would lead you true.”

“W-Well, all right...” said the Maiden Queen, rising from her throne. “In that case, I will set out in all haste.”

“Your Majesty, wait,” the Oracle said, holding out a hand to stop the Queen. “Sage Star-Reader resides deep in a forest known as the Woods of Seclusion and will only meet with those who have traveled to that land on foot. I will meet her myself and ask her advice.”

“Oracle, please wait.” This time it was the Maiden Queen’s turn to raise her hand, stopping the Oracle from leaving. “If I may, please allow me to be the one to carry out this duty.”

“You personally, Your Majesty?” the Oracle asked.

“Yes,” the Maiden Queen said. “After all, this matter concerns not only the Magic Kingdom of Klyrode, but the nearby kingdoms who risk serious damage as well, depending on the situation. So please...”

“Very well,” the Oracle relented. “In that case, I shall write you a letter of introduction addressed to the sage.” She stood up as well, making a hasty exit from the room.

The Second Princess peered curiously at the door after the Oracle’s departing form. “So...sister...” she began. “Is there a particular reason we can’t just ask Mister Flio to deal with this for us? To be honest, I had completely forgotten about Sage Star-Reader until the Oracle brought her up just now.”

“I can’t say relying on Sage Star-Reader of all people would be my first choice either...” the Maiden Queen admitted. “Certainly not after that incident from back when father was King—although perhaps I shouldn’t go about bringing up bygone events. Still, even father only ever took her opinions with a grain of salt after the fiasco with that Hero...”

*Back then, she urged us to retain that golden-haired man as Hero, saying it would be the answer to all of our troubles... she remembered. If only she hadn’t given us that advice, perhaps we could have discovered Mister Flio from the very start! Ah, but it’s no use crying over spilled milk, is it? After all, by that time, my father had already sent Mister Flio into exile.*

“W-Well!” the Maiden Queen said, bringing herself back to reality. “Sage Star-Reader aside, the introduction comes from the very Oracle who pointed us in the direction of Mister Flio. It wouldn’t do for us to simply refuse. Please, just leave this matter in my hands.”

The Second Princess frowned in confusion at her sister’s words. “S-So then why would *you* have to be the one to go? Why not let me handle this? Diplomacy is my responsibility, after all.”

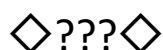


“Oh, well, there’s no need for that I’m sure...” the Maiden Queen said.  
“Rather, I must speak with you about the business of running the country while I am gone...”

“Ohhh, I see!” the Second Princess exclaimed. “You’ve been testing our little sister the Third Princess’s capacity to hold court in your absence, and you want to provide her the opportunity for some hands-on experience! Well then, I’ll be happy to get it all ready! Our next item is that petition from Houghtow City, I believe...”

The Maiden Queen watched as the Second Princess left the room, then glanced over to the window. Outside, she could see the castle walls stretching out in every direction, but the Maiden Queen’s eyes were drawn to one spot in particular: a small gap in the parapets where she could just make out a certain building.

*He’s there right now...* she thought, hiding her cheeks behind her hand as she blushed a distinctive red. *My Garyl is in the knight’s dormitory right over there...*



Deep in a forest—a veritable sea of trees that showed no hint of having ever been touched by civilization, known to the inhabitants of the nearby lands as the Woods of Seclusion—stood a single solitary house. Distinctly out of place in its surroundings, it was a dwelling that wouldn’t have looked out of place in any countryside village, enough so that someone looking at the house could almost forget that they were in the middle of a vast untamed wilderness.

Inside the house, a woman sat at a table, looking out the window and heaving one sigh after another.

“How long has it been since I was summoned as a Hero to the world of Klyrode...?” she wondered. “Years? Decades? Centuries? I can’t seem to remember. That’s somewhat distressing, in a way. Then again, once I sealed away the Dark One and fulfilled my duty as the Hero, it was my decision to sever ties to worldly affairs and live quietly out here.” Once again, the woman heaved an especially heavy sigh.

“Thanks to the blessing I received when I was summoned,” she continued, “I was granted exceptional magic ability and the power to see into the future.” A

small jewel on the woman's forehead glittered as she spoke, hidden behind her bangs. "That's why I took on the name Hero Star-Reader—I wanted to sound cool, after all! And I'm glad I did! But then...after I finished my duties, I changed my name to Sage Star-Reader and moved to the forest here. I mean—imagine how cool it would be! A former hero, living in seclusion in the wilderness, only to be called upon by a newly arisen hero to do battle once again! Proving their strength and winning the adulation of King Klyrode and the people of the Magical Kingdom alike! That was the future I saw for myself!"

Sage Star-Reader sighed deeply to herself once more, and then slammed her fist down on the table with a loud thud, momentarily sending the cup that had been resting on the table up into the air.

"Drat that golden-haired Hero!" she said. "I still can't see how strong he's become by now with my power, but I haven't had a single visitor ever since that man came to this world and received Divine Revelation! No one from the Magical Kingdom—not even a guest from the kingdoms nearby! I used to at least get mages hoping to become my apprentice dropping by from time to time, but ever since that golden-haired Hero appeared, I haven't even gotten that! Ahhh! I'm so bored I could just die!!!"

*I wonder if that golden-haired Hero was particularly blessed in his companions... I can sense the presence of a human possessing even greater powers. It can't be that one of the humans they summoned has greater power than the current human, can it? I mean, that would be ridiculous! If the kingdom had managed to summon someone like that, they would have just made them the Hero instead! The king would have to be an absolute idiot to make the weaker human the kingdom's Hero!*

Sage Star-Reader laughed sardonically at the thought, finishing her cup of tea in a single gulp.

"But I'm sure of one thing..." she said. "That golden-haired man had what it takes to be a Hero, for certain."

◇Houghtow City—Mount Fli-o'-Rys◇

Out in front of Flio's house was the pasture for raising horses, followed by the great fields of Blossom Acres stretching out towards a smallish mountain known

these days by the name of Mount Fli-o'-Rys. Once that mountain had stood in a different spot entirely. It was home to a village Ura the oni had assembled out of a band of displaced demons, which Flio had moved near his house, mountain and all. These days, the people of Flio's house and Ura's village cooperated and shared freely with one another.

At the foot of Mount Fli-o'-Rys, a woman stood looking up at the mountain above. "I can't believe this mountain crushed my secret stash of high-class liquor..." she huffed, crossing her arms and puffing out her cheeks in a pout.

This was Telbyress, a onetime goddess who was in charge of an entire world. She was exiled from the Celestial Plane for gross negligence towards her duties as goddess. Since her fall from grace, she found new lodgings at the goblin Hokh'hokton's house, entirely against the latter's will. While living there, she was meant to help out with the farmwork on Blossom Acres, but due to her love of liquor and deep congenital laziness, she found herself being scolded by Hokh'hokton more often than not, day after day...

"And worse!" Telbyress continued. "No matter how sneakily I try to buy new liquor, Hokh'hokton always seems to find out right away and take it from me! Even though I bought it fair and square with the money I earned working on the farm and everything!"

"Harumph!" said Hokh'hokton, running up beside her and smacking the fallen goddess with a handheld paper fan. "You've got some nerve to say that, no-gooddness!"

Hokh'hokton started out as a goblin foot soldier in the Dark Army. Now, however, he was a senior member of the staff of Blossom Acres, working up a sweat on the farm day after day. He was the one who had unfortunately found himself in the position of looking after Telbyress, the so-called no-gooddness.

"Ouch!" Telbyress cried. "Hey! Quit it! I tell you, you've gotten way too quick to hit people with that paper fan of yours you bought in Naneewa Town! What'll you do if you knock me stupid?!"

"Bold words from a useless no-gooddness who only uses her brain to think of more ways to slack off!" Hokh'hokton shot back. "Now hurry up and get back to work! And I'd better not catch you sneaking off!"

“No way!” said Telbyress. “I *was* just about to go back, you know, but now that you’re being so mean to me, I don’t wanna!”

“Y-You!” Hokh’hokton simmered. “Don’t be impossible!”

“It’s your fault I’m not working!” Telbyress jeered. “I haven’t done anything wrong!”

“Grrrrhhh!!!”

“Bleeeehhh!!!”

The two thrust their faces up against each other, bickering like little children. Maunty, who was watching from some distance away, sighed with exasperation.

Maunty, like his comrade Hokh’hokton, was a former goblin foot soldier in the Dark Army now living and working on Blossom’s farm. Unlike the bachelor Hokh’hokton, he had a goblin wife as well, and a family full to bursting with goblin children.

“I was wondering where Telbyress had gotten to...” Maunty said. “And here I find you two having a lovers’ spat!”

Two heads turned to rebuke Maunty’s choice of words at once.

“We are *not* having a lovers’ spat!”

“We aren’t having a lovers’ spat!”

### ◇The Fli-o’-Rys General Store◇

The doors of the Fli-o’-Rys General Store swung open, prompting a warm cry of “Welcome!” from the girl smiling by the entrance.

The girl greeting customers with a smile on her face was Snow Little, one of Garyl’s old classmates from Houghtow College of Magic. A specialist in summoning magic, she was a member of the rare fable folk species. Like Salina and the others, she harbored distant hopes of being the one to win Garyl’s heart. Recently, she had found employment at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store.

Calsi’im the skeleton watched in satisfaction as Snow Little went about her job. Calsi’im was an old skeleton who had once served as the Dark Regent and

even Dark One, although now he lived a quiet life with his wife, Charun. He was so old that he had in fact entirely died, although Flio was able to bring him back with his magic. Ever since, he lived at Flio's house and helped out at the Fli-o'-Rys General Store store from time to time as a substitute manager.

Right now, Calsi'im was greeting customers at the entrance to a newly opened cafeteria—the Cal'Cha Teahouse. Instead of his usual black robes, he was wearing a white robe complete with an attached apron.

“Very good, very good!” Calsi'im said. “Everything seems to be coming along nicely! I suppose even these old bones can whip a shop into shape if I try!”

“Ah, but Calsi'im!” said Charun, stepping up beside her husband.

Charun was a magic doll originally created by a mage who had served in the Dark Army long ago. Calsi'im had found her in a ruined state and had her restored. Ever since then, she lived alongside her savior, even marrying him once the two of them moved in to Flio's house.

“Mister Flio has restored you to youthful bones again, has he not?” Charun said with a smile as she prepared a customer's order of tea. “I shouldn't think you would find your bones to be old at all!”

“Hmm...” Calsi'im said, his jawbone rattling merrily. “Now that you mention it, I suppose you're right! You've got me there!”

As Calsi'im laughed, a young girl came running up to the skeleton and his wife. “Papa!”

“Oho! If it isn't Rabbitz!” said Calsi'im, turning to look at the newcomer. “So good to see— Yhwehfff!!!” Suddenly, he let out a strange cry as the girl climbed up onto the skeleton's bony head.

Rabbitz was the daughter of Calsi'im and Charun. Half skeleton and half magic doll, she was a being of truly exceptional rarity. She was a cheerful girl with a great big smile who loved to spend her days perched atop her father's head. She was getting nearly old enough to take classes at the Houghtow College of Magic, but still not quite.

Rabbitz had been a tall and hefty child ever since she was very young, in spite of her parents, Casli'im and Charun, both being rather small. The size she was



now made it hard to tell at a glance which were the parents and which was the child. Rabbitz loved her father especially deeply, and had taken to climbing atop his head first thing in the morning and staying there all day whenever she could.

Demihumans tended to grow up fast, but Rabbitz had always been large, with nearly cartoonish proportions—her slender parts were quite slender indeed, and the parts that stuck out stuck out all the way.

“Papa tired! I help!” said Rabbitz, rubbing her cheek against the top of Calsi’im’s head.

“Yes, yes, thank you ever so much,” Calsi’im said, looking up at Rabbitz as she perched on her shoulder. Thankfully the girl wasn’t wearing a skirt—otherwise, with the way she was positioned, Calsi’im would have gotten an enormous eyeful of Rabbitz’s private parts. *She says “help,”* he thought, *but of course she’s only going to be grinning away up there like always...*

Around Calsi’im, however, the customers all looked up at the spectacle, smiling and laughing in kind amusement. Calsi’im heard a smattering of voices...

“Ah ha ha! What an adorable little girl!”

“Well, that puts a smile on my face!”

*Very good indeed!* Calsi’im thought. *If this puts smiles on the customers’ faces, I suppose it is a help after all! What was it they call this, again?* “A mascot... Is that what they call this?”

“Yah!” Rabbitz’ chirped. “I’m a mascot!”

“Quite right, quite right! You’re the mascot of our tea house, little Rabbitz!” Calsi’im said, his skull rattling as he laughed along with his daughter.

As Calsi’im waved his daughter in the air, Greanyl the shadow demon passed by beside them. Greanyl was originally a member of the Silent Listeners, a network of spies that had served as the ears of the Dark Army before they were disbanded. Now, Greanyl served as the Fli-o’-Rys General Store’s head of human resources, helping out wherever she was needed whenever she had a moment between directing her junior staff members.

It had only been a short time since Cal’Cha first opened but the cafeteria had

been a runaway success, with seats full to capacity day after day. Even with the newly hired Snow Little using her summoning magic to conjure a small battalion of dwarves to see to the customers' needs, the staff was undeniably finding themselves short of hands.

*Cal'Cha has been doing more business than I ever dared imagine,* Greanyl thought, hiding her mounting distress behind an unwavering smile as she did her best to keep up with the flood of customers. *If I had known it would be this popular, I would have hired more people to serve as staff...*

Ordinarily, Greanyl wore a black cape that concealed her body. After all, she had gotten her start in an organization devoted to espionage and even now did some intelligence work in addition to her regular duties for the Fli-o'-Rys General Store. Today, however, she was dressed in the same uniform as everyone else working in a cafeteria—an outfit designed to emphasize the athleticism and beauty of the servers, featuring a white short-sleeved shirt tied up around the waist to expose her bare midriff, complemented by a pair of hot pants.

*B-But still...* she thought, pulling the long scarf she had been wearing around her neck to provide a minimum of modesty up around her reddening cheeks. *Wh-Why does the Cal'Cha uniform need to expose so much bare skin, anyway? I-I would really rather not be seen in such a state...*

A short distance away, doing his best to stay hidden behind a pillar outside the store, a man watched as Greanyl put the footwork she honed in her time in the Silent Listeners to use, darting from table to table faster than the eye could follow. This man, of course, was Dalc Horst.

Dalc Horst was a subordinate of Sleip from when the old lichsteed had been in the Infernal Four. Currently he was in charge of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store's transportation teams, and was an avid racer at the Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall whenever he had time free from work.

*I-I can't get enough of seeing Greanyl in that outfit!* Dalc Horst thought. *Sh-She looks great the way she usually dresses, but this one just has that something! I-It's great! It's greater than great!*

With his superior reaction speed, honed during his time in the Dark Army,

Dalc Horst could do what most of the patrons of the store could not and keep up with Greanyl's high speed motions across the cafeteria. It was a truly frivolous use of such remarkable visual acumen.

Dalc Horst was watching from outside, behind a pillar, because he was worried that Greanyl would use her advanced espionage abilities to detect his presence if he tried to get a look from inside the store. The Cal'Cha Teahouse was a newly built addition to the Fli-o'-Rys General Store with walls made of mirrored glass, making it easy for someone on the street to look in and see what was happening inside.

Ordinarily, a large man like Dalc Horst peering into the windows of a nearby shop could hardly be more suspicious, but Dalc Horst had employed his skill Concealment to hide his presence from onlookers. None of the passersby took note of his presence behind the pillar.

This, too, was a profoundly frivolous use of Dalc Horst's many abilities.

Suddenly, as Dalc Horst stood there watching Greanyl at work, the ground under his feet began to bulge upwards with surprising force.

"H-Hey! What's going on over there?!" cried a passing townsfolk.

"I-Is that a magic beast?!"

All around Dalc Horst, people began to cry out in alarm and run in fear as a magic beast with a serpentlike body erupted from the ground right in front of him. Thanks to his Concealment ability, very few had noticed him standing there at all, but with this magic beast on the scene, everyone's attention was now being drawn right towards his location.

The serpent rose from the ground, climbing up Dalc Horst's body as if it were the trunk of a tree, coiling around his face. Before it could do anything else, however, Dalc Horst grabbed the snake by the neck and flung it to the ground as hard as he could. "Get out of my way!" he shouted as the magic beast struck the ground hard enough to bury its upper body in the earth.

The serpent was knocked utterly unconscious by the blow, but Dalc Horst's shout had unfortunately made everyone in the area suddenly aware of his presence, including Greanyl working inside the store. The two of them locked

eyes in a moment of mutual recognition.

“S-S-Sir Dalc Horst!” Greanyl said, doing her best to hide the bare skin exposed by her work uniform behind the scarf she wore around her neck. “Wh-Wh-What are you doing in a place like this?”

“N-Nothing! It’s not what you think!” Dalc Horst said, casting about desperately for a plausible excuse as the stares of the crowd bore down on his back. “I-I was just, u-um...you know!”

It would be a while before the commotion in front of the Fli-o’-Rys General Store fully settled down.

### ◇Houghtow City—Flio’s House◇

That night after dinner, Flio’s household gathered in the living room for a meeting. “Starting this morning, it seems like we’ve been running into these serpentine magic beasts everywhere...” Flio said, folding his arms as he looked over at the creatures laid out atop the table. The serpents had each been miniaturized and contained within their own Box of Imprisonment, making them much smaller now than they had been when the various residents of the house had encountered them throughout the day.

“One was caught by Ghozal at the Houghtow College of Magic,” Flio said. “Dalc Horst found one in front of the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. And Rys and myself caught one earlier in the morning, when we were hunting in the nearby forest...”

Ghozal’s arms were folded in concentration as he listened. When Flio began counting the magic beasts, however, he raised his voice. “Hrm?” Ghozal grunted, cocking his head. “If we’ve captured three of these things, how come we only have two corpses here?”

“W-Well, yes...” Flio said, frowning. “About that...”

“It’s very strange...” Rys chimed in, frowning just like her husband. “My lord husband and I were both quite busy all day, so we left the Box of Imprisonment containing the magic beast we caught in the kitchen to deal with it later. But somehow, it seems to have vanished.”

“I’m sorry...” said Elinàsze, raising her hand to speak. “I already processed it. I

was so excited to be given new materials by papa that I wanted to prepare them for synthesis right away...”

“Hrm...” Ghozal nodded understandingly. “Well, no use crying over spilled milk,” he said, looking back at the specimens on the table.

*That’s Ghozal for you...* Flio thought, stealing a glance over at his friend. *He’s never been the type to assign blame or complain about the circumstances. I’m sure he’d say there’s no use dwelling on the mistakes we might have made in the past. What matters is what we do now.*

Indeed, just as Flio had the thought, Ghozal did say exactly that. “There’s no use dwelling on the mistakes we might have made in the past,” he said, holding out his hand towards the serpents. “What matters is what we do now.”

*And there you have it,* Flio thought, stifling a laugh as he looked over at the magic beasts himself. “It looks like these magic beasts are all fragments of the same Beast of Disaster. Its name is Hydrana.”

“I see,” said Hiya. “I do not believe I have heard of a magic beast by such a name...”

“Hrm. First I’ve heard of it too...” Ghozal said with a nod of his head. “Although, my Identification spell won’t even give me the name.”

A window floated in front of Ghozal showing his spell’s analysis of the magic beasts:

◇Name: Unidentified

◇Species: Unidentified

◇...

In fact, the only fields that didn’t read “Unidentified” were the data on the creatures’ total height and weight.

Floating next to him, meanwhile, was Flio’s own Identification window. That one read:

◇Name: Hydrana

◇Species: Beast of Disaster (Nine-Headed Serpent)

◇...

There were still quite a number of Unidentified fields, but the creatures' names and species, at the very least, were being displayed properly.

"My, my. That's a curious phenomenon," Hiya commented, comparing the differences between Flio's and Ghozal's windows.

"My results are the same as papa's," said Elinàsze, reaching out towards the magic beasts and conjuring an Identification window of her own. Its contents were, in fact, identical to Flio's.

"Hrm..." said Ghozal. "I can only speculate about what the original beast was like, but going by the name, it's probably safe to assume it had nine heads."

"But each of the magic beasts we have caught so far have had a single head apiece, have they not?" queried Hiya.

"They have," said Ghozal. "This is just a guess, but maybe this nine-headed snake of ours was split into nine parts."

"I see..." Hiya nodded. "A plausible hypothesis, certainly."

"So," said Flio. "Does that mean we can expect to see six more of these things?"

"It's only a theory, Mister Flio," said Ghozal, folding his arms in thought. "But I've gotta say, these serpents have some deadly venom in those fangs of theirs, and their physical abilities are pretty formidable as well. It's a good thing the three today all happened to show up right where champion fighters like Mister Flio, Dalc Horst, and myself were waiting to take care of them. I imagine if one of these showed up in the middle of a defenseless village they'd have a hell of a time bringing it down."

"Excuse *me*..." said Rys, grinding her elbow into the gap between Ghozal's shoulders. "I couldn't help noticing... Exactly *why* did you omit my name from your telling, when my lord husband and I fought the beast *together*?"



“Don’t worry,” said Ghozal. “I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“Oh, *really*?” Rys asked, narrowing her eyes and fixing Ghozal’s face with a pointed glare.

Ghozal, however, simply ignored Rys and turned to face Flio. “Anyway, we need to do something about this.”

“Right,” Flio said, nodding in agreement. “I could equip our regular Enchanted Frigate ferries with high power Magic Beast sensors to help provide security across multiple regions. And, of course, we should inform everyone on the supply and transport teams...”

“That’s a good start,” Ghozal said. “I hope we won’t end up needing them, but it’s better safe than sorry.”

◇Next Morning—Dark Citadel, Throne Room◇

The following morning, Dark One Dawkson was holding court in the throne room of the Dark Citadel, sitting, like always, on the steps leading up to the throne rather than the throne itself. It was a form of self-admonition for his past as a reckless tyrant, whose actions had once driven the Dark Army to the verge of collapse—a way of saying that he still did not consider himself worthy to sit on the throne itself.

Dawkson was the younger brother of the former Dark One Gholl. He had once gone by the name of Yuigarde, during which time he never took a moment to consider anyone besides himself, but he changed his name as well as his attitude and was now doing his best to walk the road of an enlightened ruler.

Today, as Dawkson sat on the floor, he was looking over a letter that had arrived from the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. “Hrm... Looks like somethin’ serious is goin’ on down in the Magical Kingdom...” he said as he finished reading, handing the letter over to Phufun.

Phufun was a succubus who had served Dawkson as his minion even before he became the Dark One. At first glance, it was easy to mistake her for a knowledgeable and intelligent assistant, but in fact she was quite clueless, and an inveterate masochist.

Phufun took the letter and used her finger to press her false glasses up the

ridge of her nose to read what it had to say. “I see...” she said as she finished. “An unknown magic beast, is it?”

“Looks like,” Dawkson confirmed with a grunt. “But the strange thing is, it looks like these beasts ain’t got a speck of malicism in their bodies.”

“That *is* strange,” Phufun agreed, cocking her head curiously and adjusting her glasses once again. “Magic beasts of this world all possess malicism without exception, don’t they...?”

At this, Zanzibar, who had been on standby beside the throne, stepped forward. “Pardon my boldness, but perhaps I might offer an opinion?”

Zanzibar was a devil noble who had once raised a rebellion against Dark One Yuigarde’s tyranny, only to be defeated. Since then, that same spirit and initiative, as well as the knowledge he had cultivated as a member of the nobility, had earned him a spot on the Infernal Four.

“What’s up, Zanzibar?” Dawkson asked. “Somethin’ come to mind?”

“Indeed,” Zanzibar said. “If these magic beasts are truly without malicism, can we not assume that they will avoid lands where malicism is present?”

“Hrm. Good point,” said Dawkson. “So in other words, there’s probably no chance of ’em payin’ us a visit over here...”

“We should remain vigilant, of course, but I believe that is very likely to be the case,” said Zanzibar.

“All right,” Dawkson nodded, turning to Phufun. “Hey, tell the guards—”

“Dark One, a moment, please,” said Zanzibar, interrupting Dawkson.

“Yeah?” said Dawkson. “Somethin’ else you wanna say, Zanzibar?”

“Only, my lord, that I would like to entrust the security in this case to my own division, if I may.”

“Hah? You want your division in charge of this one?”

“Yes,” said Zanzibar, bowing deeply before the Dark One. “If I may be so bold...”

“Fine by me,” said Dawkson. “It’s all yours.”

“Most gracious, Dark One,” said Zanzibar. “It shall be dealt with posthaste.”

“I’m countin’ on it,” said Dawkson. With that, he rose from his seat and made his way back to the door that led to his private room.

Zanzibar kept his head bowed as he listened to the Dark One’s retreating footsteps. *The person Lord Dawkson used to be would be far too suspicious of rebellion to ever think of giving me such responsibilities...* he reflected, a satisfied look on his face. *As he is now, however, the moment he decides to entrust a matter to someone, he truly leaves it all to them. I am glad to see my decision to submit and serve the Dark One upon my defeat was not in vain...*

Before he left the room, however, Dawkson stopped in his tracks. “Oh, right,” he said. “Coqueshtti, I’ve got a job for you too.”

“Y-You do?!” Coqueshtti squeaked, startled to hear her name called so suddenly. “Wh-Whatever could it be?!”

Coqueshtti was a mad scientist of the little girl variety, and one of the Dark Army’s current Infernal Four. Dawkson had awarded her the position for her work treating great numbers of demons with her healing magic, but as Coqueshtti herself was a shy and happy-go-lucky girl, the position didn’t seem to suit her at all.

“This letter came with an analysis of the new magic beast’s venom,” Dawkson said, holding up a second sheet of paper over to Coqueshtti. “Think you can use this to make an antidote for any demons that get bit?”

“Y-Y-Y-Yes, sir! Right away!” Coqueshtti said, scampering across the room over to Dawkson and bowing deeply as she took the document from his hands.

“Thanks,” Dawkson said. “I’m countin’ on you.”

“Of course, of course!” Coqueshtti said, bobbing her head up and down.

Dawkson nodded in satisfaction and turned to leave the room. *I wonder...* he thought, glancing down at the now-empty envelope in his hand. *Have I gotten a little closer to the level of my big brother’s feet...*

On the envelope was written “From Ghozal, Houghtow City.”

◇Somewhere, on a Back Road◇

That night, somewhere in the world, a carriage hurdled down a back road deep in a forest, moving along at positively breakneck speeds. This area had once been a main road, but recently it had seen a sharp decline in traffic thanks to a brand-new road that had been built nearby, leaving this one disused.

Sitting on the coach's driver's platform, holding the reins tight in his hand, was none other than the Shadow King—the former king of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode and father of the Maiden Queen. He was banished from the kingdom when his evildoing was brought to light, and since then, had devoted himself full-time to the Shadow Conglomerate, the criminal organization he had managed on the side during his time as king.

The Shadow King drove on with desperation, swallowing his usually fastidious sense of fashion and putting the chaotic state of his outfit out of his mind. He swung the whip in his left arm, lashing out and striking the magic beast driving the carriage.

“Ouch!” the beast yelped. “What do you think you’re doing?!”

The beast, it turned out, was the demon fox Kintsuno the Golden herself—the elder of the infamous demon fox sisters who had once been a powerful force within the Dark Army, known for her love of everything golden. The demon fox sisters had joined forces with the Shadow Conglomerate after the fall of their clan, now serving as Shadow King’s partners in crime.

Kintsuno, in her magic beast form, lashed back at the Shadow King with her tail, shooting him a deadly glare over her shoulder.

“Shadow King!” scolded the silver fox pulling the carriage alongside Kintsuno. “What are you thinking?! Don’t hit my sister Kintsuno with a whip!”

This was, of course, Gintsuno the Silver, the younger of the demon fox sisters who favored the color silver.

The Shadow King recoiled before the combined glare of the two sisters in their magic beast forms, but quickly gathered himself and faced forward. “Forget that! If we can’t get this treasure back to the hideout by the end of tonight, we’ll lose out on a contract with a big partner for the Shadow Conglomerate! We can’t let that happen!”

“I know that!” Kintsuno yipped in protest.

“Why won’t this guy come out on any other day, anyway?!” Gintsuno complained. “It’s completely unacceptable!” She cried out in frustration, and suddenly, as if on cue, a great serpent burst out of the earth behind the carriage.

“H-Holy hells...” Kintsuno said, sweat running down her brow. “It came back!”

“Why won’t it leave us alone?!” said Gintsuno.

The demon fox sisters ran for their lives as the enormous magic beast drew closer and closer from behind. “Kshhhaaah!!!” it cried, opening its mouth wide and stretching out its neck towards the driver, venomous saliva spraying from its maw and melting the wooden carriage where it landed, dangerously close to the Shadow King himself.

“E-Eeeek!!!” the Shadow King cried, a shiver of terror running down his spine.

The snake bit at the carriage, shattering its frame and sending the contents flying every which way.

“D-Damnation...” the Shadow King swore. “We’re losing the treasure, after everything we went through to get it! Kintsuno! Gintsuno! Hurry! We need to get away from this snake!”

“You can say that all you like, but I promise you we’re running as fast as we can!” said Kintsuno.

“You’re the one who had the bright idea to make us pull the carriage when that thing scared the horses away!” Gintsuno added. “You don’t get to complain!”

The Shadow King and demon fox sisters spat invectives back and forth as the serpent came up from behind, persistently trying to attack the carriage in spite of all their efforts to get away. The greater half of the treasure was already lost, strewn across the road behind them as they fled. And yet, the carriage rolled on down that disused road by the light of the moon.

## Chapter 2: The Third Princess on the Job

◇Houghtow City—Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall◇

It was another day of packed stands at the Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall. In the plaza outside, two men were having a conversation.

“Would you look at that,” one of them said, marveling at the crowd. “This place is as popular as ever!”

“Did you know?” the other man asked. “This whole place used to be a wide open field, without a building in sight!”

“Really? It’s hard to believe, seeing what it looks like now.”

“That’s right! Of course, that all changed when Mister Flio showed up in town...”

“Speaking of which,” the first man said, looking all around. Above their heads, an Enchanted Frigate flew in to dock at the boarding tower, arriving in the city right at that moment. “Those Enchanted Frigates are one of this Mister Flio’s creations too, aren’t they?”

“That’s right! I’ve heard Mister Flio built them all himself!”

“They say those ships’ll take you all the way to the Calgosi Coast at the south end of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, or the Oldwass region in the north, or even to other kingdoms like Indol or Hi Izuru! But...” The man furrowed his brow, rubbing his thumb and index finger together in the universally understood symbol for cash. “Is it expensive?”

“Not especially, I’d say,” the other man answered. “You can get a flight to the Calgosi Coast for the price of a single cup of tea—and they’ll get you there as fast as you can finish a cup of tea as well!”

“B-But that’s absurd!” the first man protested. “It costs the same as a whole week’s worth of expensive meals from a top class restaurant to go to the Calgosi Coast by carriage—and the trip takes two entire months one way!”



Suddenly, the magic speakers installed in the plaza played a loud fanfare, interrupting the two men's conversation and signaling the start of the busiest part of the whole day.

"Oh!" said the first. "Is it already time for the main race?"

"Seems like it," said the second, as the two headed towards the racetrack to take their seats. "Here's to a good one!"

The announcer's voice came over the speakers, signaling the start of the headline race of the day. "I am pleased to announce the start of today's main race!"

The role of announcer, incidentally, was played by Charun, whose voice had become one of the iconic features of the Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall. On top of that, the magic doll had recently taken up another role as manager of the newly opened Cal'Cha Teahouse, located right by the entrance to the Fli-o'-Rys General Store itself. It could be said, perhaps, that Charun had recently overcome all competition to become the very busiest of all the members of Flio's House.

"Today, we will be commencing the race for the Klyrode Cup," Charun continued. "We invite Her Majesty, the Third Princess of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, to please do us the honor of the starting shot."

The magic beasts were all ready to go behind the starting gate. Next to them, a moving platform slowly ascended from the ground, revealing the Third Princess riding on top.

The Third Princess was the Maiden Queen's youngest sister. Her given name was Swann Klyrode. She had become her sister the Queen's indispensable left arm almost as soon as she graduated from the academy for noble children where she had received her education. Above all else, though, she was absolutely infatuated with her oldest sister.

For her public appearance, the Third Princess wore a light blue dress, holding the magic pistol used for the starting shot in her right hand and smiling at the crowd as the platform rose to its full height.

Up in the VIP box, the Second Princess watched as the Third Princess came

into view down on the track. “She looks a bit tense, but that’s hardly surprising,” she remarked, watching with a smirk as her nervous younger sister rose up into the air. “After all, this is her first time making a public appearance like this. Still, Swann is a member of the royal family. She’ll have to get used to making the occasional appearance at times like this when our sister the Maiden Queen is unavailable.”

Considering that the race today was for the coveted Klyrode Cup, the racers lining up behind the starting gate was a who’s-who of the finest talent the Fli-o’-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall had to offer, starting with Sleip, who reigned undefeated as the racing hall’s invincible ace.

Races in the Fli-o’-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall were restricted to demons and demihumans who could transform into a magic beast shape, plus individuals riding a magic beast trained for racing. Races were split up into different classes according to weight. Demihumans would submit the weight of their body in its magic beast form, while riders would submit the combined weight of themselves and their mount. There were some demihumans who had a third form in addition to their human and beast forms—half human and half beast. In those cases, however, the racer would simply weigh themselves in the form they intended to use in the race. Transforming mid-race was a violation of the rules and grounds for disqualification from the rankings.

“All right,” Sleip said as he waited at the top of the first lane in his centaur form. “Time for another race...” He let out a breath of anticipation, then flashed a cocky grin. “Hah. It’s strange, you know. I get even more worked up for one of these races than I ever did for the bloody violence of the battlefield...” It was obvious he was raring to go—his human upper half was flush with excitement.

“Terribly sorry to spoil your high spirits,” said Stoleanna, the racer beside him in the second lane, “but I’m afraid to say that today, on this gala occasion, you will be tasting the first defeat of your long life. By my hands, of course,” she added, a daring grin on her face as she brushed her hair out of her eyes.

As a racer, Stoleanna had been completely undefeated in her former stomping grounds, the Naneewa Town Magic Beast Racing Hall. It hadn’t been until she went up against Sleip that her winning streak was finally broken, prompting her to move to the Fli-o’-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall. In addition to

racing she was an authority on the subject of medical care for magic beasts, and had even been called on from time to time to care for the mounts ridden by the knights of Klyrode castle.

“Hah!” Sleip laughed. “One day I’ll meet my match, I’m sure. But you have another thing coming if you think I’m about to lose today!”

“Hmph!” said Stoleanna. “We’ll see if this goes like you think when the race begins!”

“That’s true enough...” Sleip said. “In a contest, your fortunes can change at any moment.”

Sleip and Stoleanna exchanged a look before turning their attention back to the track ahead of them, waiting impatiently alongside the other contestants for the race to begin.



Up in the stands, Rislei sat watching the racers intently as they prepared. “Ahhh!” she cried in frustration, puffing her cheeks out in a pout as she stretched her own shoulders. “I wanted to run in the race too! Today was going to be the day I finally beat papa!”

In the seat next to her, the lizardfolk boy wearing a large pair of goggles loose around his neck gave a knowing smirk. “You’ve been doing good in the races lately, for sure, but all that’s been in the beginner’s division, hasn’t it?” he said, tapping Rislei on the head. “Wouldn’t you need a lot more experience before you can hope to win against *him*?”

This was Reptor, one of the recent graduates from the Houghtow College of Magic. He had grown close to Rislei during their time together at school, although Rislei’s father Sleip seemed determined to treat him as an enemy.

Rislei looked up at Reptor with evident frustration in her eyes. Rislei was quite a bit taller than most other girls around her age, but as a lizardfolk, Reptor had been the tallest in their entire class. In fact, no one at the Houghtow College of Magic reached his height, including any of the teachers. Because of his height, Reptor had to watch the race standing in the staff-only seating area in the very first row. Needless to say, he stood out quite a bit.

The reason Reptor was allowed in the staff-only area, incidentally, was that he, too, was a regular participant in the racing hall's races.

"Besides," Reptor continued, "this is a title race. Your dad and Stoleanna are the favorites, of course, but there's lots of other big names here as well, like Hitopoi the muscle monkey, who has top-notch cornering thanks to those strong biceps of his, or Brazana, who you can count on to run flat out all the way to the finish. I wouldn't expect to win against competition like that—in fact, it seems flat out impossible!"

"But that's exactly it..." Rislei huffed, looking down and away from Reptor. "I wanna run alongside such incredible racers so they can see how cool I can be..." she mumbled indistinctly towards the ground.

"Huh?" said Reptor. "What was that you said, Rislei?"

"Forget it!" Rislei insisted. "Anyway, the race is starting! Look!"

"O-Oh!" said Reptor, turning his attention back to the racetrack at Rislei's prompting. The two of them were far from the only ones—all around them, the spectators in the stands were staring intently over at the starting gate.

The Third Princess, however, was standing motionless before the eyes of the crowd, the arm holding the starting pistol dangling limp at her side. At first, the Second Princess had noted her sister's stage fright with affectionate good nature, but as time wore on her expression began to take on a note of distinct impatience.

The racers waiting on standby behind the starting gate were beginning to grow quite impatient as well.

"Hey now...what's the big idea?!" said one, unable to restrain himself from voicing his displeasure.

"Has something gone wrong, I wonder?" said a second.

"They'd better start this race soon! My muscles can't wait a second longer! Pwa hah!"

Even the audience stands had begun to murmur in confusion, whispering audibly all throughout the hall.

“Looks like we’ve got a situation on our hands...” the Second Princess said, frowning from the VIP box. “I’m not sure what happened, but it looks like my little sister has gone and completely frozen up!” Thinking on her feet, she jumped to her feet and ran out of the box onto the race track, clambering up the platform in full view of the now quite noisy crowd. “My apologies!” she said, her voice amplified by the magic speakers as she bowed repeated apologies to the racers and audience. “It seems the Third Princess is feeling unwell today. I will be opening this race in her stead...”

The Second Princess took the starting pistol from her younger sister’s hand, as the Third Princess stood completely frozen all the while. She didn’t even twitch as the Second Princess pried the gun from her fingers. “All right...” the Second Princess said. “On your marks...get set...and start!”

*Bang!*

The Second Princess fired the pistol into the air, its roar echoing throughout the racing hall. On that signal, the gate swung open and the racers came running out as one.

Sleip took an early lead, his enormous frame and massive strides sending him deftly ahead of the competition in a single burst with Stoleanna following right behind on her own equine magic beast, with the rest of the pack falling away behind the two frontrunners.

Suddenly, however, the crowd in the stands cried out in alarm.

“Wh-What’s *that*?!”

“W-Was something that massive hiding somewhere on the track?!”

Before their eyes, another magic beast—a serpent of tremendous size—had emerged from the ground in front of the racers. It made a lunge towards Sleip and Stoleanna, who were running far ahead of the rest, but it was not to be...

“Out of my way!” Sleip roared, grabbing the serpent out of the air and flinging it to the ground.

“Gwahhh?!” the beast exclaimed, its death cry swallowed up by the tumultuous sound of it crashing hard to earth.

For a moment, the stands fell into a stunned silence. Then, a second later, a tremendous cheer rang out. “W-Way to go, Sleip!”

“That magic beast showed up out of nowhere, and he killed it with a single strike!”

“And he didn’t even drop his speed while he was doing it! Incredible!”

“Ha ha!” Sleip laughed, speeding up still further as he left the body of the magic beast in the dust behind him. “It’ll take more than that to slow me down in the middle of a race!”

Behind Sleip in second place, Stoleanna stole a glance in the lichsteed’s direction. *That magic beast appeared so suddenly, but he adapted to the situation with no trouble at all... she thought. He precisely dispatched the beast with a single blow to its vitals, and even took care to toss it outside of the course, where it won’t interfere with me or the other racers. And most notably of all...he did it all the while widening the gap between me and him!* A smile played on Stoleanna’s lips even as a bead of cold sweat ran down her brow. “Fascinating!” she said. “And this is exactly why he’s an opponent worth defeating! Let’s go, Womba!” She pulled on the reins, urging her partner horse onward. Womba dutifully lowered her head, speeding up for all she was worth, but try as she might there was no hope of closing the distance to Sleip.

*I-I can’t catch up to him... Stoleanna thought in distress. I-In fact...is he getting farther away?*

Indeed, the gap between first and second was widening by the minute. By the time they reached the far side of the track, he might as well have been leagues ahead of the others, running entirely on his own. The audience was in an uproar at Sleip’s singular display of unrivaled prowess.

“Wh-Whoa!” Rislei exclaimed, hiding her face behind her hands to conceal her shock and delight. “Look how fast papa’s going! I-I mean, holy crap! This is like, totally nuts!”

“No kidding...” Reptor agreed, wide-eyed as he watched Sleip’s progress along the track. “Your dad was always fast, but it feels like today he’s on a whole different level! It’s completely out of this world...”

*Which means, Reptor thought to himself, I need to be able to keep up with that speed if I want to make good on my plan to give him a worthy race and earn his approval to have a relationship with Rislei...*

Reptor had fallen for Rislei the first time he set eyes on her at the Houghtow College of Magic, and stayed by her side ever since. Rislei's mother Byleri regarded the boy warmly, but her father Sleip on the other hand had proved a much more difficult obstacle.

Needless to say, the race ended with Sleip in a commanding lead.



"Now, a word from our champion Lord Sleip, following his overwhelming victory in the race for the Klyrode Cup! Please join us for today's Winner Interview!" Charun's voice came over the racing hall's magic speakers. Down in the arena, Sleip stood atop the winner's podium, waving up at the audience in the stands as Charun stood beside him, Magicrophone in hand.

The Winner Interview, conducted after the headline race every day at the Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall, had become one of the popular features of the establishment. Most of the day's guests opted to stay and listen, welcoming Sleip with generous applause.

Up in the VIP box, the Third Princess had a particularly excellent view of the interview. The VIP box was built a fair distance from the track, above the spectator stands, giving its occupants an unobstructed view of the entire hall. The Third Princess, however, wasn't paying a bit of attention to anything happening below—she was simply sitting on the sofa, head drooped in shame as the Second Princess stood beside her, a flabbergasted expression on her face.

"You were frightened...by the magic beasts?" the Second Princess repeated, stunned by the explanation her sister had finally managed to give.

The Third Princess, who hadn't moved a muscle since returning from the racetrack, suddenly seemed to be desperately holding back a flood of tears now that she had worked up the nerve to speak. "I-It's just, I'd only ever seen magic beasts before in the likes of grimoires and bestiaries... And all of them were so



huge and imposing, especially that...that wildly muscular lichsteed who came in first... I was just...so afraid..."

"Wait, wait, wait, hang on..." the Second Princess said, rolling her eyes up towards the ceiling in spite of herself. "I get that the magic beasts in today's race were probably a particularly intimidating bunch, but you've ridden in a carriage pulled by magic beasts before, haven't you? There's no way you've never seen a magic beast before today!"

"But..." the Third Princess protested, hugging her own trembling shoulders. "The magic beasts I've seen pulling carriages weren't nearly so big! I've read about magic beasts like the ones today in bestiaries and the like, of course, but to see them in reality was just... It was just..."

The Second Princess clutched her head as if she were in pain. *Well, crap...* she thought. *Swann is so clever and so good at handling all of the financial affairs of the castle that I forgot she was appointed as our sister's aide the very moment she was old enough to graduate! She hasn't had time to get used to the outside world like our older sister and I have! No wonder she has trouble being around magic beasts...* She folded her arms, a furrow forming on her brow as she turned her gaze back towards her younger sister. *But wait— isn't this a serious problem?! If she's going to be appearing at public events when the Maiden Queen is unavailable, being afraid of magic beasts isn't going to cut it!*

The Second Princess stood in thought, until finally something hit her. "Hey, hang on, Third Princess..."

"Y-Yes?" the Third Princess asked. "Whatever is it?"

"You've been to Flio's house before, haven't you?"

"W-Well, yes..." she acknowledged. "I have accompanied our sister the Queen there on many occasions."

"You must have seen a bunch of unicorn rabbits and psychobears hanging out in Mister Flio's living room, right?" the Second Princess asked.

"Well, yes, now that you mention it, there were..."

"And? You were fine with them?"

“I was a little afraid of them...” the Third Princess said, taking out her pocket handkerchief as she spoke and loudly blowing her nose. “But it’s Mister Flio’s house, you know. The house’s usual residents were with me the whole time, and I know the magic beasts living there are all friendly to humans...”

*Thinking back, Swann would always find someone to hide behind every time we went to Mister Flio’s house, wouldn’t she...* the Second Princess thought, pressing her hand up to her mouth in a gesture of deep thought as she considered her sister’s predicament. *But that aside, I can’t just leave things as they are, can I? Think, think... There must be some card I can play...* Then, suddenly, she seemed to have an idea. “I’ve got it!” she said, suddenly pointing her finger up towards the ceiling as she looked towards the Third Princess with a great big grin on her face. “I know what card to play here!”

“Card?” her sister repeated, looking blankly between her own hands and the Second Princess’s. “I haven’t got a card... Have you?”

The Second Princess smirked at the Third Princess’s display of her somewhat airheaded nature. “It might be a bit drastic...” she said, nodding to herself at her idea. “But it’s for the Third Princess’s own sake—and by extension, our sister the Queen’s!”

### ◇The Magical Kingdom of Klyrode—Northern Forest◇

While the Second and Third Princesses were carrying on their conversation in the VIP box of the Fli-o’-Rys magic beast racing hall, the Maiden Queen was in a carriage headed to the north of the kingdom.

The Oracle had made contact with Sage Star-Reader and received the reply, *“If you are to come, I ask that you do so as inconspicuously and with as few companions as you are able.”* Therefore, the Maiden Queen had departed for the Woods of Seclusion where Sage Star-Reader lived accompanied by only a single guard—the finest knight the Order of Klyrode had to offer. In Klyrode Castle, the Maiden Queen would usually be seen dressed in a regal gown, but for this journey she had chosen a simple outfit, much like what a common town girl might wear.

*I believe the request in Sage Star-Reader’s letter was her way of saying that she wished to meet with me as an individual, rather than as the Maiden Queen*

*of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode... the Maiden Queen thought as she looked out the carriage window. It's strange, though. According to our records, the Sage used to specifically request a formal delegation from the kingdom when we had occasion to visit her in the past.*

*Still, the Maiden Queen added, I suppose the reasons behind it aren't altogether that important, are they?* She turned towards the front of the carriage, sliding open the window that looked out at the driver's seat, meant to allow the passenger of the carriage to communicate with the driver. There she could see Garyl, sitting right before her eyes. He was holding the reins with a serious expression on his face, making sure to look to the left and right from time to time in order to keep an eye on his surroundings.

The Maiden Queen stared up at him, engrossed by the view of Garyl's profile. *I told the knights that my companion would have to be someone who would not seem too obviously like a knight in service of the Queen, but capable of handling any difficulties or emergencies we might have on the road... she thought. But I never expected them to assign Garyl of all people to me!*

The Maiden Queen held both hands daintily in front of her face, her cheeks turning a distinctive shade of red as she took in the sight. *I had heard that Garyl's performance on the Klyrode Institute entrance examination was so exemplary that he was skipped over the school entirely and made a member of the Order of Klyrode on the spot... she reflected. But who would have thought he was already prepared to be sent out on missions!*

◇Meanwhile—Klyrode Castle◇

The Second Princess walked down the castle corridor, reviewing a sheet of official paperwork. On it was recorded the details of the Maiden Queen's mission to visit Sage Star-Reader in her home. When she saw the name of the knight accompanying the Queen, a smile came to her face.

*Looks like all the behind the scenes maneuvering I did to get Garyl assigned to this mission went well, then... she thought. I mean, I wasn't exactly worried about him being chosen after the way he beat those knights who said were the strongest in the Institute in a matter of seconds back during his exam, but I was a little bit concerned that some factions in the knighthood might find some*

*excuse to complain on the grounds of seniority, or family standing or the like...*

She breathed a sigh of relief, pleased to see that everything had gone the way she wanted. “Now then, it looks like they’ll be spending the next three days traveling to the Woods of Seclusion and back,” she said, looking up out the castle window and tightening her right into a fist. “And during that time, it’ll be just the two of us holding down the fort. Godspeed to both of us, I suppose...”

### ◇Back on the Road◇

“Achoo!” Sitting in her seat in the carriage, the Maiden Queen suddenly sneezed.

Garyl looked back over his shoulders at the sound. “Are you okay, Your Ma—” he began, before hastily correcting himself. “Sorry, I mean, Miss Elizabeth?” As they were traveling incognito on this particular journey, they had decided to address the Maiden Queen as Elizabeth for the duration of the trip—although Garyl had briefly forgotten in that moment.

“Yes, I’m all right...” Elizabeth said. “It’s just a little cold outside the carriage, perhaps...”

“Oh!” said Garyl. “We should close the window, then!”

“A-Ah...” Elizabeth found herself reaching out towards the window with her outstretched right hand, but it was too late. Garyl had shut it tight. *Wh-Why did I have to sneeze right at that moment?* she thought, covering her dismayed face with her hands.

Up in the driver’s seat, however, Garyl didn’t have the slightest inkling of the Maiden Queen’s remorse. He kept on driving the horses just as before without a care in the world.

*It’s a good thing Byleri and Sleip gave me such a thorough education in how to handle horses!* he thought. *Thanks to them, I can drive a carriage like this no problem!*

Relieved that so far everything had been going well, Garyl lifted up the reins, when suddenly he noticed something to the side of the road. “Huh?” he said, looking out towards a spot in the forest where he could see splinters of wood scattered among the trees. *Another one...* he thought. *That’s the fifth one like it*

*today, isn't it?* He frowned. "That's near the back road, right? Do you think there's something going on over there?"

At his words, a cloud of mist formed behind Garyl as his familiar Ben'ne took form. "Shall I go and see what has happened, my master?"

"Good idea, Miss B," Garyl said. "Would you mind?"

Ben'ne nodded, readying her naginata. "It would be my pleasure," she said, leaping off into the air. As a psychic construct, Ben'ne was more than capable of flying along effortlessly above the ground, and she soared off into the distance, following the road. A short while later, Garyl could hear a loud *bang!* coming from the direction Ben'ne had gone.

"Did Miss B find something?" Garyl wondered, lifting himself up from the seat. *Wait... he thought. Right now, I'm supposed to be guarding Ellie. I shouldn't be moving around like this! Besides, with Miss B on the case I should have nothing to worry about.*

Garyl went to sit back down. This time, however, he suddenly sensed something coming towards them from where he had heard the explosion just a second ago. "Is something coming?" he wondered aloud, standing up in the driver's seat once again. He looked out and saw the forest underbrush swaying violently as something made its way straight for the carriage.

Garyl silently lowered himself into a fighting stance, transforming his arms past the elbows into their magic beast forms.

"Gwraaaaahhh!!!" A giant serpentine magic beast burst forth from the tall grass, opening its mouth wide as it descended upon the carriage.

The very second the magic beast came into view, Garyl leaped up from the driver's seat, flying all the way around the carriage with unbelievable speed and landing on the ground behind the vehicle right as the snake came soaring overhead and catching it with a rising uppercut straight to its open jaw. The serpent was sent flying high into the air by the force of the attack, and then fell to the ground behind Garyl in a powerless heap.

Garyl looked back over his shoulder, checking to make sure that the serpent really wasn't moving before taking out the Bottomless Bag he wore on his belt.

“Dad said something about this in his last telepathic message, didn’t he? He told me to keep an eye out for these serpentine magic beasts that’ve been appearing all over the place. I wonder if this is one of them...”

Storing the magic beast safely in the bag, Garyl jumped into the air once again and landed in the driver’s seat in a single bound. He took the reins back in his hand.

The magic beasts who had been pulling the carriage were clearly agitated by the serpent’s sudden appearance. “Whoa, whoa...” Garyl said. “Easy does it!” And with that, they quickly calmed down.

“Um, Garyl?” came Elizabeth’s voice from inside the carriage. “Is something the matter?” She was leaning in so close to the little window that all Garyl could see was her eye peering out.

“Don’t worry!” Garyl replied with his father’s easygoing smile. “Everything’s under control!”

“I see...” Elizabeth said, reassured. “That’s good, then.”

*Garyl... she thought, staring out through the window up at the profile of his face for a bit longer than she had intended. He does take after Mister Flio, doesn’t he...*

### ◇Houghtow City—Flio’s House◇

As Elizabeth and Garyl continued their journey on the highway to the north, the residents of Flio’s house were settling down for a morning meeting now that the frenzy of breakfast had run its course.

“And so,” Flio said, standing before the entire assembled household at the living room table, “Miss Swann is going to be staying here with us for a little while, starting today.”

Swann stepped forward at Flio’s words, looking around at the assembled crowd with a very tense expression on her face. “Th-Thank you for having me, everyone...” she said, bowing deeply. “M-My name’s Swann...”

Swann was dressed in a boyish cowgirl-style outfit to Flio’s house, a far cry from the dresses she usually wore around the castle. She had additionally been

given an enormous pair of glasses, nearly too large to actually wear, to disguise her identity. With her dressed like that, very few people indeed would recognize her as the Third Princess of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode.

“S-Still...” Swann said. “I-Isn’t this disguise a little...much?” In particular, she seemed to be self-conscious of the outfit’s bare midriff. She hunched her back in an attempt to hide her stomach from sight, her cheeks flushing with embarrassment.

“Oh? Is something wrong with it?” Rys, who had selected the outfit in the first place, asked, looking genuinely confused.

“N-Not at all!” Swann said. “The Fli-o’-Rys General Store’s fashion line is famous even in Klyrode Castle and the surrounding town, you know. I’ve heard all about how fashionable and cutting-edge the designs are! B-But...I’m just not used to showing this much skin...”

“Well, then, that’s nothing to worry about!” Rys declared with a smile, grabbing both of Swann’s trembling shoulders from behind. “If you’re not used to showing skin, then we just have to get you used to it!”

“F-Fweh?!” Swann exclaimed, her eyes going wide as she froze up once again.

Flio watched the exchange, a knowing smile on his face. In fact, aside from Folmina and Ghoro, who were on their way to school along with their parents accompanying them for their special morning practice, and Blossom, who was out working in the fields, nearly all the residents of Flio’s house were in the living room, watching warmly as Rys did her best to encourage Swann.

“Excuse me!” said Byleri, raising her hand from her seat at the table. “So like, Miss Swann, you’re here to get over your fear of magic beasts, right? Well, how about helping me and Lord Sleip out at our magic beast ranch?” she offered, beaming over Swann’s direction.

“I don’t know about that, Byleri...” Sleip said, wincing as he pushed Byleri’s hand back down. “When she was arriving at our house, just seeing a few of the horses running about was enough to make her freeze up entirely...”

“I-I’m very sorry for the trouble I’ve caused you...” Swann said at those words, hanging her head and looking very apologetic indeed.



Sleip, of course, had not been exaggerating in the slightest. The Second Princess's grand plan had been for the Third Princess—Swann—to stay for a while at Flio's house, where magic beasts and humans lived side by side, in an effort to overcome her phobia of magic beasts. She had started out full of confidence when she first arrived at Flio's house, and made up her mind to pay a visit to the pasture where the house's herd of equine magic beasts lived.

*Just you watch!* she had thought at the time. *I'll conquer this phobia of mine in just a day!*

Alas, in the presence of the magic beasts, her fear took over completely, and she ended up freezing stiff the instant she came anywhere near the pasture.

*I had been doing my best to train with the illustrations in bestiaries and other illustrations of magic beasts ever since my failure at the Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall, but I suppose it's just not the same as the real thing...* Swann thought, drooping with shame as she thought back to the event. *A-At this rate, I won't be any use to my sister the Queen!*

"I'm hooome!" As Swann was lost in thought, Rynàsze came bursting in through the front entrance, back from her morning walk. She was riding atop Sybe, who was walking on all fours in his natural psychobear form. The rest of Sybe's family were there too, of course, having joined them for the walk.

"Rynàsze! Welcome home!" said Flio. "This is Miss Swann. I believe I mentioned it to you yesterday, but she's going to be staying with us for a while starting today. Let's do our best to make her feel at home."

"Yes, papa!" Rynàsze said, happily nodding. "It's so nice to meet you Miss Swann!" She stepped up to Swann, removing her hat and reaching out to shake her hand.

Rynàsze, however, was still riding on Sybe's back, so before her hand could reach its destination, Sybe's face had to come precariously close to Swann's.

"Nwahhh?!" Swann cried, frozen stiff by Sybe's sudden appearance on the scene.

Sybe, however, showed no consideration for Swann's mental state whatsoever. "*Bwor!*" he cried out happily, giving Swann a big good-natured

*liiick* right on her face.

Next to him, Tybe, the fearsome Bear of Misfortune followed suit, with a “*Bwor!*” and a *liiick* of his own, as Shebe the unicorn rabbit and her children mobbed about Swann’s feet.



It was a heartwarming image. Except...

“Hm?” Rylnàsze said, looking curiously down at Swann, who seemed to have fainted away standing up. “Miss Swann?”

“H-Hwah!!!” Swann cried, suddenly regaining her consciousness.

A second later, however, came another pair of licks—Sybe’s tongue on her right cheek and Tybe’s on the left.

*Magic beasts...* she thought, the color draining from her face as she took stock of her current situation. *M-Magic beasts are...I-licking...I-licking...*

“M-My...” Swann said.

“My?” Rylnàsze blinked, unsure what to make of the word Swann had finally managed to utter.

And then, with the eyes of everyone in the living room upon her, Swann took in a slow, deep breath...and let out a scream from the very depths of her diaphragm.

“My gooooodneeeess!!!”

“Hwahhh?!” Rylnàsze cried, covering her ears with her hands. The magic beasts who had been mobbing Swann all covered their ears as well, curling up into balls to hide from the sound.

Flio, incidentally, was able to withstand the sudden sonic assault without so much as flinching thanks to the numerous defensive spells active on his person at all times.

*This might be tough going after all...* he thought, a pained smile on his face as he watched Swann continue to scream.

◇Meanwhile—Klyrode Castle, Third Princess’s Office◇

The Third Princess’s private room was located on the second floor of the castle. It was divided into two chambers, one for sleeping and one for daily use. At the moment, however, the Third Princess was not present. Instead, a trio of girls was there, looking around the room with furrowed brows. All three of them seemed to be relatively young. It must not have been long at all since they

had graduated from school themselves.

“Hang on...” one of them said. “*This* is where we’re going to be working?”

“That’s right,” said Cygnus, the Third Princess’s aide, standing behind three girls. “Her Highness the Third Princess uses this room as her personal office, so we thought it would be fitting to have you perform your tasks in the same room while you are serving as her substitutes.”

“So you say...” said Alba, the girl at the head of the group, sighing heavily. “But there’s nothing here but shelf after shelf of difficult looking books and a single cramped writing desk! Does the woman in charge of the kingdom’s internal administration really do her work in a place like *this*?”

Next to Alba, Potrie, the second of the girls, looked around the room with a near identical grimace on her face.

“Well, even so...” Unlike Alba and Potrie, who seemed to be struggling to bite their tongues about their annoyance at the situation, the third girl, Sansa, had picked the paperwork up off the desk and had already begun looking it over with a sleepy-eyed but self-assured grin. “If this is all the work you have for us, I could probably handle it on my own, don’t you think?”

“Well, you know Swann,” Alba said. “Or—excuse me, I forgot that even her former classmates are supposed to call her Her Majesty the Third Princess now. But what are the odds she called in all three of us to do her work while she’s away just so she can tell people she does the work of three people?”

“I see!” said Potrie. “That does sound somewhat possible...” At that, all three girls burst into laughter together.

Cygnus, however, maintained her cool expression. “Now. I do believe we’ve wasted enough time talking,” she said. “I would appreciate it if you could begin your work as soon as possible. I believe I have already explained what tasks are expected of you. It should not be very different from your usual assignments in the general affairs department.” *After all...* she thought to herself. *I’ve only given you work of that sort.*

The three set about their tasks with the air of experienced workers expecting to have the whole thing finished before breakfast that day. Cygnus watched

impassively, internally clicking her tongue in frustration all the while keeping her face studiously blank. “Some of these documents pertain to highly classified information,” she said. “Take care not to allow anything you are working on here to leave this room. I will be performing my own tasks in Her Majesty the Third Princess’s bedchambers. Please let me know if you have any further questions.”

“Yes, ma’am!” the three girls said in unison, giving Cygnus a smart salute.

*Hmm... Cygnus thought, They certainly said some rather disrespectful things towards the beginning, but at least these girls know how to use proper etiquette when it’s called for. Her cool expression remained unfaltering as she took stock of the three. I do wonder how they will fare... The three of them were selected for this because of their status as the Third Princess’s former classmates, but Her Highness instructed me not to ask them for the impossible. I suppose I had best do what I can to support them. Although... she went on, her eyes turning a shade more severe. I really can’t conceive of that earlier comment as anything other than a dis against Her Highness. Perhaps I should take that into account when considering my treatment of them. Yes, I must make them understand. They must learn just how wonderful my beloved Third Princess truly is...*

Cygnus, aide to the Third Princess, seemed at first glance to be a cool and dignified beauty. More than a few members of the castle staff, however, had noticed that she seemed to get a strange glint in her eyes whenever her gaze fell upon the Third Princess...

### ◇Houghtow City—Flio’s House◇

That night after dinner, Swann and Rynàsze went off to take a bath together.

“Th-This bath is simply incredible!” Swann marveled, struck motionless in the doorway leading from the changing room to the bath itself.

It was no wonder that Swann was so surprised by the sight. The bath stretching out before her was nearly as large as the living room of the house, complete with an area to rinse off before getting in the hot water. It was easily large enough to accommodate a dozen bathers at once.

It was no mystery how the bath had ended up this way. Every time someone new had come to live at Flio’s house, Flio had made a point of expanding the

bathing facilities so that all the residents of the house could enjoy a pleasant, relaxing bath. After all of the successive expansions, the baths of Flio's house had become something truly grandiose.

"A-And this is only the women's bath, is it not?" Swann said, disbelief written on her face. "I-If the adjourning men's baths are of a similar size, that would make this bath even larger than the one in the castle!"

"Oh Miss Swann!" Rynàsze said, running up behind the princess from the changing room. "You'll catch a cold if you keep standing about in the doorway! Let's get in the bath!" Beaming, she grabbed Swann from behind by the shoulders and began to push her inside.

At Rynàsze's urging, Swann sat down on one of the wooden bath stools as Rynàsze took a seat beside her, humming a cheerful tune as she filled a bucket full of water from the bath.

"Here you go!" Rynàsze said. "This is for you, Miss Swann!"

"Th-Thank you!" Swann said, politely accepting the bucket of water. Her eyes, however, were drawn to Rynàsze, who was sitting naked in the open air. *I-I didn't notice when we were outside the bath, she thought, but Miss Rynàsze's chest really is quite large, isn't it...?*

Right before her eyes, Swann could see Rynàsze's hefty bosom swaying and jiggling with every motion. Swann looked down at her own chest for comparison. Among her own family, Swann might have been the youngest sibling, but chest was quite a bit larger than those of both Leusoc, the Second Princess, and Elizabeth, the Maiden Queen. In fact, Swann had never before met another girl her age whose chest was larger than hers. As she looked between her own breasts and Rynàsze's, her eyes gradually went wide. *I-Is her chest...larger than my own?*

Rynàsze, however, simply splashed her own bucket of water over her head, smiling without a care in the world. "Now, Miss Swann, would you face the other way so that I can wash your back please?"

"F-Fweh?!" Swann exclaimed. "Y-You're going to wash my back?!"

"First, let's get you nice and rinsed up!" Rynàsze refilled her own bucket from

the bath, dumping the contents out atop Swann's head.

"Bhpffh!!!" sputtered Swann, startled to find herself suddenly wet.

Rylnàsze spun Swann around the other way and produced a hand towel frothing with soapy bubbles, setting about washing Swann's back.

"U-Um!" Swan protested. "I-I can do this myself, if you please!"

"No, no, I insist!" said Rylnàsze, smiling happily in contrast to Swann's mounting panic. "It's no trouble at all!"

It didn't seem like Rylnàsze was going to stop anytime soon, so Swann gave up and sat down without protest, allowing the girl to do as she pleased. *Miss Rylnàsze really is an extraordinary young lady... she thought, looking back over her shoulder as Rylnàsze worked. She seems like she's always having so much fun surrounded by those magic beasts. Why can't I be like that?*

Swann's mood sank as she thought back on the events of the day. Since her goal had been to acclimate herself to magic beasts, Swann had spent the day together with Rylnàsze and her pets. Or, to be more precise, she had *tried* to spend the day with her...

"Hahhh..." Swann let out a deep, melancholic sigh.

"Miss Swann?" said Rylnàsze, looking up with innocent worry. "Is something the matter?"

"Oh, no, nothing really..." Swann said. "I was just thinking... I really didn't manage to get close to your magic beasts at all today..."

True to her words, Swann hadn't managed to approach the magic beasts during the entire course of the day. It wasn't only the large ones like Sybe the psychobear and Tybe the Bear of Misfortune that gave her trouble either; Swann had found herself unable to approach Sybe's children Sube, Sebe, and Sobe closer than a certain distance as well.

"I'm starting to worry if I'll ever be able to get used to being around magic beasts, if the first day went so poorly..." Swann said, slumping her shoulders.

"I don't think you need to worry about that," Rylnàsze said. "All of the magic beasts here are very gentle, you know! I'm sure you'll get used to them, even if



it takes you a few days.”

“Y-You really think so?” Swann asked.

“I do! I promise!” Rylnàsze said, smiling brightly as she encouraged Swann as best she could. “It’s going to be okay!”

*It’s strange, Swann thought, a smile coming to her own face as well. When Miss Rylnàsze tells me it’s going to be okay, somehow it feels like it actually will.*

“Now!” said Rylnàsze. “Let’s get some more practice in spending time with magic beasts tonight!”

“E-Excuse me?” Swann asked, looking back blankly. “T-Tonight?”

Some time later, Swann was dressed in her nightclothes, lying down in Flio’s living room to sleep. Rylnàsze was lying down next to her, dressed in a pair of nightclothes of her own, already fast asleep and snoring adorably. Swann, however, was frozen stiff, wide awake. And no surprise—the two girls, in fact, were lying on top of Sybe’s belly as he lay on his back in his natural psychobear form, arms and legs spread out wide.

*H-H-H-How did I end up here?! Swann thought, unable to move from fear and confusion. I-I-I remember Miss Rylnàsze calling me to bed...b-b-b-but why would she think I could sleep on top of a magic beast’s belly?! I-I-I-I can’t even get close to the things!*

Just then, Rylnàsze turned over in her sleep, still unconscious as she wrapped her arms tight around Swann’s middle.

“F-Fwehhh?!” Swann cried, her eyes shooting open at the sudden sensation. Rylnàsze was holding on to her like a human-sized pillow, the same way she would usually hold on to one of Sybe’s arms as she slept. It seemed that tonight, Swann would have to serve that role.

At first, Swann passed the hours in acute distress. As time went on with her in Rylnàsze’s arms, however, she began to find herself singing a different tune. *Miss Rylnàsze’s body is so soft and warm... she thought. And her smell is somehow pleasant as well...almost like a grassy field...*

Sawnn was born into the royal family of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, but

in spite of her heritage, it happened that she had very little talent for magic. She had done everything she could to make up for that defect with scholastic achievement, studying as hard as anyone had ever studied from a very young age to acquire every bit of knowledge she possibly could. The war with the Dark Army had reached a fever pitch when she was coming into her early childhood, and her parents never found the time to treat her with the least bit of fondness. They never gave a second thought to her studies, and never came to seek her council.

*So, so warm...* Swann thought, her expression softening and her body finally relaxing as Rynàsze held her tight. Soon, she found herself returning the hug of her own volition. And then, with the two of them wrapped up in each other's arms, she fell into a deep, deep sleep...

◇The Woods of Seclusion◇

As the morning dawned, Garyl was still driving the carriage north, making good time.

“Wait, hang on...” Deep in the Woods of Seclusion, Sage Star-Reader furrowed her brow as she watched the scene play out reflected in the crystal ball in her room. “They’re making way better time than I thought! Based on my initial calculations, I wasn’t expecting them until tomorrow morning!” Panicking, she switched the view in her crystal ball to display a map of the entire woods, centered on her location, a light indicating Garyl’s and Elizabeth’s presences blinking dangerously close to her house.

“I-I’ve been caught unprepared!” Sage Star-Reader cried. “Oh, what to do? I still haven’t cleaned the mysterious cloak I use when I’m receiving guests! I was going to do that *today*! A-And worse—I haven’t had time to prepare the sweets for my guests’ tea! I was going to do that today too! Oh no, no, no...”

And so, Sage Star-Reader rushed off in disarray, heedless of the fact that she was still dressed in her nightclothes.



Garyl sat in the driver’s seat of the stopped carriage, looking back and forth between the map and the road. “All right!” he said after a short while, nodding in satisfaction as he took up the reins once again. “It looks like we’re on the

right track. We just need to keep moving forward. Somehow we managed to keep to the path, in spite of all the false turns and identical scenery. This place sure lives up to its reputation. No wonder they call it the Woods of Seclusion..."

"My master..." said Ben'ne from the seat beside him. "Perhaps it is time for me to take a turn at the reins? Surely even one such as you must be tired after driving the carriage all through the night..."

"Thanks, Ben'ne, but that's all right," Garyl said, giving his familiar a friendly smile. "I can go a week without sleep without trouble, and the horses are telling me they're still going strong too!"

The equine magic beasts pulling the carriage let out a proud whinny in response to Garyl's words.

"Besides," Garyl continued, "you need the rest more than I do, don't you, Ben'ne? You were off chasing that mysterious gang until early in the morning!"

"Indeed, it is as you say..." Ben'ne admitted. "Although in the end, I lost sight of them. Much to my shame..."

"Hey, don't beat yourself up about it!" Garyl said, smiling as affably as always. "You'll get 'em the next time they show up!"

*Truly, this is the man I have chosen as my master... Ben'ne thought. His magnanimity knows no bounds.*

As the two carried on their conversation, inside the carriage Elizabeth was lying on her side, replaying the events of last night over and over in her head.

*"Excuse me...Garyl?" she had said. "Perhaps it is time we stopped for dinner?"*

*"Oh, yes!" was Garyl's response. "Here! This is for you!" he had said, producing a boxed meal from his Bottomless Bag.*

*"U-Um... What...?"*

*"Oh!" said Garyl. "I thought it would be best to minimize the time we spent on meals in order to get to our destination as soon as possible, so I made this in advance!"*

*"Ah... Yes, of course..."*

*“Excuse me...Garyl?” she had said again some time later. “Perhaps it’s time to set up camp for the night?”*

*“Oh, no need!” Garyl had said. “Both me and the horses can go for two or three days without rest. You should get some sleep in the carriage as we travel!”*

*“Ah... Yes, of course...”*

*This is all wrong! Elizabeth thought, covering her face with her hands. Yes, the boxed meal was very good...and yes, the carriage seats are perfectly soft, and the Gem of Heat makes it as warm inside as a room in the castle...and yes, I slept comfortably until morning...and yes, we’ve been moving along quite a bit ahead of schedule...but that isn’t what I wanted at all! I wanted Garyl and me to eat together...to fall asleep huddled together in a tent in the wild!*

*Ben’ne, who had some idea as to what Elizabeth was doing inside the carriage, looked down at her master. My master’s magnanimity outstrips the most benevolent of lords... she thought. But alas, he gives little heed to the hearts of the maidens around him. Or perhaps he is simply oblivious...*

And with that, she turned to mist and vanished.



A few hours later, the carriage stood parked just outside Sage Star-Reader’s wooden house deep in the Woods of Seclusion. To get there it had passed through a long and winding path, often traveling on roads no better than animal trails.

“I must apologize for the difficulty of the journey here,” Sage Star-Reader said, bowing gravely to Elizabeth, who was sitting in one of the sage’s chairs, with Garyl on standby behind her. Sage Star-Reader was dressed in a long purple coat that concealed her entire body, complete with a large pointed hat that hid her eyes from view. By all appearances, she seemed perfectly at ease. Inside, however, Sage Star-Reader was engaged in a desperate battle to maintain her calm composure.

*Th-They haven’t noticed I’m not wearing anything besides my underwear*

*underneath this coat, have they?* she thought, her heart beating in her chest as she prayed for her interlocutors to remain ignorant of her state of undress.

“Not at all!” said Elizabeth, returning the sage’s bow. “You have my thanks for agreeing to meet like this, Sage Star-Reader.”

“Now, enough formalities...” Sage Star-Reader cleared her throat. “I heard from my student, the Oracle, that there is something you wish me to divine for you. What matter would that be, pray tell?” As she spoke, Sage Star-Reader produced a set of cards, laying them on the table. She began to chant, and the cards began to glow with light and float into the air, spreading out dramatically in midair above the sage’s head.

“Of course,” Elizabeth said, lowering her head as she made her request. “Recently, serpentine magic beasts have been appearing all across the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. I have heard that in Hi Izuru, the sudden appearance of draconic magic beasts is said to be a portent of disaster. Are these magic beasts a portent of some sort as well? Also, if there is any way your divination can predict where they will appear ahead of time, it would be a great help in protecting the peaceful lives of the kingdom’s people...”

Sage Star-Reader nodded once and reached out with both hands towards the cards spread out above her head, a number of which floated down within her reach. She took those cards and laid them out on the table in front of her. Then, suddenly, she froze.

*Huh? What? Huh?* the Sage thought, distress mounting as she looked over the cards backwards and forwards. *Wh-What in the world is this arrangement supposed to be? This part could be read as “an incident resolved,” which I could take to mean we’ve seen the last of these magic beasts, but the very last card seems to imply the presence of beasts in great numbers. S-So...how am I supposed to read this? I’ve never seen an arrangement so complicated before in my life!*

Sage Star-Reader made her living as a fortune teller in the world she came from before being summoned to Klyrode. The deck of tarlot cards she used for divination was one she had brought with her from her previous world as well. With it, her abilities enabled her to correctly divine all manner of phenomena,

but her capacity to interpret the results was unfortunately limited by her own experience. She was known to struggle to read the cards correctly whenever she encountered a particular arrangement for the first time.

After a very long moment of Sage Star-Reader staring down the cards in intense silence, Elizabeth began to sense that something had gone wrong. “Um... Sage Star-Reader?” she asked in a quiet voice. Sage Star-Reader, however, was far too lost in her own confusion to register the words at all.

*Let’s see... she thought, slowly drumming her fingers in thought. These cards together mean “fate” or “destiny,” but what about the rest of them? This part signifies “becoming one,” and the cards at the end indicate “judgment” or “divine blessing.” Taken together, it all seems to point to the meaning of “successful resolution.” In other words...*

“Guided by fate they will become one, and thus bring all to blessed resolution...” Sage Star-Reader muttered, holding her head in her hand. *Or something to that effect... she thought. Or maybe not...I could be completely off base...*

The moment she uttered those words, however, Elizabeth’s face went bright red. For a while she just sat there, stunned. “I-I see!” she said, speaking quickly as she rose from her seat. “Y-Yes, I understand! W-Well, I suppose I should be going, then!” Without wasting a moment, she began half jogging to the door.

“Huh? W-Wait...” said Garyl, confused by Elizabeth’s sudden change in behavior. Nonetheless, he followed after her, exiting Sage Star-Reader’s house with a quick bow and a polite, “Um, thank you very much for having us today!”

Sage Star-Reader looked on in gobsmailed disbelief as the two left her alone once more. “What? You understand the divination result? W-Wait! Tell me!”



Some time later, Elizabeth’s carriage was making its way along the road back towards Klyrode Castle, the queen herself sitting in the compartment with her hands covering her face, blushing all the way down past her shoulders.

*The words of that prophecy from earlier... “Guided by fate they will become one, and thus bring all to blessed resolution...” she thought. Surely “they” must*

*refer to Garyl and myself...which means...Garyl and I, guided by fate, will become one and bring about a blessed resolution! Th-Then...“become one” must mean...when a man and a woman...*

Elizabeth suddenly found herself imagining Garyl and herself in every sort of lascivious situation and froze up, her face somehow managing to become even redder.

Garyl, meanwhile, was up in the driver’s seat frowning with innocent confusion as he rubbed the back of his neck. “I wonder what that prophecy could have meant,” he said out loud. “Well, Ellie said she understood at least! She sure was in a hurry to leave, though, wasn’t she? She must be rushing back to the castle!”

Garyl took the reins of the carriage once again and instructed the horses to speed up. In the end, the two made the return journey quite a bit faster than they had managed the journey there.

#### ◇Houghtow City—Flio’s House◇

That morning, Rylnàsze woke up in Sybe’s hutch in the corner of the living room. She went to sit up like usual, only to find a weight around her middle was preventing her from moving.

“H-Hm?” She looked down to see Swann, her arms wrapped tightly around Rylnàsze’s body, keeping her from getting out of bed. “Miss Swann?” Rylnàsze said, taking care not to speak too loud. She repeated herself a number of times until at last, Swann opened her eyes. It seemed, however, that Swann was having trouble rousing herself from her long and comfortable sleep. Even though her eyes were open, she didn’t seem to be completely conscious as she looked vacantly around the room before finally hugging Rylnàsze tightly once again.

“Oh! Um... Miss Swann?” Rylnàsze said, somewhat startled at first before turning over to hug her bedmate back. Safe and sound in Rylnàsze’s arms, Swann was soon snoring away once again. Sybe, meanwhile, held both girls gently in his big strong paws.

“Well, I suppose there’s no harm in sleeping in every once in a while,” Rylnàsze said, smiling brightly as Swann drifted happily off to sleep in her arms.

Nearby, Flio peered inside to see how Swann and Rylnàsze were getting along.

“My lord husband,” Rys asked, noticing him looking and stepping up beside him. “What’s—?”

Flio, however, cut her off with a finger pressed up against his lips, gesturing for silence. Quickly realizing her mistake, Rys clapped both hands over her mouth and peered into Sybe’s bear hutch herself to see Rylnàsze and Swann lying together atop Sybe’s upturned belly, snuggled up with one another fast asleep.

Sybe, currently serving as the Rylnàsze and Swann’s impromptu bed, was for his own part wide awake, as were the other magic beasts in the hutch—Tybe, Shebe, and their children—but all of them were staying still and silent, careful not to wake the girls.

Flio took a glance out the window and saw that quite a few more magic beasts had come out of the nearby forest as well, all gazes turned towards the sleeping Rylnàsze. *Come to think of it, this is about when Rylnàsze usually takes the magic beasts on their morning walk, isn’t it?* Flio mused.

Rylnàsze’s morning routine began with a long walk together with her magic beast friends. Her usual route took her on a loop to a local lake not far from Houghtow City and back to Flio’s house, where she picked up more friends as she traveled until inevitably returning home accompanied by a wide range of the nearby forest’s population of magic beasts.

*Judging by how soundly those two are sleeping, it doesn’t look like Rylnàsze’s going to take these magic beasts on a walk anytime soon...* Flio thought, smiling his usual easygoing smile as he waved his hand to beckon Sybe’s wife Shebe over to his side. *I suppose I should take them on their walk in place of Rylnàsze.*

Shebe stood up on her hind legs at Flio’s signal, only to shake her head no. Sybe and the other children all shook their heads as well, and outside the window they could see the local magic beasts all shaking their heads in unison. They seemed to be saying, *“We’ll wait for Rylnàsze to wake up, thank you.”*



“The nerve of them!” Rys bristled, her lupine demon ears and fangs manifesting as she screwed up her face in anger. “And after my lord husband had the good grace to invite them on a walk...”

Lupine demons were considered the strongest of all species of magic beast in Klyrode, and the assembled beasts all shrunk back in fear from Rys’s wrath. Flio, however, brought his head in close to whisper quietly to his wife. “R-Rys!” he said. “They haven’t offended me in any way. And besides, right now we need to be quiet, okay?”

“They haven’t?” Rys asked. “Well...if such is the will of my lord husband, I suppose I can let it go...” She nodded, her ears and teeth returning to their human forms.

“That aside,” Flio said, “how about we join them on their walk once Rylnàsze’s awake?”

“Oh! May we?” Rys exclaimed, forgetting to control her volume in her excitement at the prospect. Flio quickly held up his finger to his lips again, reminding her to take care not to wake Rylnàsze and Swann.

*We’ve been so busy running the Fli-o’-Rys Magic Beast Racing hall and getting everything ready for Cal’Cha’s grand opening we’ve hardly had time to join them on their walks lately...* Flio thought, pulling Rys in close to his chest. *We’ve hardly had any outings aside from the odd hunt on the way back from shopping...*

Rys smiled happily and closed her eyes, leaning into her husband’s embrace. In the hutch before them, meanwhile, Rylnàsze and Swann slept peacefully on.

## Chapter 3: Hole: Thus Hero Gold-Hair Fought *The Beast of Disaster from the Underground Lake*

### ◇Magical Kingdom of Klyrode—Northern Forest◇

Some distance away from the road heading north was a disused back road running parallel to its more trafficked counterpart. While the main road was newly paved with stone and saw regular maintenance, the old back road had fallen into disrepair. Weeds were growing wild all along its length, with open potholes dotting its path. And yet, there were still a few people who chose to make the journey by the disused back road.

For the most part, this was done for one of two reasons: First, in order to travel to specific spots in the back that were not connected directly to the new main road. The second reason was to avoid being seen by any third parties who might be traveling along more heavily trafficked main roads.

A solitary carriage rolled along that rough-and-tumble road. It seemed much like any other run-of-the-mill carriage, if not for one rather significant point—there were no horses or livestock of any kind to drive it. This strange carriage was driving down the road completely detached from any sort of harness or reins. In fact, it was none other than the body of the carriage djinn Aryun Keats, transformed into a carriage.

Carriage djinns were a rare djinn species possessing a unique Skill that gave them the ability to transform into any vehicle they had ever laid their hands upon. It was a potent ability with one significant weakness: the transformed carriage djinn would have to exhaust their own physical stamina, with especially large amounts required to maintain a form larger than their own body, making it impossible to sustain for long periods of time. That was the reason the species was given the name carriage djinn when in fact they could transform into any vehicle at all—the only form they could take without quickly exhausting themselves was an ordinary carriage common to the world of Klyrode.

The inside of Aryun Keats's carriage body was divided into two compartments

—one was reserved for luggage, leaving Hero Gold-Hair and his party cramped in the passenger area.

“*Sir Hero Gold-Hair!*” came Aryun Keats’s telepathic voice, emanating from the ceiling of the passenger compartment. “*There’s more!*”

“Well now! You don’t say!” Hero Gold-Hair replied, quickly leaning his upper body out of the window to look.

“Reeeally?” said Tsuya, pushing him aside to poke her own head out in turn. “Where iiis it?” she asked.

Hero Gold-Hair could feel the sensation of something soft and squishy pressing up against his back as Tsuya pressed her body close to his in her effort to get a good view of the outside. *H-Hang on!* he thought. *Th-That sensation must be that chest of Tsuya’s, I’m certain of it!* “Tsuya, quit it!” he barked. “Have some shame, woman!”

“Fweeeh?!” Tsuya exclaimed, not certain what she had done to provoke Hero Gold-Hair’s anger. She hadn’t been aware that she was pressing her chest up against Hero Gold-Hair’s back, after all. “Sh-Shaaame? What do you meeean?”

“W-Well...I, uh...” Hero Gold-Hair hemmed and hawed as he struggled to pull his body back into the carriage.

Sitting across from them, meanwhile, Valentine and Wuha Gappoli had begun poking their heads out of the opposite window as well. In her usual size, Valentine boasted a voluptuous figure to rival Tsuya’s, which would have left the short and slender Wuha Gappoli squished in much the same predicament as Hero Gold-Hair. At present, however, she was in a form that could be mistaken for a young girl, only three heads tall, allowing her to lean over Wuha with minimal risk.

Valentine was an outsider to the world of Klyrode, originally from a world known as the Realm of Evil. Her home world had an atmosphere overflowing with magical power, in contrast to Klyrode, where the atmosphere contained only trace amounts of magic. As a result, her body burned through magic at a truly alarming rate. To compensate, Valentine had learned how to transform herself into this smaller form in order to minimize the amount of magic it took to sustain her on any given day. Lately she had taken to using this form in most

everyday situations.

“You’re right!” Valentine declared, crying for joy at the sight of golden nuggets scattered around the wild grass in front of the carriage. “There’s more gold in that patch of grass over there!”

“Well, wouldja look at that!” said Wuha Gappoli, licking her lips as she grinned happily in the direction of the gold. “With this we should have plenty of money to pay for the night’s drinks!”

As the party inside the carriage celebrated the find, Riliangiu, who had been standing by on the roof of the carriage, leaped down and set to recover the gold from its grassy resting place.

“I wonder how all of this gold came to be here...” Riliangiu said. “I wonder if it’s all the scattered cargo of a carriage that came under attack by something along this road...” Keeping a careful eye on her surroundings, she swiftly returned to the carriage gold in hand, adding it to the other treasure they had picked up along the way.

“Oh, wooow!” Tsuya gushed, pressing both hands against the sides of her cheeks. “With all this gooold, we won’t have to worry about money for a whiiile!”

Wuha Gappoli picked up one of the nuggets, rubbing it against her cheek and beaming from ear to ear. “But how did you know we’d find treasure here, Hero Gold-Hair?” she asked. “And here I thought you just wanted to keep a low profile to avoid tipping off the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, since you’re a wanted criminal and all.”

“Ha ha!” Hero Gold-Hair laughed boastfully, hands on his hips. “Have you forgotten who you’re dealing with? Finding piles of gold like this is child’s play to my intuition!”

“You mean the same intuition that got us scammed out of all our money just last week?” Wuha Gappoli countered, giving Hero Gold-Hair a distinct side-eye. “I seem to remember you putting me to work on odd construction jobs to earn back our— Gbhlllfff!!!”

“Ha ha!” Hero Gold-Hair laughed again, grabbing Wuha Gappoli tight from

behind and covering up her mouth to keep her from saying anything further. "Slander and nonsense, the lot of it!"

"Ah ha ha ha ha! Oh, Hero Gold-Hair!" Valentine said, laughing mirthfully at the farce playing out in front of her. Hero Gold-Hair couldn't help laughing as well, and soon even Aryun Keats joined in, her laughter filling up the carriage.

Tsuya, for her part, smiled fondly at the sight. *Hero Gooold-Hair has come a long way from how he was back when I was waiting on him at Klyrode Caaastle, though, hasn't he? He used to do some pretty despiicable things every now and then...* she thought as Hero gold-Hair and Wuha Gappoli leaned forward and wrapped their arms around each other's shoulders, heaving with laughter. *But I've always admired the way he would stand up to aaanyone and insiiist on being treated as a Hero...and now, as the head of our party, he's become pretty heroic in reaaality too!*

"Sir Hero Gold-Hair!" Suddenly, the revelry inside the carriage was interrupted by the sound of Aryun Keats's voice.

"What is it, Keats?" Hero Gold-Hair asked. "Did you spot more treasure by the side of the— Wait, no..." Hero Gold-Hair's smile vanished as he looked out the window, covering his mouth with his hand.

"*There seems to be a humanoid individual approaching us from ahead!*" Aryun Keats reported.

"A humanoid?" Valentine asked, cocking her neck to look up at the ceiling.

"*That's right! They're headed this way, brandishing some sort of large spear-looking weapon!*"

"A weapon?!" said Valentine, poking her head out of the window to get a better look. There, dead ahead of the carriage, she could see a woman flying through the air coming straight at them. "Well, what do you know!" she said, entirely nonchalant. "I wonder who that could be!"

"You imbecile!" Hero Gold-Hair bellowed, grabbing Valentine by the base of the neck and pulling her back inside the carriage. "Keep your head in!"

Barely a second later, the woman swooped down upon them, her weapon slicing through the air right where Valentine's gawking face had been just

moments earlier and cutting her bangs a few inches shorter.

“Well now!” the woman said, withdrawing her weapon and slinging it over her shoulder with a fierce glare at the carriage’s passengers. “You dodged that attack, did you? I suppose I should have expected nothing less from a criminal wanted by the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode!”

“You maniac!” Hero Gold-Hair shouted back. “What do you think you’re doing, attacking someone out of the blue like— Gah!!!” he said, cutting himself off and narrowly avoiding yet another swipe of the woman’s polearm by diving onto the carriage floor. That one had been aimed straight at his face.

“Indeed,” the woman said. “I must apologize. Even against a thief like yourself, it would only bring my master dishonor for me to attack without first giving my name. I am Ben’ne. Now prepare yourself, criminals! In the name of my master Garyl, I shall— Wait...what?” Ben’ne looked around in disbelief every which way, cutting her introduction short. The carriage she was chasing, which had been there just moments ago, seemed to have vanished completely.

Ben’ne looked around until at last she spotted Hero Gold-Hair and the rest of his party making their escape under the cover of the trees. “That carriage...” she said. “Was that a carriage djinn transformation, perhaps? But no matter! If you think you can escape me by turning back into your humanoid form, I’m afraid I am not the only one who has underestimated their opponent!” Grinning boldly, she leaped through the air, polearm in hand as she closed the distance between herself and Hero Gold-Hair’s party in a single bound, despite their desperate efforts to flee.

“Gwah!”

“W-Watch ouuut!”

Ben’ne’s weapon struck the forest floor, cutting a deep groove in the ground with an audible *thwack!* as Hero Gold-Hair and company dodged to the left and right just in the nick of time.

“Stubborn thieves, aren’t you?” Ben’ne huffed, clicking her tongue in frustration as she raised her blade for another attack.

“Agwaaah!!!” Aryun Keats cried out, collapsing to the ground in a dramatic

heap and sliding face-first along the ground. “O-Oh no!” she said. “My legs aren’t working properly so soon after transforming back from a carriage!”

Ben’ne, however, showed no pity for the fallen carriage djinn. “I’ve got you!” she declared, spinning her weapon in a wide circle as she leaped forward to capture Aryun Keats. Hero Gold-Hair, however, had other ideas.

“Think again!” he said, grabbing Aryun by the legs and snatching her up, dashing out of Ben’ne’s reach with the carriage djinn dangling upside down from his arms, leaving her skirt hanging down around her waist and her undergarments completely exposed.

“S-Sir Hero Gold-Hair?!” Aryun protested as she scrambled to push her skirt back up her legs. “This is not proper treatment for a lady like myself!”

“Who cares?!” Hero Gold-Hair shot back as he ran, giving no heed to Aryun’s modesty whatsoever. “Right now, worry about getting away!”

“You’ll never escape from me!” Ben’ne declared, deftly wielding her polearm as she chased after Hero Gold-Hair.

“We’ll see!” Hero Gold-Hair answered, running as fast as his legs could carry him in a bid to shake Ben’ne off his tail. “Catch me if you can!”

“Wait!” complained Aryun Keats, struggling to keep her undergarments out of sight. “Everyone can see up my skirt like this!!!”

“Wh-What’s Hero Gooold-Hair doing?” Tsuya wondered as she watched the chase from a short distance away.

“That woman seems to recognize us as wanted criminals...” Riliangiu said, running along just ahead of the group. “All we can do for now is run away.”

And so, the once quiet forest was suddenly filled with shouting voices and chaotic clamor.



By now, it had been quite some time since Ben’ne first started pursuing Hero Gold-Hair and his party, who were currently hiding from sight at the bottom of a deep hole.

“Any chance that woman’s passed us by yet, you think?” the manor djinn

Wuha Gappoli wondered, pressing her back up against the wall of the hole and craning her neck up to look skyward. Next to her, Valentine produced a set of her threads of darkness, extending them from her outstretched hands all the way out of the hole to see what was happening on the surface outside.

“Well, I don’t sense her anymore...” Valentine said, closing her eyes to focus her senses on the threads.

Valentine, incidentally, was still in the young girl form she used to conserve magical energy rather than her usual voluptuous adult body.

The rest of the party, who had all been doing their level best to stay out of sight, breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank gooodness...” said Tsuya, who had been standing with her hand on her chest, trembling with fear. “If Hero Gooold-Hair hadn’t been so quick to dig this hooole, we could have been in some reeeal trouble...”

“You’re right about that...” Hero Gold-Hair grumbled. “That woman was going to cut us all in half with that spear-sword of hers no matter what we had to say for ourselves!”

“I believe that weapon is what is known as a naginata, used by warriors from the land of Hi Izuru to the far east,” Riliangiu, without looking up, volunteered from her position kneeling beside Hero Gold-Hair.

“Who cares what it’s called,” Hero Gold-Hair told Riliangiu. “The problem is, your Sense Presence skill doesn’t seem to work on that maniac.”

No sooner had the words left his mouth, however, than Valentine, who had been focusing on the sensations transmitted to her through her dark threads, suddenly frowned in distress. “Oh no...” she said, lowering her voice to a whisper.

### ◇Meanwhile—Above Ground◇

“Hmmm...” Ben’ne mused as she stepped up to the lip of the hole where Hero Gold-Hair’s party had concealed themselves. “I thought I sensed a presence that seemed to belong to that group of shady brigands from earlier, but wherever could they be?” Ben’ne cocked her head, resting her jaw in her left hand as she gazed down into the hole.



Inside, Valentine was using the spell Concealment to hide the party from detection. Valentine's magic came from the Realm of Evil, and was powerful enough that even Ben'ne found herself unable to detect a presence hidden by one of her spells. However...

"Well, what have we here?" mused Ben'ne. "At first glance, I took this for the den of a wild magic beast, but the closer I look, the more this hole seems clearly suspicious..."

Alas for Hero Gold-Hair's party, Ben'ne's long years of experience had given her enough knowledge about the world to tell that something was odd about the hole in front of her. She slowly lifted her naginata, holding it high above her head. "Blades of light, fall like rain!" she cried, thrusting the blade down towards the hole at her feet. "Samidare Ranbu!" Countless beams of burning light in the shape of the naginata blade began to rain down ward, cutting gouges into the walls of the hole and widening its entrance further.

Ben'ne looked down at her handiwork with a cool expression. "This hole could afford to be larger, I believe. Perhaps twice as large will do?" she said, and set about the work at once, thrusting with her naginata again and again, making the hole wider each time.

"C-Confound it all!" Hero Gold-Hair exclaimed down at the bottom of the hole, abandoning his hiding spot and putting the Drilldozer Shovel to work, tunneling away with surprising speed.



"What did we do to this woman, anyway?!" Hero Gold-Hair said as he tunneled for dear life with his trusty Drilldozer Shovel, while Valentine used her threads to rapidly close off the opening behind the party as they ran. "It's all slash first, ask questions later with this maniac, isn't it?!"

The Drilldozer Shovel was a legendary item giving its bearer the power to dig through the earth at a positively breathtaking pace. With it by his side, Hero Gold-Hair had grown accustomed to shoveling his way through all his problems, and true to form, the very moment the words "oh no" had left Valentine's mouth, he quickly began digging through the wall of the hole they were in, avoiding Ben'ne's attacks by the skin of the party's teeth.

“You said it, sir!” Aryun Keats agreed, panting for breath as she ran beside Valentine, her expression twisted with exertion. “If I had been just a single step farther behind you, I would have been cut in two!”

“No kidding, huh...” said Wuha Gappoli, glancing over at Aryun Keats as she ran along behind her. From her vantage point, she could clearly see that the back part of the carriage djinn’s outfit had been torn to ribbons all the way down to her newly exposed buttocks, courtesy of Ben’ne’s perilously near miss. “A second slower and you might’ve been kissing your butt goodbye! Quite a tough customer we’re dealing with, isn’t she?”

“Come on!” Hero Gold-Hair barked. “We need to get out of here—and fast!” He sped up, digging even more furiously than before. The rest of his party followed closely behind, with Valentine taking up the rear to close up the tunnel behind them.

“It’s funny, though, isn’t it?” Wuha Gappoli said. “After all the running away we’ve had to do, we’ve got this method down to a science!” She, at least, seemed to be having fun, even if the situation could only be described as dire.

“I hate it,” Valentine moaned in a plaintive wail as she worked. “Every time, I get so hungry...”

The party tunneled on and on without rest, until finally, Hero Gold-Hair paused his digging. “We must have gone far enough by now, don’t you think?” he asked, leaning on the handle of his shovel like a cane as he looked back at his companions behind him. Even with the benefit of a legendary item, Hero Gold-Hair had been digging all out as hard as he could for quite some time. By now he was drenched in sweat and gasping for breath. It was clear that he had pushed himself to the brink of collapse.

“Indeed...” said Riliangiu, focusing her senses.

Riliangiu had originally been a spy from the Realm of Evil, created with a body that could subsist on very little magic power in order to survive indefinitely in any world her superiors might have seen fit to dispatch her to. That same efficiency meant she lacked the overwhelming offensive power of someone like Valentine, of course, but when it came to scouting and intelligence work, she was perfectly in her element.

“I no longer sense even a trace of that woman’s presence,” Riliangiu reported.

“Finally...” Hero Gold-Hair breathed a sigh of relief. “I guess we made it...”

“We don’t have to run awaaaay anymore?” Tsuya asked, sitting down heavily on the tunnel floor.

“I’m just about out of magic, anyway...” said Valentine, propping herself up against Tsuya’s back.

“That certainly was a close shave!” Aryun Keats remarked, a smile on her face as she wiped the sweat from her brow.

“I mean, yeah, definitely, in a manner of speaking...” said Wuha Gappoli, glancing over at the now stark naked Aryun Keats. With the back part of her clothing destroyed by Ben’ne’s attack, Aryun had ended up shedding more and more of her outfit along the floor of the tunnel as she ran, until now the only items of clothing remaining on her body were her shoes. “On that note, need something to wear?” Wuha Gappoli said, taking one of her own outfits out of her Bottomless Bag and offering it to Aryun.

“No, thank you,” Aryun said. “I don’t especially mind being in the nude, you know.”

“Uh-huh,” said Wuha. “Well, those of us who have to look at you definitely mind.”

Aryun sighed. “Well, if you insist,” she said, half-heartedly setting about dressing herself in Wuha’s clothes. “But you know, Madame Wuha...these clothes of yours are rather tight around the chest...”

“Shaddap!” Wuha snapped, smacking Aryun Keats on her naked butt. “*Excuse me* for having a flat chest!”

“Now then, it looks like we’ve escaped from the maniac woman for the time being...” Hero Gold-Hair said, taking care not to cast his eyes in Aryun Keats’s direction as he looked around the area they had found themselves by the light of Tsuya’s magic gem powered lantern. “Time to dig our way back up to the surface, I suppose!” he said, setting his jaw for a bit more hard labor as he lifted the Drilldozer Shovel once again.

The moment he removed the Drilldozer Shovel from its resting place thrust in the ground beneath his feet, however, the entire tunnel floor they had been standing on suddenly crumbled away.

“What the—?” Hero Gold-Hair said, a look of pure disbelief coming over his face. An instant later, the entire party abruptly found themselves in a state of free fall.

“Gwaaaaaaaah!!!”

“Eeeeeeeeeek!!!”

“Oh my gooooooooooodness!!!”

The party shrieked as they plummeted down and down until, a few second later, they landed in a large body of water with an enormous *splaaaaash!*

A long few moments and Hero Gold-Hair’s face finally resurfaced. “P-Pfwah!!!” he exclaimed. “Is this...an underground lake?”

Treading water, Hero Gold-Hair took stock of the area. He was in a large empty space that seemed to be a natural cave, its lower recesses filled up with cold water. It was, however, curiously bright. “Are the walls glowing...?” Hero Gold-Hair wondered aloud.

“It seems the walls of this cave are home to a wild species of bioluminescent moss,” Riliangiu observed, coming up beside him.

“It’s good there was all this waaater, though!” Tsuya said, swimming after Riliangiu with her best breaststroke. “Otherwise we would have gone splat on the cave flooor!”

As Valentine, Wuha Gappoli, and Aryun Keats joined up as well, Hero Gold-Hair breathed a sigh of relief. “Good, everyone’s still with us...” he said. “For the time being, let’s just get to dry land.”

Hero Gold-Hair aimed for the nearest shore and started to swim, followed closely by the others. After some time, the party reached the water’s edge and pulled themselves out, sopping wet from head to toe.

“Hm... We can see down here just fine thanks to this moss, at least...” Hero Gold-Hair said. “But this is pretty big for an underground lake, isn’t it?” It

certainly did seem to be on the larger size—even with the glowing moss lighting up the cave, the far reaches of the lake were far enough away to still be shrouded in inky darkness, leaving the party unable to get the full scope of the space they had found themselves in.

As he watched his companions make their way to dry ground, Hero Gold-Hair noticed that Valentine alone was still in the water, lying on her back. “Something wrong, Valentine?” he asked.

“Ahh... No, nothing!” Valentine replied, spreading her arms and legs out wide as she floated along. “But this water feels so pleasant, somehow—almost as if power is welling up within my body just by being submerged in it...” She took a long breath, color rising to her cheeks.

“Pleasant?” Hero Gold-Hair asked, frowning quizzically at the water’s surface. “*That* water?”

Next to him, Riliangiu knelt down and stuck her hand into the water, summoning a magic circle to analyze the properties of the lake. “The waters of this lake possess some manner of energizing effect, it seems,” she observed.

“Oh really...” said Hero Gold-Hair. “Is that safe?”

“It does not seem to be dangerous,” Riliangiu answered. “At this moment, I cannot give a complete analysis, but the absorption rate is as if this water were made to recharge Lady Valentine’s magic power. It should alleviate fatigue and provide nutrition for the humans in the party as well.”

“I see. Well, I can’t say I understand all the gobbledygook, but basically, you’re saying it’s good for the body, right?”

“In simple terms, that would be accurate.”

“In that case...Tsuya, come here,” Hero Gold-Hair said, beckoning his companion over. “Let’s bring some of this lake water back with us. If we’re lucky, it could go for a good bit of money. I bet we could carry quite a bit of it with our Bottomless Bags.”

“Right awaaay!” Tsuya said, taking out her Magic Bag and pointing the mouth towards the lake, sucking the water straight up into the bag.

Hero Gold-Hair sat on a nearby rock, letting out a fatigued sigh as he watched Tsuya work. “In any event, it seems like we’re safe here. Perhaps we should take a rest for the time being?”

“Yes, let’s!” agreed Valentine. “This seems like an excellent place to relax and recharge!”

“In that case, perhaps we can share some of these drinks I’ve brought along!” Aryun Keats volunteered, wasting no time in producing a bottle from her own Bottomless Bag.

“You never waste an opportunity to bring booze into the mix, do you?” Hero Gold-Hair said with an amused smirk as he accepted the bottle from Aryun.

Soon, Hero Gold-Hair’s party was laughing merrily as they drank at the shore of the underground lake.



A good session of drinking and merrymaking later, Aryun Keats was lying passed out spread-eagle on the cave floor with a bottle sticking unceremoniously out of her open mouth as she snored.

“And there we have it!” Wuha Gappoli cackled as she drank from her own cup. “Aryun loves her booze a whole hell of a lot for a total lightweight.”

The carriage djinn Aryun Keats and the manor djinn Wuha Gappoli, both members of rare djinn species, had been together since before they joined Hero Gold-Hair’s party and were about as close as companions can be.

*It’s hard to believe it sometimes, though...* Wuha reflected as she downed her drink in a single gulp. *Aryun and I used to always be on the run from bounty hunters back before we joined up with Hero Gold-Hair’s crew. I never thought the day would come when we could laze about getting drunk like this...*

“Oh Hero Gold-Hair!” Valentine said, drunkenly draping herself over the party’s leader next to Wuha. “Have you tried mixing the alcohol with the lake water? It’s quite good, if I do say so myself!”

“O-Oh?” Hero Gold-Hair replied. “You don’t say...”

“I suppose it must be that energizing effect Riliangiu noticed!” Valentine

gushed. "I can feel it permeating all of my humors, like power welling up from the very depths of my body... Hee hee!" she giggled, grinning lasciviously as she pressed her chest up against Hero Gold-Hair's back.

"H-Hey, Valentine..." Hero Gold-Hair protested. "I'm glad to hear you've been enjoying this mixed drink concoction of yours and all, but I think you might be touching a little more than you mean to..."

"Not at all!" said Valentine, grabbing hold of Hero Gold-Hair's arms and pressing her chest against him even closer. "I'm doing it quite on purpose, I assure you!"

"Y-Yes, well..." Hero Gold-Hair said as he pushed Valentine away, a mix of elation and consternation on his face. "It's one thing in your child form, but you really should think about what you're doing more when you're in your adult body..."

"That's riiight!" Tsuya concurred, forcefully pushing Hero Gold-Hair and Valentine apart. "Lady Vaaalentine, you're waaay too drunk!"

"Nooo!" Valentine protested, although it did seem she was still in a good mood. "Madame Tsuya, you meanie! I was just getting to the good part!" she said, this time holding Tsuya tight.

"L-Lady Vaaalentine?! Wh-What are you doooing?!" Tsuya exclaimed, as, much to her shock, Valentine nuzzled her head in between Tsuya's breasts. "Hyaaah?!" she cried. "What in the wooorld?!"

"Ah ha ha!" Valentine laughed. "Mm... It's so comfortable here... All soft and warm..."

"W-Waaait!" Tsuya cried, blushing bright red. "A-Are you talking about my breaaasts?!"

"Of course I am!" said Valentine. "Ah ha ha ha ha..."

*Wh-What do those two think they're doing?! Hero Gold-Hair thought, glaring intensely at Tsuya and Valentine. That's simply outrageous behavior! Still, though, in spite of his internal protests, Hero Gold-Hair found himself unable to tear his eyes away. I-If only I could bury my face in Tsuya's breasts like that... he thought. W-Wait! No! What in the devil's name am I thinking?!*

And just that moment, however, Hero Gold-Hair felt a sudden sense of unease. His gaze was fixed on the sight of Valentine gleefully pressing her face into Tsuya's hefty bosom. In his peripheral vision, however, just behind Tsuya, something was moving.

"Wh-What is *that*?" Hero Gold-Hair asked, looking up just in time to see an enormous magic beast bearing down on them. "Ah?!" He sprung to his feet, eyes shooting wide open.

"*Kssshhhaaaah!!!*" the serpentine beast cried, opening its mouth wide as it lunged downwards to strike at Hero Gold-Hair's party.

"Hang on!" Hero Gold-Hair exclaimed, quickly running forward to interpose himself between Tsuya and the snake, Drilldozer Shovel in hand as he faced off against the beast. "You bastard! Don't you know it's fighting dirty to attack when your opponent's guard is down?!"

The snake, however, paid Hero Gold-Hair's complaints no mind, simply lashing out with its powerful neck to attack him instead.

"Hngh!" Hero Gold-Hair grunted, smacking the serpent square on the jaw with the flat of the shovel. It was enough to stun the beast for a second, but soon it had recovered its composure and was rearing up to attack again. "H-Hey!" Hero Gold-Hair shouted, looking back over his shoulder at his party as he quickly got back on guard. "Is anyone going to help me fight this thing?!"

As he took stock of his party's condition, however, it dawned on him that help might not be coming at all.

Aryun Keats was fast asleep, still lying spread-eagle with Wuha Gappoli now beside her, hugging the carriage djinn tight in her arms.

Wuha Gappoli snored, mumbling in her sleep. "I couldn't eat another bite..."

Valentine and Tsuya, meanwhile, were currently engaged in a merry chase far from Hero Gold-Hair, heedless of any danger. They didn't seem to have noticed the serpent at all.

"Come ooonnn!" Valentine pleaded. "Let me touch you more! Your breasts feel sooo nice!"



“I-I reeeally don’t think we should be doooing those things!” Tsuya protested as she fled.

“Ngh...” Hero Gold-Hair stared in disbelief, beads of cold sweat dripping down his forehead. “Ts-Tsuya and Wuha aren’t much use in a fight anyway, but I’m not sure I can fight something this big without Valentine or Keats...and I don’t see Riliangiu anywhere...”

*Sluuurp!*

Hero Gold-Hair was pulled back to reality by the sensation of a tongue running down his face, licking at his sweat. He quickly looked back ahead of him to see the snake’s tongue lolling out of its open maw. Something about the sight made his body go stiff.

“N-Nothing for it...” Hero Gold-Hair muttered to himself. “Time to break out my secret weapon...” Taking a deep breath, he forced his body to move, turning to face his foe directly. “All right, you magic beast!” he said, pointing towards the snake with his right index finger. “Take a good look at *this!*”

“*Kshh?*” said the serpent, fixing Hero Gold-Hair’s extended finger with a dubious look.

The second its attention was focused on his finger, however, Hero Gold-Hair sprung into action. “Hah!” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together right in front of the snake’s eyes. The snake flinched, closing its eyes for just a second...but when it opened them again Hero Gold-Hair was gone.

“*K-Kshah?!?*” it hissed, incredulously cocking its head and quickly looking every which way around the cavern, slithering its massive body this way and that as it tried to find where Hero Gold-Hair could have gone. Its search was fruitless, however, until suddenly, from behind, it heard the man’s boastful laugh.

“Ha ha ha! Looking for someone?” Hero Gold-Hair said, standing atop a large boulder, hands on his hips and chest thrust manfully outwards.

In actuality, the twitching corners of his mouth and the sweat dampening his entire body showed how frightened Hero Gold-Hair actually was, but he hid his nerves as best he could, praying his display of confidence was enough to fool the snake.

*I managed to dig a hole to hide Keats and Wuha, at least...* Hero Gold-Hair thought, swallowing heavily. *Now I just need to lead it away from Tsuya and Valentine...*

“Come on, snake!” he bellowed, jumping down from the boulder and taking off running in the opposite direction from where Tsuya and Valentine had been running a moment ago. “I’m the one you want, aren’t I? So come after me already!”

“*Kssshhhaaahhh!!!*” the snake roared, obliging Hero Gold-Hair and immediately giving chase. For all its size the creature was unbelievably fast, skillfully twisting its body around obstacles as it came after the golden-haired man.

“Damn it all!” Hero Gold-Hair cursed, practically screaming in terror. “How can that thing move so fast?!” In spite of his opponents alacrity, however, he somehow managed to keep his distance using the rocky terrain as cover.

*First things first, I need to find a way to get this snake off my tail!* Hero Gold-Hair thought, taking the Drilldozer Shovel out from his Bottomless Bag as he ran for his life. “I always rely on you in the end, don’t I? My partner.”

The Drilldozer Shovel glowed softly in response to Hero Gold-Hair’s words.

And on and on the chase went, with Hero Gold-Hair desperately fleeing the snake’s unerring pursuit. Again and again the magic beast would stretch out its neck to swallow Hero Gold-Hair whole, but every time he would escape just in the nick of time, rolling on the ground or leaping through the air to dodge the waiting maw.

“This stupid thing isn’t giving me any opening to dig a hole...” Hero Gold-Hair grumbled, gritting his teeth. No matter how fast he ran, the snake was always right behind him. “In that case, I should aim for the gap in the wall!”

He took off running ahead, towards the part of the cavern wall where he could see a natural fissure and went to leap inside, only to come to a screeching halt. The snake had cut him off, blocking the hole with its enormous body and cutting off Hero Gold-Hair’s avenue of escape. “N-No!” he cried, quickly backpedaling and bringing the Drilldozer Shovel up to a guard, gritting his teeth as the serpent reared up, opening its mouth wide.

*Now what...?* Hero Gold-Hair thought. *The ground here isn't like the lake shore—this is solid rock at my feet! Even the Drilldozer Shovel can't dig through something like that!* He racked his brains, clammy from the sweat dripping down his forehead. *Think... Think... I-I'm too important to die in a place like this! I... I... I...* “I!” he shouted, raising his voice as loud as he could. “Am! Hero Gold-Haaair!!!”

At that moment, the Drilldozer Shovel in his hand began to glow brighter still. “Hm?” Hero Gold-Hair said, glancing down towards his trusty partner. It was almost as if the shovel were speaking to him.

It seemed to be saying, *“Believe in the shovel!”*

*“Kshaaaaah!!!”* the magic beast roared.

“All right...” said Hero Gold-Hair, bringing the head of the shovel down to the rock beneath his feet. “It’s do or die! Let’s go, Drilldozer Shovel! *Roaaaaaah!!!*” Bellowing, he wielded the shovel with all his might, digging even as the snake’s fangs drew closer and closer. With each scoop of the shovel, bit by bit the rocky terrain was scraped away, and Hero Gold-Hair came closer to vanishing underground out of sight.

Before he could escape, however, one of his enemy’s fangs scored a glancing blow, scraping the skin of his shoulder. “Kh!” Hero Gold-Hair exclaimed, grimacing with pain. Even so, his shovel never stopped. “You think that’s enough to beat me?!” he bellowed, rallying his spirits and digging even faster than before.

*“Kshah!”* the snake charged once again, only to be repelled by a shard of rock sent flying by the Drilldozer Shovel. Determined to eat the pesky human who had provoked it, it contorted its body again to chase after Hero Gold-Hair as he vanished into the earth, only to find its body too large to move freely in the narrow tunnel Hero Gold-Hair had made. *“Ksh... Kshhh...”* it hissed as it searched in vain for a way out.

Hero Gold-Hair, meanwhile, was digging away full steam ahead. “*Roaaaaaaaahhh!!!*” he shouted, psyching himself up as he dug and dug through the solid rock—until suddenly, his vision began to blur. “Wh-What the...?” he said, alarmed as a numbness spread throughout his body, keeping

his limbs from moving as they should. He fell to his knees, the Drilldozer Shovel stuck upright in the solid stone.

“Wh-What’s happening...?” Hero Gold-Hair said, looking down at his right shoulder, where he could see blood welling up from a fine laceration in his skin, like a wound made by a very sharp knife. “This is...where that thing’s fang got me earlier...” His eyes opened wide in sudden understanding. “Could it be...venom?”

He leaned against the Drilldozer Shovel, finding himself suddenly unable to move. *I-I can’t breathe...* he thought, as his thoughts quickly became faint and hazy. *M-My sight’s going... My body won’t do what I tell it...*

As he struggled to hold on to consciousness, an image of Tsuya’s face floated to the surface of his mind. *Tsuya...* he thought. *I’ve caused you so much trouble, haven’t I? You’d have been better off...if you never followed after someone like me...*

“Hero Gooold-Hair!”

*If only...* Hero Gold-Hair thought. *I wish I could have done better by you...*

“Hero Gooold-Hair! Are you in theeere?!”

*Yes, Tsuya, I’m right here...* he thought. *After all you’ve done to help me and look after me over the years...*

“Hero Gooold-Hair might be in that hooole! Get out of the waaay!”

“Huh?!” In a flash, Hero Gold-Hair realized that he had actually been hearing Tsuya’s voice through the murky haze of his consciousness. He looked up, past the serpentine magic beast still struggling to wriggle its way out of the hole above him. From somewhere on the surface, he could hear a voice.

“Get this thiiiing out of theeere! We need to save Hero Gooold-Hair!” There was no doubt about it—it was Tsuya.

*Ts-Tsuya! What is she doing here?!* Hero Gold-Hair thought, forcing himself to his feet as the snake writhed and struggled above him. *Th-This isn’t good! At this rate, Tsuya will...*

Just then, the Drilldozer Shovel once again glowed bright.

“D-Drilldozer Shovel...” Hero Gold-Hair said. “Y-You want me to use you...?”

As if in response, the shovel glowed once again.

“H-Ha ha ha...” Hero Gold-Hair laughed. “Got it, partner. I’ve just gotta use you to dig, huh? After all...” He lifted the shovel up once again. “I...I...” he said, taking a deep breath to steady his trembling legs. “I...am Hero Gold-Hair!”

Mustering all of his remaining strength, he brought the Drilldozer Shovel down hard, thrusting it deep into the rock below. There was a loud crack, and a new fissure formed in the rock, growing bigger and bigger until the cavern walls themselves began to give way.

“Wh-What’s happening!” Hero Gold-Hair looked all around the best he could with his blurry vision as rock after rock came falling down.



Chunks of bedrock were falling like snow in an avalanche. One of them hit the magic beast square in the head, sending it plummeting into the abyss as well with one final “*Kshaaahhh!!!*”

In that moment, however, Hero Gold-Hair’s foggy mind was only capable of perceiving one thing: the voice coming from above.

“H-Hero Gooold-Haaair!”

“Th-That voice...” Hero Gold-Hair said. “Ts-Tsuya?!” He looked up just in time to see Tsuya leaping his way in among the falling bedrock, a look of sheer desperation on her face. She wrapped her arms tight around his shoulders, collapsing on top of him as rocks came down, protecting him from the debris as best she could.

And then, all Hero Gold-Hair could hear was the sounds of crashing and rumbling rocks.



“M-Mnhf...” Hero Gold-Hair mumbled as he groggily opened his eyes.

“Hero Gold-Hair!!!” The instant they noticed Hero Gold-Hair was awake, the members of Hero Gold-Hair’s party all bobbed their heads into his field of view all at once.

“Wh-Where am I...?” Hero Gold-Hair asked, a hand over his throbbing head as pulled himself up to sit.

“Hero Gooold-Haaair!!!” Tusya cried, wrapping her arms around him tight. “I’m so glad you’re aliiiiiiiive!!!”

“Oof!” Hero Gold-Hair, however, was still recovering his strength. In his current state, Tsuya’s added weight was enough to force him back down.

Tsuya held the supine Hero Gold-Hair around his shoulders, sobbing and crying messy tears. Behind her, Valentine, Wuha Gappoli, and Aryun Keats were weeping with joy as well to see Hero Gold-Hair returned to consciousness.

“W-Wait! Wait, wait, wait!” Hero Gold-Hair exclaimed. “Wh-What’s going on?!”

“I gueeeess it’s no surpriiise you don’t remember...” Tsuya choked out through her tears, gingerly letting go of the alarmed and distressed Hero Gold-Hair. “You were on the brink of deeeath thanks to that serpent magic beast’s veeenom, after all...”

Tsuya’s words sparked something in Hero Gold-Hair’s memory, and all at once, everything he had been doing came back to him. “That’s right...” he said. “I was digging as hard as I could when the bedrock all started to collapse... The last thing I remember was Tsuya falling down...”

“It was a sight to see, let me tell you!” said Wuha Gappoli, snapping Hero Gold-Hair back to reality once again. “Somehow, just the area right around you all crumbled away, leaving the rest of the floor untouched.”

“Just the area right around me...?” Hero Gold-Hair asked, looking down at his Bottomless Bag where he could tell the Drilldozer Shovel was even now safely stowed away. *I see...* he thought. *You destroyed the area right around me to save my life...*

“That’s right!” chimed in Aryun Keats. “It seems the serpent wasn’t the only thing living in that lake either—a great load of creatures went falling down to the Subaltern Plane along with it!”

“Yeah, yeah!” Wuha nodded in agreement. “There was even some kind of blue dragon in there! I tell you, you don’t see something like that every day, all those creatures plummeting down together to their doom...”

“The...Subaltern Plane?” Hero Gold-Hair asked, frowning in confusion.

“Quite so!” said Valentine, taking her turn to be the one pressing up close to Hero Gold-Hair’s face. “Here, see for yourself!” She pointed down to the hole.

Hero Gold-Hair looked, gulping in awe at what he saw. “Th-This...” he stammered, unable to find the words as he stared with his eyes wide open.

The first thing Hero Gold-Hair noticed was that the party was sitting on the rim of the great hole he had made in the bedrock. Right beside where he was lying the bedrock cut away precipitously, revealing a truly otherworldly sight. Beyond the hole, Hero Gold-Hair could see other planetoid worlds moving slowly beneath. Farther below them still was a vast and unmoving expanse,



above which the world Hero Gold-Hair and his companions were on seemed to be floating. Hero Gold-Hair stared wide-eyed and speechless at the sight. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined seeing scenery like that before his very eyes.

“You’re aware, I believe, that the world of Klyrode is one of many planetoid worlds orbiting around the base of the Celestial Plane, yes?” Valentine said with a smile. “The underground lake we found must have been at this world’s very lowest underground stratum. Now that you’ve broken through the bottom, we can see the other ones in our area floating beneath us. And at the very bottom is where you’ll find the Subaltern Plane, and the underground world of Dogorogma. Unlike the planetoid worlds orbiting around above it, Dogorogma doesn’t move an inch. So, once you destroyed the bedrock, it sent our serpent and all the other magic beasts falling all the way down!”

*P-Planetoid worlds? Subaltern Plane?! I can’t make heads or tails of any of that!* Hero Gold-Hair thought. “W-Well...you certainly seem to know all about it, Valentine.”

“But of course!” Valentine chirped. “I might have left that life behind me, but I used to be one of the Realm of Evil’s Twelve Evil Generals, dedicated to destroying all other planetoid worlds!”

“D-Destroy?!” Hero Gold-Hair said, taken aback at the reminder of Valentine’s original vocation. “A-A-Ahem! W-Well, I suppose that all explains what we’re looking at down there...but how did I manage to survive that, anyway?” he asked, touching his own body up and down as if to make sure it was all still there. “I thought that the serpent’s venom had killed me for sure...”

“Oh!” said Valentine. “Why, that’s thanks to the water of the underground lake, of course!”

“The water of the... Oh!” Hero Gold-Hair said, striking his open palm with his fist as recognition dawned. “Come to think of it, we gathered up quite a lot of it on the off chance it would fetch a high price at market, didn’t we?”

“That’s riiight!” Tsuya said. “We had pleenty in our Bottomless Baaags... All we had to do was make you driiink it!”

“It was even more effective than we were expecting too,” Aryun Keats said,

nodding in affirmation to Tsuya's words. "It got rid of all the venom in your system without leaving any trace."

"Still, though," said Wuha Gappoli, smirking as she leaned back to rest her head against her arms. "Getting you to drink while you were unconscious was a whole nother thing..."

"It certainly was!" Valentine said with an amused snicker. "We spent so much time arguing over who was going to be first to make Hero Gold-Hair drink the water, he nearly died while we were fighting!"

For some reason, the members of Hero Gold-Hair's party all seemed to suddenly be blushing at something in what Valentine had said.

"I see..." Hero Gold-Hair grunted. "Well, sorry for putting you through all the trouble... No, wait," he said, holding up his hand and interrupting his own apology. "Wh-When you say you made me drink the water...how exactly...?"

"Oooh!" said Tsuya. "Weeell, you were uncooonscious of course, so we had to do it...uummm...mouth-to-mouth..."

"Bhbhwah!!!" Hero Gold-Hair exclaimed, doing a violent spit take at the revelation.

"A-Aaah! H-Hero Gooold-Hair! Are you okaaay?!" Tsuya asked, the rest of the party looking on with concern as he coughed and sputtered.



"Wh-What is this...?" Riliangiu's eyes went wide, her body frozen in disbelief as she beheld the sight that awaited her return. She was certain that this was the place where the rest of Hero Gold-Hair's party had made camp, but... "What could have possibly happened while I was off looking for food?" she wondered out loud. "I don't see the party anywhere...and stranger still, the lake water has vanished entirely!"

Riliangiu could only stare, her arms heaped full of fresh food she had harvested from elsewhere in the cavern.

## Chapter 4: Wyne and the Dragonewt of Water

### ◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

That day, Zofina the angel stopped by Flio's house with a request. "And so," she said, once the pleasantries were out of the way, "I would request your service in culling the Beasts of Disaster living in Dogorogma for the immediate future."

"We'd be happy to help," Flio nodded, smiling his usual easygoing smile. "Although, you're giving us permission to stay in Dogorogma for quite a bit longer than usual this time, aren't you? Usually it's only two or three days—a week at the most. This time you want us to stay for an entire month?"

Zofina smiled tensely. "How do I put this...?" she began. "Recently, we've seen a rapid increase in Beast of Disaster appearances across multiple planetoid worlds. We've been doing what we can to capture the Beasts of Disaster and relocate them to Dogorogma, but now Dogorogma itself has reached a critical state. It has been quite some time since you and yours last took a hunting trip there, after all, leaving us rather short-handed on individuals willing to hunt a Beast of Disaster."

"I suppose so," Flio said. "We've been so busy with the Fli-o'-Rys General Store lately that we haven't had much spare time to visit Dogorogma."

"Yes, well...by no means do I intend to rebuke your priorities, but I would beg you to tend to Dogorogma posthaste. We disciples of the Celestial Plane can capture Beasts of Disaster well enough, but actually exterminating one is... Well, it isn't that we can't do it exactly, but it would require a considerable amount of our magic power—enough to interfere with our other tasks..." Zofina frowned uncomfortably as she spoke. This seemed to be a bit of a sore topic for her.

Flio, by contrast, simply nodded a casual assent. "That's no problem at all!" he said. "In fact, we're quite grateful for the opportunity to restock our supply of materials for medicinal powder and magic potions!"

“It truly is a relief to hear you say that,” Zofina replied, bowing her head.

Just then, Wyne popped her head out from the doorway behind Flio. “Dada?” she said. “Are you going on a trip-trip?”

“Oh! Yes, it looks like we’re going to Dogorogma for a bit,” said Flio. “Would you like—”

Before he could finish his sentence, however, Wyne burst into the room and dived straight for Flio, hugging him tight and gleefully rubbing her cheek against his face. “I wanna go! I wanna go with dada!”

The force of Wyne’s tackle-hug, incidentally, would have been enough to break every bone in an ordinary human’s upper body. Needless to say, she wasn’t holding back any of her colossal strength in her loving cheek rubs either.

“E-Excuse me... Mister Flio?” Zofina said, worry on her face. “A-Are you all right?”

“Oh, yes, I’m fine!” Flio said, giving Zofina an affectionate but long-suffering smile. “Wyne does this every chance she gets. I’ve gotten used to it.”

◇Houghtow City—Flio’s House, Some Time Later◇

“So, who would like to accompany us to Dogorogma?” Flio asked at a house meeting later that day. “Assuming it works for your schedule, of course.”

“I would follow you anywhere, of course!” said Rys, shooting her hand into the air before anyone else. The others weren’t far behind, however, and soon the whole house was busy running about making preparations for the trip.

“We’ve been so busy lately, we haven’t had much time to go out,” Flio mused, nodding with satisfaction at the excited smiles he saw on just about every member of the household. “It’s good to see everyone having fun.”

“Truly, though, you are doing a tremendous favor, Mister Flio...” Zofina said, smiling and nodding alongside him. “Although...may I say something?” She looked around to make sure no one was watching before leaning in to whisper in Flio’s ear. “In one of the other planetoid worlds, there’s a certain magus who has been entering Dogorogma for their own purposes without permission from the Celestial Plane. They’ve been a bit of trouble for us, as well...”

“I see...” Flio said with a slight frown. *I guess they’ve been working pretty hard up on the Celestial Plane too...* he thought. “Don’t worry; I’ll be sure not to do anything that would cause trouble for you.”

“It really is a great relief to hear that,” Zofina said, bowing her head gravely.

Suddenly, Rys barged into the scene, interrupting the conversation. “You there! Miss Zofina! What do you think you’re doing?!” she demanded. “Are you trying to flirt with my lord husband while I’m busy getting ready for the trip?!”

“N-No! Nothing of the sort!” Zofina insisted.

“In that case, I would ask you to get no closer to him than is strictly necessary!” said Rys, wrapping her arms around one of Flio’s, her lupine demon fangs fully manifested as she menaced Zofina to her face. “My lord husband is my lord husband!”

Zofina was left scrambling for excuses, a bead of cold sweat dripping down her forehead, while not far away, Elinàsze stole a glance in the angel’s direction. *So going to other worlds on your own whims can get you in trouble after all, I see...* she thought. *But...what if I simply don’t get caught?*

No one present noticed the somewhat maniacal grin playing on Flio’s daughter’s face.

◇Some Time Later◇

Elinàsze stepped out of the front entrance of Flio’s house, wearing the usual casual outfit she favored when working on her magical research. When he spotted her, Flio greeted her with his usual easygoing smile and a wave of his right hand. “Hello, Elinàsze,” he said. “Thank you for doing this while you have so many other projects going on. I’ll be trusting you and Wyne to look after everyone while I’m back here.”

“Why, anything for my one and only papa, of course!” said Elinàsze, beaming brightly. “We’ll handle everything in Dogorogma for you, so you can focus on wrapping up your work as quickly as possible without any worry!”

“I’ll be joining you too, of course, once I’ve finished up the housework here,” said Rys.

“Of course! I’ll see you then, mama!” Elinàsze said, smiling and sharing a hug with her mother.

“Me too!” Just then, Wyne came diving down from high above, grinning from ear to ear as she descended upon Rys’s and Elinàsze’s heads. “I want a hug-hug too!!!”

Rys and Elinàsze, however, quickly leaped back in unison, crying out with an identical alarmed “Ah!” as they narrowly avoided the deadly dragonewt projectile. With her target missing, Wyne impacted the ground head first, hard enough to bury herself up to the waist.

“U-Um...Wyne?” said Rys.

“B-Big sis Wyne?” asked Elinàsze. “Are you all right?”

The two watched as Wyne’s upside-down legs began to kick at the air, until suddenly she burst out of the earth, leaving a large hole at the point of impact. “Pwah!!!” she said, spitting out a mouthful of dirt and pouting theatrically. “That was mean-mean, mama and Eli-Eli! I wanted a hug-hug too!”

Rys and Elinàsze shared a look, grinning with amusement. “Well, judging by her behavior, she seems to be unharmed,” observed Rys.

“Yes, so it seems,” Elinàsze agreed.

Flio smiled his usual smile and held up his arm, casting a quick spell and summoning a magic circle on the ground in front of the household. After a short movement, the magic circle stabilized, and out from it appeared a door. Next, Flio held out his hand towards the door itself, beginning to cast spell after spell on top of the initial magic.

*This is going to be a longer visit than normal, Flio thought, so I had better cast Stabilize Magic. And a magic lock, to ensure that nobody outside of the household can go through. And also...*

Belano watched Flio work, her eyes wide in awe.

When Belano first joined the family, she was a witch serving in Balirossa’s knightly company from Klyrode Castle, a small and skittish woman who was only capable of casting defensive spells. She left the knighthood along with her

companions and came to reside in Flio's House, eventually finding a day job as a teacher for the Houghtow College of Magic. Since then, she found a husband in Minilio, and had a child named Belalio.

*H-He's casting...so many spells...* Belano marveled, watching with something approaching distress as Flio went on to cast enchantment after enchantment on the portal he had created. *I-I don't even recognize most of them! M-Mister Flio really is incredible...*

Belano, incidentally, had recently been made the head teacher at the Klyrode School of Magic for the upcoming term.



A short while later, Flio completed his work on the teleportation portal, and the party departing for Dogorogma gathered in front of the doorway.

"All right, Belano," Flio said with one of his easygoing smiles. "I'll be trusting you with looking after everyone."

"I-I understand!" Belano squeaked nervously, bobbing her head a little too quickly. "I-I'll do my besht!"

Fortunately, Flio was gracious enough not to call attention to Belano accidentally biting her tongue out of nervousness while she was speaking.

*C-C-Can I really handle being responsible for all these people?* Belano worried to herself. *A-A-And not only that, but one of the people going to Dogorogma with us this time is Her Highness the Third Princess!*

Indeed, Swann, also known as the Third Princess of the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, was among the members of the first wave to step into Dogorogma, currently chatting with Rynàsze as if the two of them were old friends.

*I-I-If by any chance something were to happen to Her Highness because of my inattentiveness, there's a chance Mister Flio could be held accountable...* Belano reflected, her level of tension rising and rising, until before she knew it she started to feel seriously unwell. She clasped a hand over her mouth, her face turning green with nausea.

Before her nervousness could make Belano any sicker, however, her husband

Minilio and her child Belalio each nuzzled against her calmingly from either side.

The magic doll Minilio had originally been created by Flio as a test of his abilities. He had earned his name due to his resemblance to a younger version of Flio himself. He had grown close to Belano during his time assisting her at her work at the Houghtow College of Magic, and eventually the two were married and had a child by the name of Belalio.

As the child of a magic doll and a human, Belalio was a being of utmost rarity. Like his father Minilio, they too resembled a younger version of Flio, but Minilio cut an androgynous figure in body and presentation, leaving their gender a mystery.

Noticing Belano was feeling unwell, Minilio placed his left hand against the witch's back. A magic circle appeared at his fingertips, enveloping Belano's body in light. Under the influence of Minilio's curative magic, Belano soon seemed to regain her calm, her expression returning to normal.

"Th-Thank you..." Belano said, smiling back at Minilio and Belalio as the two of them beamed happily at her words of thanks. "That's right... The two of you are here too... Everything is going to be okay..." Squeezing both her hands in a pair of tight fists, Belano rallied her spirits.

"Well then," said Flio. "Shall we get going?"

Flio stepped through the portal first at the head of the group, followed by Belano and her husband and child. Next came Rynàsze, accompanied by Swann, and after them was Sybe's family and Tybe, leading a small crowd of Rynàsze's magic beast friends.

"Wowzers!" Wyne exclaimed in excitement as she watched the procession make their way through the door. "There are so many-many!"

"You're Rynàsze's older sister, you know," Rys said, smiling fondly from behind where she was standing. "You'll make sure to help her look after all those magic beasts too now, won't you?"

"Okay, mama!" Wyne said, nodding and hugging Rys tight. "I'm a big sis now! I'll do my best!" As she took a glance around the area, however, a confused frown came over her face. "Mama," she said, "where's Gare-Gare and Eli-Eli?"



Where's Fol-Fol and Gho-Gho?"

"Folmina and Ghorro are still in school. They'll be joining us later tonight," Rys answered. "Garyl is busy with his knightly duties. I'm not certain when he'll be able to come. As for Elinàsze, she's already out gathering materials. I believe she'll meet up with us when she gets back."

"Oh... Okay..." Wyne said, her good mood taking a sudden turn for the glum.

*Ah... Rys thought, noticing Wyne's reaction. She must have been looking forward to spending time with Garyl and the others...* She placed a comforting hand on Wyne's shoulder, guiding her through the portal. "It's all right, Wyne. Don't worry," she said. "I'll be coming as well just as soon as I've finished putting everything in order back at the house. We can go on a hunt together when I get there!"

"Okay..." Wyne said, managing a cheery smile, although there was something about her expression that still looked distinctly lonesome. "Thank you, mama..."

*All of the other children have been starting on a new stage of their life, whether it's finding employment or starting school...* Flio reflected, a complicated look coming over his own face as he watched Rys doting on the despondent Wyne. *But Wyne seems like she's still the same as she ever was. Maybe it would be different if she had some friends of her own species, but I get the sense that there aren't a lot of dragonfolk in the world...*



The underground world of Dogorogma stretched out to the far horizon below the manifold planetoid worlds that orbited the base of the Celestial Plane. Unlike those worlds, the management of Dogorogma was not assigned to a specific goddess, but was instead the purview of whatever disciples of the Celestial Plane happened to be on duty.

Flio stepped through the portal from the world of Klyrode and tilted his head for a moment in thought. "So..." he said. "All of the Beasts of Disaster in Dogorogma are here because they were captured, right...?"

The portal Flio had created led directly to a lake located near the very center of Dogorogma. There, hidden behind a large waterfall, was the vacation home

Flio had built out of the stone of the cliff face for his family's use on their trips to the Subaltern Plane. It was an act that the Celestial Plane had only permitted because of Flio's ability to slay the Beasts of Disaster that even their angelic disciples struggled to dispatch. The home itself was a three story structure complete with fearsome gargoyle statues on the roof which would come to life if anyone were to approach without permission, first issuing a warning and then removing them from the premises. The interior was staffed by a number of magic dolls created by Elinàsze, who kept the house clean day after day.

Flio stood right outside the portal, watching as the group made their way to the vacation home with Belano at its head before turning to look in the direction of the lake. *This is the same place we always come...* he thought. *But somehow I can't shake the feeling that something's different about the place today...*

Flio held out his hand towards the lake, summoning a magic circle to identify the presence of anything that might be nearby. The Beasts of Disaster that inhabited Dogorogma, however, were each powerful enough on their own to bring ruin to a planetoid world. With multiple such beings in the immediate area, even Flio's Search spell struggled to provide reliable information.

"That's strange..." Flio said, tilting his head the other direction as he read through the information displayed on the window before his eyes. "These results don't seem right at all. Maybe it's the presence of all the Beasts of Disaster in the area..."

The window read:

◇??? of Disaster (Home World: Klyrode)

◇HyLedviananana^\*#

◇%\*\*\$\*FD#@\$%U

Unfortunately, most of the information was too garbled to make out.

"It looks like it's saying there's a Beast of Disaster from our world nearby..." Flio noted. "But how did the display end up in this state?" Confused, he focused

his energy into his hand, increasing the amount of magic power being channeled into the spell to increase its functionality.

As he was busy working his magic, Wyne came running up beside him, her feet pitter patter on the lake shore. “Papa!” she said, glancing dubiously between Flio and the lake itself. “Something’s weird-weird!”

“I see...” Flio said. “So you think something’s off too, do you, Wyne?”

“Look!” Wyne said, pointing to a spot on the surface of the water, furrowing her brow as she strained to make out whatever it was she saw. “There!”

“There?” Flio asked, following Wyne’s finger with his eyes.

“There’s something-something moving!” Wyne said.

*Over there, huh...? Flio thought, bringing his face right up next to Wyne’s as he looked across at the lake. That’s right near the lake shore...and it looks like something’s knocked over the trees that were in the area! It wasn’t like that the last time we were here, was it? Did something fall down here, maybe? But...what?*

“Is something the matter, my lord husband?” Rys asked, stepping in to join the conversation.

“Yes, is something wrong, papa?” asked Rynàsze, running up as well.

“E-Excuse me...” said Swann, following behind Rynàsze. “Is there something amiss?”

Swann was still not completely comfortable with being around magic beasts, but she had grown accustomed to Sybe and his family during her time staying at Flio’s house. Even with Sybe and the others following behind Elinàsze and gathering around the two of them, she showed no signs of freezing up or shrieking with terror as she might have not long ago.

Next to join Flio in staring across at the suspicious spot on the lake was Belano and her family. The moment they arrived, however, two magic beasts came bursting out of the water. First came what looked to be a blue dragon, its long neck erupting from the surface of the lake, followed by a gigantic serpent. They seemed, by the looks of things, to be facing off against each other.

*"Persistent bastard..."* the dragon said, irritation clear in its telepathic voice as it prepared itself to receive another attack. *"Give me a break, will you?!"* The snake opened its mouth wide, menacing the dragon as Flio and company watched.

"That snake..." Flio said. "It looks like one of the serpentine magic beasts that have been showing up all around Klyrode, doesn't it?"

"But isn't it rather too large to be one of them?" Rys said, curiously inclining her head.

Belano held her arms outstretched beside them, chanting the incantation of a spell. *I-I have to protect Her Highness!* she thought as she finished casting, summoning a protective dome around Rynàsze, Swann, and the magic beasts that had come along with them.

Flio, meanwhile, took the opportunity to cast Search once again. This time, the window displayed the information on the two combatants properly.

◇Beast of Disaster Hydrana (Home World: Klyrode)

◇Leviathan Levana (Home World: Klyrode)

"Those two must've been close enough to mess up the spell results a moment ago," Flio said, nodding in understanding as he read.

*"Graaaah!!!"* The household watched as the serpent—Hydrana—lunged towards the blue dragon named Levana, bellowing a fearsome roar. Its enormous body moved across the surface of the water with astonishing agility, rapidly closing the distance between it and its foe. Levana managed to dodge the direct impact of the creature's open maw, but not without its fangs scraping across a part of her skin.

*"Kh..."* Levana spat in irritation, diving back under the water. *"This poison..."*

Levana's body was already covered in more wounds than the onlookers could count. It seemed to be that she had been fighting the serpent under water out of their view for some time already. It was clear to everyone watching that in her weakened state, Levana was at an overwhelming disadvantage compared to

the fragment of Hydrana.

*“If only I hadn’t been hurt when we fell out of the underground lake...”* Levana said, gritting her teeth and glaring defiantly back at the serpent. *“I might be able to do something about this monster...”*

The serpent opened its mouth wide as if it were boasting of its victory, and began making its way towards Levana to strike the finishing blow.

“What should we do, my lord husband?” Rys said, turning away from the battle to look over at Flio. “Those two seem to be in a fight of their own!”

“Hm...” Flio pondered. “That serpent is on the big side, but other than that, it looks the same as the ones rampaging around the world of Klyrode...” He held out his right hand, a magic circle appearing at his fingertips. It had only just begun to resolve, however, when Wyne made a move of her own.

“Wait-wait right there!” Wyne said, taking off into the air before Flio could finish casting his spell and diving straight for the serpent.

*“Kshhah?!”*

*“Huh? What?!”*

The Hydrana fragment and Levana both stopped what they were doing and turned to look, crying out in surprise as they saw Wyne bearing down upon them, her draconic wings manifested on her back. She sped up in midair, aiming a devastating headbutt straight for the serpent’s middle.

*“Ghwaaaahhh!!!”* it roared, howling in pain as it was launched through the air by the force of Wyne’s attack.

Wyne was still in her humanoid form, but as she launched her attack, scales formed on her body around her arms, legs, and the joints where her wings met her back.

Rys nodded in motherly approval as she watched from afar. “She enhanced her physical abilities before performing a headbutt attack...” she observed. “Our little Wyne certainly doesn’t hold back! I’m so proud to have her in the family!”

“It’s a powerful maneuver for sure,” Flio said with a wry smirk. “After all, that

headbutt of hers was enough to get rid of Tanya's memories, wasn't it?"

As they spoke, Wyne floated up in the air, flapping her wings to stay airborne as she shouted down at the serpent below. "Bad snake! I hate-hate you! Papa said you're up to no-no good!"

The Hydrana serpent stirred at Wyne's impassioned taunts, raising the upper half of its body back out of the lake. It was still suffering from the blow Wyne had dealt it moments ago, however, and no matter how much it tried, it couldn't quite lift its head all the way up.

From behind, Levana looked up at Wyne, her eyes wide with astonishment. "*Who...are you?*" she asked.

"I'm Wyne!" Wyne said, grinning from ear to ear. "I'm a dragon-dragon!"

"*Really?*" Levana asked. "*You're a dragon too?*"

"That's right!" said Wyne, filling her body with draconic might and transforming entirely, assuming her true form as a wyvern with red scales, the great dragon of the sky. "I'm a dragon-dragon for real-real!"

"*A wyvern...*" Levana marveled. "*I've never seen one before...*"

"*I've never-never seen a blue dragon like you either!*" said Wyne.

"*My species lives in underground lakes after a— Ah!*" Levana's eyes shot open, interrupting herself midsentence as she saw the serpent rearing up behind Wyne for an attack while the wyvern was distracted talking to Levana. "*W-Watch out!*" she cried, leaning forward to try to interpose.

Wyne, however, seemed completely unconcerned. "*Don't worry-worry!*" she said, smiling with cool confidence as the serpent came up behind her, maw open wide. *Thwack!* Wyne's tail struck the creature across the face from left to right as it drew close with a surprisingly hefty blow.

"*K-Kshah?!!*" the serpent cried in distress, as Wyne's tail struck it again and again and again, right to left, then left to right, then right to left once more, until its cheeks were both swollen and red from the high speed tail lashing it had received.

Wyne kept on smacking and smacking the creature with her tail, not even

looking its way as she pressed the attack. At first it had tried to fight back against the furious assault, but Wyne's tail was far too powerful and soon its mind had grown too hazy from the beating to do anything other than stand there and take it.

Wyne herself, however, didn't seem to have any attention to spare for her opponent at all. *"So, my name's Wyne!"* she repeated, still focused on talking to the new dragon whose acquaintance she had just made. *"What's your name-name?"*

*I-I could barely hold off that serpent magic beast...* Levana marveled, staring in disbelief as Wyne continued to beat her assailant senseless with only her tail. *But she's not even looking!*



Some time later, Wyne, back in her humanoid form, returned to Flio carrying the serpent in her arms and deposited the enormous magic beast on the ground in front of him, thoroughly unconscious. The tail lashing she had given the creature had caused its face to swell up beyond all recognition. "Do you want-want this, papa?" she asked.

"Ah, yes, thank you, Wyne. I'll take that off your hands," said Flio, retrieving the Bottomless Bag from his belt with a smirk as he looked up at the creature in front of him. "Although, the serpents of this kind we've captured before were all smaller than this, weren't they? I wonder why this one is so much larger. Is this one a mutant strain, maybe?" He pointed the Bottomless Bag towards the serpent, and within seconds, the massive creature vanished inside.

"Whoa!" Wyne gushed, beaming at the sight. "That was cool-cool!"

At this point, Levana came swimming up to the group, moving through the water in her leviathan form until she reached the shore, transforming into a humanoid as she stepped on dry land. In this form, she appeared as a girl of slight build, wearing an outfit distinctly reminiscent of the red and white costumes worn by the shrine maidens of Hi Izuru.

"Thanks for coming to my rescue," she said in a quiet voice, walking up to Flio and Wyne. "I'm Levana." She bowed politely, her face betraying very little of her emotional state.

“I’m Wyne-Wyne!” She leaped towards the newcomer with a joyful grin on her face, hugging her tight.

“Wah! H-Hey!” Levana protested, flailing her arms in a panic, the surprise at being suddenly hugged causing her calm and collected denouement to fall away in an instant.

Wyne grinned from ear to ear, holding on to Levana in spite of her new friend’s confused objections. “Aha ha!” she laughed. “Friend-friend!”

“O-Okay, okay!” Levana said. “Just let me go—and calm down!”

“Nuh-uh, nuh-uh!” said Wyne.

“I-I’m serious!” said Levana, her distress mounting further as Wyne’s grin grew wider still. “W-Watch the neck! You’re choking me!”

The two dragons’ meeting carried on in that vein for quite some time.





## ◇Meanwhile—Houghtow City, Flio’s House◇

The central street of Houghtow City led from the city center all the way outside the gates, eventually arriving at Flio’s house, passing by the Fli-o’-Rys General Store and the Enchanted Frigate boarding tower, along with the Fli-o’-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall along its way.

That day, a single magic doll was making its way along the road, carrying a paper bag marked with a seal reading “Cal’Cha Teahouse”—the name of the new establishment Calsi’im and Charun had recently opened right beside the entrance to the Fli-o’-Rys General Store. The doll was dressed up in a fashionable outfit, but its face was featureless and blank.

As the doll approached the door of Flio’s house, a spot at the very top of the doorway lit up for just a moment. That light was caused by a magic gem set in the frame and enchanted with the spell Discernment, keeping the door locked shut unless it detected a member of the family or an individual on the list of expected guests, in which case it would open automatically to let them through.

Everything in Flio’s house—not only the door, but the windows and walls as well—looked outwardly like utterly normal objects, but every one of them was protected by multiple layers of defensive magic. They were resilient enough that even a direct hit from one of Hiya’s powerful destructive spells wouldn’t so much as leave a dent. It was essentially impossible for an unwanted intruder to enter Flio’s house.

Fortunately, the Discernment spell on the door recognized the magic doll, and the front door swung slowly open, allowing it to step inside.

Once it was past the threshold, another Discernment spell activated automatically, probing the doll a second time. The doll, of course, knew this was coming ahead of time, and stopped in place just past the doorway. Moments later, another spell took effect—Teleportation. A magic circle appeared around the doll’s feet, and after a moment, it vanished from the spot.

◇???◇

In a room somewhere in the world, a magic circle appeared and out stepped the magic doll with the Cal’Cha Teahouse bag. It stepped forward, approaching

a desk where a particular girl sat, hard at work.

“Thank you ever so much for making that purchase for me,” the girl—Elinàsze—said, not bothering to look up from her hands. “Set it right over there, would you please?”

The magic doll dutifully obeyed, placing the paper bag on the desk next to Elinàsze. It took a step back, bowed, and made its way into a nearby room where a large number of dolls identical to this one were all hard at work, silently following whatever instructions Elinàsze had given them. One was synthesizing magic gems. Another was preparing some medicinal herbs using a vegetable grater. A third was heating a flask containing some sort of liquid. Yet another was going somewhere in a hurry, carrying a stack of books. All of the dolls in that room had of course been created by none other than Elinàsze herself.

In her workshop next door to the dolls’ room, Elinàsze sat in her oversized chair, reading through a magic grimoire propped open on her desk. A number of other volumes were floating in the air around her—from time to time, Elinàsze would gesture with her right index finger and one of the tomes would respond, opening its pages and floating down to Elinàsze’s eye level.

Elinàsze sipped the drink her doll had brought her from Cal’Cha Teahouse, deeply engrossed in her reading. At one point she took one of the books in her hands, poring through the pages with fervent attention.

“Well now...” she said, adjusting her large pair of round glasses. “This *is* interesting...” She looked up, making a gesture with her index and middle finger and summoning a large map right above her head. “According to this book from the Oldwass School of Magic, there’s a forest to the south of the school where the trees themselves are said to possess magic power. ‘The Labyrinth Outskirts,’ it seems to be called...”

As Elinàsze read the name of the forest, a section of the map lit up with red light. Just as she had said, it was a spot not far from the Oldwass College of Magic, north of Klyrode Castle.

“I expect we can find medical herbs with unusual properties and other things of that sort in that area,” she said. “Perhaps I should stop by there before I head

to Dogorogma. It would be a decent way to spend the time until my *project* is ready...”

She glanced behind her over her shoulder at a large beaker, containing a brightly shining magic gem. An array of magic gems was laid out outside the beaker, their essence slowly flowing down into it. When the process was complete, if everything went well, the gem would become a copy of the World Log carried by Zofina, which Elinàsze had been given an opportunity to analyze just the other day. By all appearances, the process was well underway.

“All right...” Satisfied, Elinàsze stood from her chair and snapped her fingers, a pointed hat appearing on her head and a traveling bag in her hand. “In that case, let’s be off!”

Elinàsze adjusted her hat and shouldered her bag, then cast a quick spell, a magic circle appearing in response to her incantation. As soon as the circle was stable, it sucked Elinàsze’s body in and vanished, leaving the room empty. Now, all that could be heard was the faint noise the magic gems made as they fused and reshaped, and the muffled sounds of the magic dolls still working away.

### ◇Forest Near Oldwass School of Magic◇

“Easy does it...” Elinàsze said, alighting to the ground as the magic circle she had emerged from vanished behind her. She was in a forest, surrounded by lush and dense-growing vegetation. “Now let’s see...”

She waved her finger, sending out a small mote of light. It floated gently up into the air until it left Elinàsze’s immediate vicinity, whereupon it was sucked into one of the nearby trees and vanished.

“I see...” Elinàsze said. “Some of the plants here have the ability to absorb magic. I’ll have to watch my step in a place like this, or the weeds might suck the magic right out of my body! Though, a plant with a property like that *would* be a rarity indeed...”

She cast a spell, summoning a large gauntlet to encase her right arm, and reached out towards the magic absorbing plants. With a loud *whooooosh* of rushing air, the palm of the gauntlet opened up, sucking the materials into its body with surprising force.

“Wind is a physical force!” Elinàsze declared. “If I simply use physics to suck the sample up, its magic absorbing properties are no problem at all. And since it’s a little out of my way, I’ll take a somewhat large sample to work with. I must say, this is quite a neat little trick of Ghozal’s...” A satisfied smile crossed her face as the gauntlet did its job. “Papa and Hiya can both cast some extraordinary spells, but since they never needed to understand the theory in order to use their magic, it’s no use going to them for advice. Ghozal, though, did everything he could to research the first principles of magic during his reign as Dark One. He has no trouble giving precise answers to all of my questions. Having him as a teacher has been a great help...”

“Still...” Elinàsze went on, her expression darkening. “If I could, I’d like to hear those detailed explanations from papa himself. He can use far more incredible magic than Ghozal, after all. And besides...” she spun around, staring dreamily up into the sky, her cheeks flushing pink at the thought of her father. “Any time I can spend with papa at all is like a dream come true!”

It was difficult to believe that Elinàsze, who usually wore such an aloof and intellectual expression, could make such a dopey face. Alas, however, her complex towards her beloved father had grown quite serious indeed.

As Elinàsze looked up into the sky in rapture, the grass behind her suddenly started to rustle and sway. Lost in her delirious fantasies, however, Elinàsze completely failed to notice the sound. As if sensing that she was off guard, the rustling drew closer to Elinàsze until it had come up right behind her, and then...

*“Kshaaah!”* with a savage hiss, another serpent came leaping out of the tall grass, straight for Elinàsze as she stood with her back turned.

The next moment, however, Elinàsze turned her gauntleted arm towards the snake, completely unperturbed, sucking it into the hole in the gauntlet’s palm just like she had the magic absorbing plants.

“Oh?” she said. “I thought I sensed something coming and quickly sucked it up, but this is one of those magic beasts everyone’s been talking about, isn’t it?” Elinàsze fiddled with the gauntlet’s controls, checking the magic item’s internal storage. A window appeared on the surface of the gauntlet, displaying its inventory. Among the items was one in particular that stood out:

## ◇Beast of Disaster: Hydrana

“So this counts as a Beast of Disaster too, does it?” Elinàsze mused. “In that case, I should be able to use it as ingredients for our medicinal powder! Not the worst outcome, if I do say so myself!” She closed the window, returning to gathering materials from the surrounding area. “Now, I had best finish gathering whatever medicinal herbs I can here and hurry on to Dogorogma to help papa!”

## ◇Dogorogma—Flio’s Vacation Home◇

A few hours after the incident with the Hydrana fragment had been wrapped up, Swann was on the lake shore near Flio’s vacation home, holding tight to Tybe’s back as the Bear of Misfortune crawled along on his four legs. “A-Awawah...” she stammered, her expression positively frantic from nervousness. “L-Like this?”

“Oh my goodness, Miss Swann! Incredible! You’re actually riding on his back!” Rynàsze beamed, giving Swann a generous round of applause.

It had been several days now since Swann had arrived at Flio’s house, and in that time she had gone from freezing up or shrieking whenever Tybe or a member of Sybe’s family drew close to now being able to ride on Tybe’s back—albeit with no small degree of timidity.

“Really, Miss Swann, you’ve been making tremendous progress!” Rynàsze said as she cheerfully clapped. “I’m very impressed!”

Behind Rynàsze, Sybe in his unicorn rabbit form and the rest of his family all stood in a line, applauding with their forepaws as well.

“R-Really?” Swann said. As she turned around to thank Rynàsze, however, she found herself quickly losing her balance and nearly tumbling off of Tybe’s back. “Thank you for— Awawawawawaaaah!!!”

“W-Watch out!” The moment Swann started to teeter, Rynàsze rushed over, grabbing her tight to keep her from falling. Rynàsze went out of her way to help out with magical beasts every chance she got, whether it be at home, the

Houghtow College of Magic, or Sleip and Byleri's pasture, and although she was a small girl, the work had given her a surprisingly strong lower body. With her toned legs, she had no trouble holding Swann in place.

"Th-Thank you..." Swann said, reaching out for something to hold on to as she scrambled to regain her balance, and grabbing something curiously soft. "Hm?" she said, looking down to see that her hand had found its way straight to one of Rynàsze's breasts.

*O-Oh goodness...! Swann thought, her face turning bright red in distress. It's ever so soft and squishy, isn't it?! I almost wish I could feel this sensation forever... W-Wait! No! Wh-What am I thinking?!*

"M-Miss Swann, are you all right?" Rynàsze asked, mistaking the princess's reddening face for a sign that she was still struggling not to fall from Tybe's back. "I'm not going to let you fall, so you don't need to struggle so hard, okay?" she said with a smile.

"Y-Y-Yes, I'm okay now! Th-Thank you!" Swann said, snapping back to herself and hastily removing her hand from Rynàsze's chest.

Rynàsze smiled cheerfully as she helped Swann down from Sybe's back. Although she was still not enrolled in classes, Rynàsze had been helping out with magic beast riding lessons over at the Houghtow College of Magic. Assisting a novice rider like Swann was no trouble at all for her.

From a short distance away, Belano watched with tense vigilance as Rynàsze helped Swann down off her mount, her staff, which served as an amplifier for her magic, clutched tight in her hands. *Wh-What will I do if we're attacked by another magic beast like that serpent? I-I'm not sure my defensive magic will be enough to do anything at all*, she thought, her lips pursed in concentration as she did her best to rally her spirits. *B-But...Mister Flio entrusted me with looking after everyone here! I-I have to do my best...*

Minilio and Belalio, who were standing to her right and left sides respectively, seemed to be able to sense that Belano was feeling under pressure. Like her, they were keeping watch around the area for any danger that might come their way.

Up on the house's second story veranda, Flio looked down on the scene by the lake shore, thinking to himself. "The serious Beast of Disaster hunting starts tomorrow, once everyone's here," he said. "I guess we should all just relax and have a good time for the rest of the day, then."

As he was speaking, Flio noticed someone coming up—Levana, in her blue-haired humanoid form, still dressed in her shrine maiden outfit. "Mister Flio," she said, closing her eyes and politely bowing her head. "I suppose I should begin by thanking you for saving me."

"Not at all!" Flio assured her. "We just happened to run into you when you were in trouble, after all. And besides, Wyne was the one who saved you, wasn't she?"

"Yes, and I am grateful to Miss Wyne as well..." Levana said, her expression unchanging as she spoke. It seemed she was the type to not show her emotions on her face. "But that serpent's venom was deadly enough that even a divine dragon like myself might have died if you hadn't been there to cure me." She bowed her head once again.

"We'd already captured a number of those snakes and analyzed their toxin," Flio explained, smiling his usual easygoing smile. "So it just happened we coincidentally had synthesized an antidote for their venom already. I'm just glad it came in handy!"

Levana emphatically shook her head. "There's no way you *just happened* to have *coincidentally* synthesized an antidote for a venom as powerful as that," she said, bowing a third time. "Even my healing ability wasn't able to keep up with it."

*Even so, it really was a coincidence we had that antidote ready...* Flio thought, smirking to himself before changing the subject. "By the way, there's something I've been wondering about," he said. "However much you're able to tell me is fine, of course, but I noticed you come from the world of Klyrode. How did you end up in Dogorogma?"

"Hm..." Levana frowned, a furrow forming on her brow. "That's a pretty difficult question to answer. Leviathans like me live in the underground lake on the lowest level of the planetoid world Klyrode. If we go to the surface, we'll



just end up conscripted into the Dark Army or else hunted by adventurers, after all...”

“I see...” Flio nodded his head, surprised by the information. “So there’s an underground lake beneath Klyrode, huh?”

“Well, there *was*...” she said. “But the other day, without any warning, the bottom of the lake suddenly fell away. I ended up falling out of the world of Klyrode entirely. Next thing I knew, I found myself in that lake over there down here in Dogorogma.” She pointed towards the lake stretching out into the distance outside the house.

*So Levana used to live in an underground lake...* Flio thought, balking in confusion. *But...the bottom fell away? And she fell all the way down here?* “Well, I guess that explains your circumstances...” he said. “Although...I’m very sorry, but to be perfectly honest, I’m not sure I completely understand what you’re saying happened.”

“That’s all right,” Levana said, her expression as unchanging as ever. “To be honest, I’m not really sure myself. That’s just the theory I’ve come to after analyzing the situation from an objective standpoint.”

“I see...” Flio frowned. *She says she couldn’t say what happened, but she seems to be pretty firm about what it was she experienced in the moment, even if what she’s telling me is a little out there...*

Levana cleared her throat. “May I ask a question?”

“Oh! Sure, go ahead,” Flio said with a nod.

“I heard the other serpents you captured weren’t as big as the one I fought. Is that true?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Flio confirmed. “They all varied a little in size, but none of ours were anywhere near as big as that one.”

“I knew it...” said Levana. “It must have received the blessing of the lake water...”

“The blessing of the lake water?” Flio asked.

“That’s right...” Levana explained. “You know, the underground lake where

my family used to live, after all the long years we leviathans inhabited the lake, its water came to be filled with our essence...or that's what grandfather told me, anyway."

"So you think that serpentine magic beast grew to such an enormous size because it had been drinking water full of leviathan essence?" Flio asked.

Levana shook her head. "I don't know for certain, but it's the only thing I can think of," she said. "I'd noticed that a snake had found its way into the underground lake a while ago. I could only sense its presence faintly at first, but it seemed to grow stronger day after day. It was getting to the point where I was starting to think I'd have to do something about it."

"Huh. I see..." Flio remarked.

"Grandfather told me leviathan essence can have all kinds of different effects," Levana said.

"This would be your own grandfather, I take it?" Flio asked.

"Yeah, that's right," Levana said, a lonely look suddenly coming over her face. "We were always together, just the two of us, until last year."

Flio looked gently down at the dragon girl beside him. *So it was just the two of them, meaning that now Levana is all alone...* he thought, although he kept silent for the time being.

"Well, thank you again for saving me," Levana said. "I'm on my own now, so I suppose I'll go look for somewhere to live in Dogorogma..."

"Levana!" Just then, the veranda doors flung open wide as Wyne came tumbling into the scene.

"W-Wyne!" from inside the house, they could hear Rys's voice scolding Wyne as the mother of the house approached, carrying a tray of drinks and confections. "I told you to wait!"

Out on the Veranda, however, Wyne was hugging Levana tight.

"H-Hey! W-Wyne?!" Levana said, taken aback by her sudden emergency on the scene.

Wyne grabbed Levana's cheeks firmly with both hands and looked her

straight in the eyes. “Levana! Come live-live with us!”

“Wh-What?” Levana stammered.

“I’m lonely-lonely too, you know, being the only dragon,” Wyne said. “But I’ve got dada and mama and a big home full of people!”

“A big home full of people...” Levana said. “But still...I can’t just...”

“You’re a dragon, Levana!” said Wyne. “I’m a dragon too!”

Levana just blinked, uncertain of what to say.

“So come on! Come live-live with us!” said Wyne. “It’s okay, right, dada?” she added, turning to look at Flio. “Right, mama? It’s okay-kay?” she asked again, turning towards Rys.

Flio looked over at Wyne in silent thought for a moment, before Rys stepped forward and spoke. “I’m certainly in favor, my lord husband,” she said. “If it’s all right with Levana, I’d be delighted to add her to the household.” She said all that with a kind and gentle smile on her face, but on further inspection, Flio saw her lupine tail had fully manifested, wagging furiously in a clear expression of unbridled delight.

*Oh, Rys... Flio thought, somehow managing to keep himself from laughing as he surmised his wife’s true objective. I see you’re just as excited as ever at the chance to grow our family’s fighting strength...*

Flio cleared his throat and turned back to face Levana. “Well, if it’s something you would want, why don’t you come live with us?” he offered. “You’ll be living with our daughter Wyne, who’s a dragon like you, and I can promise no adventurers will try to hunt you as long as you’re living in our house. And more importantly, you won’t have to be so alone.” He held out his right hand. “So, how about it? Would you care to be a part of the family?”

“F-Family...” Levana repeated quietly to herself. She looked over at Flio’s outstretched arm, then back at Wyne, who was still rubbing the leviathan’s cheeks with her hands. Then, after a long moment, she finally said the words. “May I?” she asked, a tear falling from her eye.

“Of course! You’re more than welcome!” Flio said, smiling happily.

Levana stared up at that smile for some time, at a loss for words, until finally reaching out with both of her own hands to take the hand Flio had offered, squeezing it tight.

At this point, Wyne, who had been watching silently up until now, let out a cheer, wrapping her arms around Levana's shoulders. "Yay-yay! You're coming with us!"

"H-Hey..." Levana objected. "D-Don't be so handsy with me! I-I'm not good with this kinda stuff..."

Wyne, however, ignored Levana's protests completely, hugging her tight and nuzzling her cheeks against the other dragon's.

"C-Come on..." Levana repeated. "I'm not good with this..."

At some point, however, a small but distinct smile had appeared on Levana's face.

#### ◇Next Morning—Dogorogma, Flio's Vacation Home◇

The plain door that served as a Teleportation Portal in front of Flio's vacation home slowly swung open, and from the other side, out stepped Flio himself.

"Now then," he said, stretching out his arms. "Our work back on Klyrode's taken care of for the time being. It's time for a vacation! And, of course, to get to work rounding up those Beasts of Disaster!"

"We can hunt together to our hearts' content, my lord husband!" Rys gushed, beaming as she followed Flio through the portal. "I simply can't wait to get started!" Bursting with spirit, she squeezed her right hand tight in a fist and held it up to her chest. In her left hand, she was carrying a large basket full of homemade meals she had prepared for everyone in the family.

"Elinàsze said she'd be joining us today as well, and Garyl should be here some time tomorrow..." Flio said as the two made their way over to the vacation home.

"We'll have to introduce Levana to everyone as well," said Rys.

Before they reached the house, however, Flio heard Elinàsze's voice coming from behind. "Oh! Papa!" He looked to see his prodigious daughter sitting atop

her traveler's bag, which she had propped up to use as a temporary chair not far from the portal. She was wearing a large pointed witch's hat and idly reading through one of her magic grimoires. When she saw Flio arrive, she ran up to him, grinning with delight.

"Hello, Elinàsze!" Flio said. "I see you're already here! You're done gathering the materials you need in Klyrode, then?"

"Yes, I was able to get all of it taken care of yesterday," Elinàsze said as she went to hug her father.

"In that case," said Flio, "you'll be able to join us hunting Beasts of Disaster today, I take it?"

"Beasts of Disaster?" Elinàsze replied with a tilt of the head. She cast a spell and a magic circle appeared around her right arm, materializing into a gauntlet. She pointed her armored hand towards a wide-open space by the lake shore, and suddenly, a great number of magic beasts came pouring one after another out of the gauntlet. It seemed they had all been stored inside the device.

"This gauntlet was so effective at gathering materials, I thought I would do a test run to see how it performs in capturing Beasts of Disaster..." she said, the pile of magic beasts growing larger and larger before Flio's and Rys's disbelieving eyes even as she spoke. "And, well, I ended up capturing somewhere around fifty of them..."

Indeed, once her gauntlet had finished depositing its stores, they could see that there were as many as she said, of all shapes and sizes, lying on the lake shore.

"Elinàsze..." Flio said. "Did you find all these Beasts of Disaster in the morning before we arrived?"

"Well, yes!" Elinàsze said with a cheerful grin. "The gauntlet turned out to be a little *too* effective, you see. I was hunting down the Beasts of Disaster one after another, and before I knew it I had gotten the whole of them."

Flio cast a spell and a magic circle appeared above his head, scanning the surrounding area.

"M-My lord husband...?" Rys said, glancing between the Beast of Disaster pile

and Flio casting his spell. “Th-There are still some Beasts of Disaster left for us, I hope? We’ll be able to go hunting together? Won’t we?” She nudged up to her husband, a pitiable look on her face as she glanced over his shoulder at the window displaying the results of the spell he had cast searching for Beasts of Disaster in Dogorogma. Alas, her husband’s magic had not returned a single result for a Beast of Disaster anywhere nearby.

*Well... Flio thought, smirking to himself, I guess the only thing left to do is enjoy our vacation!*

# Epilogue

## ◇Houghotw City—Flio's House◇

The morning sun crested the ridge of Mount Fli-o'-Rys, shining its light upon Flio's house below. Upstairs, in a bedroom on the second floor, Wyne lay sleeping on a big bed. "Ehe hee..." she chortled, a big happy grin on her sleeping face. "Aha ha..."

"H-Hey! W-Wyne!" Levana complained. "W-Watch where you're touching!" Levana and Wyne had started out sleeping side by side, but now that morning had come, Wyne, still fast asleep, had tightly wrapped her arms and legs alike around Levana.

Levana strained and struggled with evident effort to free herself from Wyne's grip, but even fast asleep, Wyne was ludicrously strong—too strong for Levana to hope to escape. "Ehe hee..." Wyne giggled in her sleep. "Love you, Leva-Leva..."

"A-And quit saying stuff like that!" Levana said, although that comment did make her cheeks turn a distinct shade of red as she fought to get away. Alas, no matter how much she kicked and thrashed her body, the hold Wyne had on her arms and legs only seemed to grow tighter.

"Ehe hee... Chomp!" Wyne said, playfully biting down on Levana's cheek.

"Wha?!" Levana exclaimed, her face growing redder still at the sudden chomp from her bedmate. "I-I'm telling you, cut it out!"

"Aha ha... It's all right... Don't worry-worry..." Wyne muttered in her sleep.

"It is *not* all right!" Objected Levana.

The two dragonewts continued their melee atop the bed, as Wyne fought to hold on to Levana and Levana struggled and flailed in an attempt to get away.

## ◇Meanwhile—Flio's House, First Floor◇

"That's Wyne and Levana again, I suppose..." Flio said, a knowing smirk

crossing his face as the sounds of their tussle made its way from the second floor above.

“It’s certainly become a regular feature of our mornings, hasn’t it?” Rys remarked, looking up at the ceiling beside him with a similar smirk to her husband.

“It certainly has...” Flio agreed, nodding. “Wyne’s been feeling lonely ever since her old bedmates Folmina and Ghoros started going to the Houghtow College of Magic and sleeping in their own individual rooms. It’s good to see her getting on so well with the newest member of the household.”

“You would say this is...getting on *well*, Master Flio?” Tanya asked, looking up from her work cleaning the living room table with a puzzled expression on her face.

Flio couldn’t help but smile in amusement at Tanya’s confusion. “Well, think about it. Wyne’s clearly very fond of Levana. And as for Levana, one way or another she ends up sleeping with Wyne every night too.”

“So you say...” Tanya said, cocking her head. “However, it’s hard to see the events of last night—and many others like it—as anything other than Young Mistress Wyne dragging Young Mistress Levana to the bed by force...”

“Maid Tanya,” Hiya said, stepping through a nearby wall to join the conversation. “If Miss Levana truly disliked this treatment, I would imagine she would revert to her full dragon form in order to fight back. Does the fact that she shows no signs of doing so not suggest that she is happy to maintain the status quo, as the Exalted One surmised?”

“I see...” Tanya said. “I must admit, your words have their logic...”

“H-Hey!!!” Just then, Levana appeared at the foot of the stairs, yelling at the top of her lungs. All the members of the family who were there in the living room turned to look at once and saw Wyne was clinging tight to Levana’s back, refusing to let go. Her leviathan wings were fully visible behind her and her tail seemed to be struggling to revert to its full-sized form, but with Wyne’s arms wrapped around her as tight as they were, even her tail seemed unable to move freely. “This girl! Is a pest!” the leviathan dragonewt shouted, bright red in the face. “Get her off me!”



*She's so soft-spoken most of the time... Flio thought. I didn't know she could yell like that!*

*Levana is usually so quiet... reflected Rys. But I suppose she can produce a fairly loud voice when she needs to!*

*Oh? I thought Levana was a modest girl... Tanya considered. Perhaps she needs some discipline after all...*

*Well, well... Hiya observed. For someone who's usually so subdued, it seems she can be quite loud when she needs to...*

"Wh-What are you all doing?" Levana said, growing even more frantic still as the four of them regarded her in silent thought. "D-Don't tell me you're thinking something strange!"

"Nmh..." Just then, from somewhere behind Flio and the others, came a sleepy voice from the direction of the large hutch in the corner of the living room. "Oh... Is it morning already?"

Levana and the others turned to look as Rynàsze sat up from the hutch with Sybe's family where she had been lying and stretched with her whole body, sleepily rubbing her eyes as she awoke.

"Mh? I-It's morning...?" The small-framed girl sleeping beside Rynàsze slowly sat up as well—Swann, the Third Princess, who had been staying at Flio's house for the past several days. Swann looked sleepily around the room before suddenly, with a jolt, flying into a panic. "W-Wait!" she said. "Oh no! Wh-What time is it?! Have I overslept?!"

"Miss Swann, there's no need to panic," Flio said, looking her way with a wry smile. "You're staying over at our house. You're still on break from your regular work, remember?"

"Fweh?!" Just as abruptly as she had started to panic, Swann stopped moving completely, her eyes blinking rapidly as if she had been pulled back into reality by Flio's words.

Rynàsze sat up from where she had been lying next to Swann, stretching her arms high above her head. "Good morning, Miss Swann!" she said. And then, she planted a single kiss on the princess's cheek.

“F-Fwahah?!” Swann exclaimed. “M-Miss Rynàsze?!”

“Yes?” Rynàsze asked. “Is something wrong?”

“N-N-No! N-N-N-N-Nothing! N-N-Nothing’s wrong at all!” Swann said, clearly extremely flustered and blushing all the way down her neck.

“That was just a friendly good morning kiss...” Rynàsze said, looking over at Swann in clear confusion. “I haven’t upset you, have I?”

“A good morning kiss...?” Swann repeated. “Oh, yes... C-Come to think of it, you gave me one of those in Dogorogma as well...” She recalled the other day when she had woken up in Dogorogma to a similar kiss from Rynàsze and blushed even more furiously.

As Swann struggled to find the words to speak, Sybe sat up behind her as well. Swann had been sleeping lying atop Sybe’s stomach, and now that they were both awake, the psychobear was sitting pressed up close beside her. Still groggy from the night’s sleep, Sybe rubbed his right eye with his right paw and stretched both arms out wide before turning forward to face Swann.

“*Bwurf!*” Sybe cried happily, his snout right up against Swann’s forehead. And then, with great gusto, he licked her right between the eyes.

“Fwaongh!!!” Swann exclaimed in surprise, squeezing her eyes tight.

From across the living room, Flio and Tanya both jolted to alertness as they watched. After all, the first day Swann had arrived, she had found herself surrounded by magic beasts and too frightened to move. Back then, Sybe had licked her cheek and she had been so startled that she screamed to high heaven and dramatically collapsed. Flio held out his right arm, conjuring a magic circle, while Tanya produced an emergency pillow, both ready to spring into action to assist Swann at a moment’s notice.

Swann, however, simply grimaced, wiping the psychobear saliva from her face with the hem of her shirt. “Sybe!” she said. “That’s sticky!” Gone, it seemed, was the Swann who used to shriek every time she so much as caught sight of a magic beast.



Flio looked on with a smile on his face. “It looks like we were worried for nothing, huh.”

Tanya, too, returned the pillow she had been holding to her Bottomless Bag and reached out to grab the broom she had set aside. “In that case, I believe I shall proceed to my cleaning tasks on the second floor,” she said, bowing deeply before making her way up the stairs.

“All right, then. Thank you, and good luck with your cleaning,” Flio said, seeing Tanya off with his usual easygoing smile before turning back towards Swann. “It looks like you’ve gotten pretty used to being around magic beasts. I guess you’ll be getting ready to head back to Klyrode Cas—”

Before he could finish, however, Swann hopped down from Sybe’s belly, running over and grabbing Flio’s arm tight.

“Um...” Flio said. “Miss Swann?”

“I-I’m not ready yet!” Swan said, shaking her head from side to side.

“Huh?” Flio asked, his eyes going wide in confusion at Swann’s sudden change in behavior.

“I-I still have so much I would like to learn about magic beasts, you see!” Swann pleaded, squeezing Flio’s arm tight. “Or rather, I want to learn about them not from reading books and bestiaries, but by actually living together with *real* magic beasts, like the ones you have here! I’m not nearly done with my studies!”

“U-Um, well...” Flio said, reeling back from Swann’s sudden display of spirit. “I understand how you feel, but isn’t your work back at the castle more important...?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry about that,” came a woman’s voice from behind Flio and Swann. The two of them turned around to see Leusoc—the Second Princess—standing in the entryway. “After all, I’m here with a message from our sister the Maiden Queen saying that Swann should consider herself free to take an extended period away, should it suit her pleasure.”

“Our sister the Queen said that?” Swann asked.

“She did,” the Second Princess replied. “She wants you to take all the time you need to get good and properly accustomed to being around magic beasts, see.”

Swann’s smile lit up brightly at her sister’s words as Rylnàsze came running up from across the room. “That means we’ll be able to spend even more time together, Miss Swann!”

“It does! I can’t wait!” Swann said, locking hands with Rylnàsze as the two girls beamed happily at each other, Flio watching warmly with a smile on her face. “Now, Miss Rylnàsze, shall we take the magic beasts out for their morning walk?”

“Yes! Of course!” Rylnàsze chirped back.

Swann hurried out the door, followed closely by a happily smiling Rylnàsze. Holding hands, the two girls shared a smile before hurrying on out of the door.

Leusoc smiled fondly as she watched the pair go. “You know, I thought I was asking you for the impossible,” she said, turning towards Flio. “But I couldn’t be happier that we left Swann in your care. I don’t think I’ve ever seen that girl smile so happily before.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Flio said, smiling his usual easygoing smile. “Rylnàsze seems to be having a really good time with her as well. I’m very glad the two of them were able to become such good friends.”

“Well then,” the Second Princess said. “I have work of my own to take care of, so I’ll be taking my leave.”

“All right,” said Flio. “I can send you home with Teleportation, if you’d like.”

“No, no. There’s no need,” the princess said. “I have my own mages waiting outside, after all.”

Leusoc, the Second Princess, was responsible for negotiations with powers outside the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode. As her work took her all around the kingdom and outside its borders on regular occasions, she had made a point of assembling a team of mages who specialized in Teleportation, creating her very own squad ready to take her wherever she needed to go in an instant.

Leusoc bowed deeply and went to leave Flio's house, as Flio himself saw her off with a smile. No sooner had she left, however, than Rys came back in the room, followed by yet another guest—the angel Zofina, disciple of the Celestial Plane.

“My lord husband, we have company!”

“Mister Flio,” said Zofina, bowing her head low. “My thanks for all your hard work.” In her hand, she was carrying a paper bag given to her by Elinàsze. The bag looked outwardly unremarkable, but it had been fortified with defensive magic—just about enough to deflect an incoming offensive spell.

“Hello, Zofina,” Flio said. “That's right—today was the day you were coming over to pick up the medicine.”

“Yes, and my thanks for your prompt delivery,” Zofina said, stepping up to speak with Flio as Rys went to stand beside her husband. “However, today there is another message I would like to deliver to you and your household.”

Zofina held out her right hand, calling up a window which displayed an image of the very serpentine magic beasts that had lately become such an issue for the family.

“Ah...” Flio said. “Those have been appearing all over Klyrode recently. I believe they're fragments of something called Hydrana...”

“I suppose I should have guessed that you would already be familiar with the creature's name,” Zofina said, holding out both her arms and gesturing to expand the window between them. In it, they could see an image of Hydrana on its side, all nine heads combined into one creature. “The serpents that have been plaguing the world of Klyrode number nine in total. If they are ever gathered together in one place, they will combine and transform into Hydrana, the Beast of Annihilation. In the Celestial Plane, this creature is known as the Final Tribulation.”

“The Final Tribulation?” Flio asked, inclining his head.

“Indeed,” said Zofina. “These beasts appear in worlds that have suffered under many long years of strife. If one were to vanquish such a creature, it is said that the world would come to know true peace.”

“Oh my! Is that true?” Rys asked, taken aback.

“It is,” Zofina nodded. “And that means that such magic beasts appearing here can be taken as a sign that the world of Klyrode is on the cusp of true peace.” With that, she turned to address Flio. “Mister Flio, I am certain that with your power you would be capable of vanquishing the Hydrana. And so...I wish you luck in battle.” She bowed gravely, holding her hand over her heart.

Flio folded his arms in thought, a furrow forming in his brow. “Um...” he said. “About that...”

“Yes? Is there some problem?” Zofina asked.

“Let’s say that we were to defeat the fragments of Hydrana before it had fused into one, while it was still in nine parts...” Flio said. “What happens then?”

“Defeated it while it was still in nine parts?” Zofina asked, blinking in confusion. “Suffice it to say, I have never heard of such a thing taking place. I believe the fragments of Hydrana are meant to be exceedingly difficult to find before they are combined...”

“Are they?” said Elinàsze, arriving to join the conversation. “That certainly wasn’t our experience. Here, look!” She pointed towards the living room table and cast a quick spell, causing a small collection of the serpentine magic beasts to appear on its surface, each sealed inside a magic gem.

“Wh-What in heaven?!” Zofina exclaimed.

“I caught one of these myself while I was out gathering medicinal herbs in a forest,” Elinàsze said.

“And my lord husband and I caught one on our date...” said Rys.

“Ghozal and Sleip each captured one as well...” Flio said with a hint of amusement in his voice. “Since they seem to count as Beasts of Disaster, we handed them all over to Elinàsze to use as materials for making medicine.”

Zofina looked between the captured serpents on Flio’s table, opening and shutting her mouth in stupefied silence for quite some time. “I am at a loss for words...” she said, finally. “In all my years serving as a disciple of the Celestial Plane, I have never heard of a case where the individual parts of the Hydrana

were defeated before they could achieve fusion...”

“So...” Elinàsze ventured. “Will this cause some sort of problem?”

“Truth be told, I could only guess as to what might happen in such an instance,” Zofina frowned. “It may be that nine more serpents will appear in your world...”

“Oh!” said Elinàsze, smiling brightly. “Well, that would be just perfect!”

“J-Just perfect?” Zofina echoed. “You do understand that the presence of these magic beasts risks the destruction of the entire world, do you not?”

“But you see!” said Elinàsze, holding up her index finger as if she had just hit upon a brilliant idea. “They’re all considered Beasts of Disaster even *before* they fuse together! All we have to do is keep capturing them before they combine and we’ll never have to worry about finding materials for making medicine again!”

“Our Search spells should be more accurate now that we’ve captured a few of these serpents too,” said Flio, nodding pensively at Elinàsze’s suggestion. “The next time one of them appears, we should be able to find it immediately.”

“And when we do, we’ll go on another hunting date together, won’t we, my lord husband?” said Rys, beaming as she went to take her husband by the arm.

Zofina regarded Flio and his family with a dry smile on her face. *A single Beast of Disaster has enough power to destroy a planetoid world entirely, to say nothing of nine of them appearing at once...* she thought. *If anyone can handle it, though, it would be Mister Flio and his extraordinary family. After all, just the other day they captured nearly fifty Beasts of Disaster on a single expedition into Dogorogma...*

Zofina watched on as the conversation continued. Flio and his family all had great big smiles on their faces as they spoke as if they were discussing plans for a pleasant hike, and not their preparations to do battle with monsters capable of ending the world.



## Side Story: Everyone's Morrow Part 15

### ◇Deep in a Forest◇

Deep in a forest somewhere in the world, a largely unremarkable place aside from the nearby small village, there stood a single isolated cottage.

“Aaaahhh!!!” shouting her head off, Cartha came bursting out of the nearby woods, holding her child tight in her arms and running for dear life from the serpentine magic beast nipping at her heels.

Cartha was the daughter of a farming family, and she had fallen in love at first sight with the original inhabitant of the cottage, one Hugi-Mugi. After a long and hard fought campaign, she had finally won the coveted seat of *wife*, and now she, along with Hugi-Mugi's two other wives, lived in the forest alongside him.

The serpent opened its mouth wide, lunging forward once again, but Cartha dodged to the side, deftly avoiding its attack. “You won't eat me that easily!”

Hissing with rage, the serpent redoubled its efforts, determined to chase Cartha down. The child in her arms, however, simply seemed to be enjoying themselves. “Wow, mama, nice dodge!” they cheered. “You can do it!”

“This child...” Cartha said, smirking ever so slightly as she ran. “Nothing seems to frighten them. They always seem like they're having the time of their life...just like someone else I know.” Suddenly, as she was speaking the snake abruptly stopped in its tracks. “Huh?” said Cartha. Then, her eyes going wide, she cried out “Bwhfff!!!” as she crashed into something ahead of her.

Cartha turned her head to see an enormous monstrous two-headed bird covered in golden scales—the true form of her spouse, Hugi-Mugi, one (or perhaps two?) of the former members of the Dark Army's Infernal Four.

Hugi-Mugi was a doppeladler, a type of two-headed monster bird, although they were capable of assuming a human form as well. They retired from the Infernal Four to live out their life deep in the woods and were now enjoying a

peaceful existence along with their three wives and their children.

“You there, magic beast, yes! Yes, you, magic beast!” Hugi-Mugi said, alternating speaking with both of their heads as was their usual habit. In fact, they spoke with two voices even while they were in human form as well. “Did you know this woman was precious to us when you chose to attack her, yes? Yes, did you know?!”

The serpent was larger than Cartha’s entire body, but Hugi-Mugi’s true form was far, far bigger than that. Seeming to sense instinctively that it was at a disadvantage, the snake slithered slowly backwards, hissing menacingly.

*Stomp! Stomp!!!* Hugi-Mugi charged forward, talons landing heavily as they rapidly closed the distance between themselves and the serpent. The serpent, losing heart in the face of such a formidable adversary, did a full one-eighty and ran for its life.

Hugi-Mugi, however, was without mercy. “We won’t let you get away, yes!” they said, reaching out with a fierce talon towards the escaping snake.

Some time later, the magic beast was lying defeated in the clearing in front of the Hugi-Mugi family cottage.

“Oh my!” Shino exclaimed, setting eyes upon the creature. “Wh-What sort of magic beast is this?!”

Shino was another one of Hugi-Mugi’s wives. She was a priestess from the same village as Cartha and, like Cartha, she had fallen in love with Hugi-Mugi’s human form at first sight. She still spent her days working in the village, healing the sick and the injured.

“It attacked Cartha in the forest earlier today, yes!” said Hugi-Mugi, now in their human form and standing with their arms folded. “Yes, and so we had to fight it!” Their human form, unlike their natural state, had only one head, but even so, Hugi-Mugi spoke with two distinct voices.

“I see... I suppose that explains it, then. Although...” Shino narrowed her eyes, turning her gaze to Cartha, who was currently situated just behind Hugi-Mugi, hugging and nuzzling and clinging to him with a positively adoring expression.

“Hee hee hee!” Cartha giggled as she doted on her husband, seemingly unaware of anything outside of her own little world. “Hugi, you were so incredibly gallant today! I think I’m falling for you all over again—harder than ever before! Hee hee hee hee hee!”

Shino stepped forward, interrupting her co-wife’s reverie by crudely grabbing her by the face. “Cartha,” she said, “have you been clinging on to Lords Hugi-Mugi like this since the incident, out here in broad daylight? You know this kind of behavior is bad for the children’s upbringing, so would you please kindly... Get! Off!”

“O-Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!” Cartha protested, tapping frantically on Shino’s arm to indicate that she had lost the altercation. Shino, however, refused to let her go, keeping her grip tight on Cartha’s face. “Sh-Shino! I keep telling you to quit grabbing my face like that! That killer grip of yours could really hurt me one of these days... Although, who could say where you get that much strength with such skinny arms...? Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!”

As Cartha and Shino struggled and grappled with each other, Hugi-Mugi’s third wife, Mato, strode past the two of them without even sparing a glance for their antics, up to Hugi-Mugi.

Mato was a merchant who Hugi-Mugi had once saved from a group of bandits who had attacked her as she was traveling through the forest. She began living along with Hugi-Mugi and the others to repay him for saving her, until eventually she fell in love with the doppeladler as well. Now she, like Cartha and Shino, was one of Hugi-Mugi’s wives.

“Perhaps you should read this, my lord,” Mato said, handing Hugi-Mugi a flyer she had been carrying. “It concerns this magic beast.”

“What’s this, yes?” Hugi-Mugi asked. “Yes, what is this?”

“It’s something I picked up at our usual general store,” Mato told them. “Read what it says here.”

“Hmm...” Hugi-Mugi said, looking over the writing on the flyer. ““Cal’Cha Teahouse’s Grand Opening,’ yes?”

“No, no, below that,” said Mato, pointing at a spot towards the bottom of the

page. “Here, look.”

“Let’s see, yes...” Hugi-Mugi said. “‘Wanted: Witness Accounts of Serpentine Magic Beasts’?”

“That’s right,” said Mato. “According to this notice, serpentine magic beasts have been appearing all over the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode and the Fli-o’-Rys general Store is asking for anyone who has witnessed such a magic beast to share what information they have with a company representative. It says they are offering rewards depending on how much information we can provide!”

“So then, yes...” Hugi-Mugi mused. “If the magic beast we have here is the same one as in the notice, we could be rewarded for bringing them its body, yes! Yes, a rich reward, perhaps!”

“Of course!” said Mato, thumping her chest. “Just leave it to me! As a former merchant, haggling for the highest price we could reasonably expect is very much within my area of expertise!”

“Wonderful, yes!” said Hugi-Mugi. “Yes, then let’s waste no time!” Transforming back into their true form, they took the serpent in one of their massive talons.

“Agreed!” said Mato, jumping up onto Hugi-Mugi’s back. “I’m ready to go right away!”

Hugi-Mugi looked to see that their wife was sitting firmly on their back before spreading their wings wide and, with a single powerful beat, taking to the sky.

Cartha and Shino watched in awe as Hugi-Mugi picked up speed, disappearing between the mountains in the blink of an eye.

“I-Is it just me, or did Mato just run off with our husband?” said Cartha.

“Y-You are correct, I’m afraid...” said Shino.

The two stared in the direction where Hugi-Mugi had vanished.

### ◇Houghtow City—Flio’s House◇

In front of Flio’s house was a large ranch and pasture, home to a herd of demon horses and equine magic beasts. Some of the steeds raised here were available to rent for adventurers or traveling merchants, while others were

being trained to run in the races at the Fli-o'-Rys Magic Beast Racing Hall. The ranch was chiefly managed by Sleip, the invincible ace of the racing hall himself, along with his wife Byleri.

That day, a number of demon horses were making their way down the road to the ranch from the magic beast racing hall, as Byleri rode around the pasture on a steed of her own. As soon as she saw the group coming her way, however, she dropped what she was doing and came galloping out to meet the head of the group—none other than Sleip himself. “Oh my gosh! Lord Sleip!” she said. “Like, welcome home!”

“Well! If it isn’t Byleri!” said Sleip, throwing his arms open wide and grinning from ear to ear as his wife, in a display of equestrian agility, stood up atop her horse and leaped off straight into his arms. “Everything’s the same as ever back on the ranch, I take it?”

“Totally!” Byleri chirped, cuddling quite close to Sleip as she spoke. “Like, it’s been a while since we’ve had any real problems!”

“Jeez...” Rislei winced, sighing a long breath from behind her mother and father. “Can you wait a little while after we get home from the races before you start going at it? You’re making it awkward for everyone!”

Behind her, the demon horses and horse demihumans who had been accompanying Sleip and Rislei back home did indeed look a little uncomfortable at the couple’s unbridled display of affection.

“Oh, like, oops!” said Byleri, blushing furiously as she suddenly realized that she and Sleip were surrounded by people. “Silly me, I guess!” She tried to back away, but Sleip had other plans.

“Ha ha ha! And what’s the matter with it, Rislei?” Sleip bellowed, holding Byleri tight around the waist. “This is all perfectly appropriate behavior between a husband and wife!” Laughing loudly, he hoisted Byleri up onto his shoulders.

“L-Lord Sleip?!” Byleri exclaimed. “L-Like, I’m happy and all, but you’re totally embarrassing me!”

“Ha ha ha!” laughed Sleip. “Never you mind! They can stare if they like!”

“U-Um... Excuse me... I’m sorry to interrupt...” As Sleip doted on his wife in full view of everyone watching, a lizardfolk demihuman stepped up to speak to him.

“Oh?” said Sleip, looking down to see Reptor, dressed up in a tailored suit rather than practical outfits he usually favored. Even his signature accessory, his goggles, were gone from around his neck.

Instantly, Sleip’s expression turned sour.

This, of course, was entirely expected. It was an open secret that Reptor was madly in love with Sleip’s daughter Rislei—and, for that matter, that Rislei herself was decently fond of him in return. To Sleip, who practically lived for his little girl, that made Reptor his natural enemy.

“Hang on, papa,” Rislei begged. “At least hear him out, will you?”

“Hrmph... I’d really much rather not, but I suppose I can, if it’s a request from my darling Rislei...” Sleip grumbled, placing Byleri back down on the ground and striding up to Reptor. “Well, boy? What is it today?”

“W-Well, you see...” Reptor stammered, pulling a leaflet out of his pocket. On it were the words “Fli-o’-Rys Ranch Now Hiring.”

“That’s right,” Sleip said. “We have more demand than we used to now that we have the racing hall on top of merchants and the like who need horses to pull their carriages. We’re looking for new live-in employees to help out around the ranch. Why?”

“W-Well...y’know...I just...or rather, I mean...” Remembering his manners, he straightened out his back and bowed a full ninety degrees. “Sir! Would you perhaps consider me for the position?”

Sleip furrowed his brow, glaring daggers across at Reptor. “You want me to hire you, boy?”

“Y-Yes!” said Reptor, keeping his body bowed as he spoke. “I-I mean...yes, sir! I spent a lot of my time at the Houghtow College of Magic helping to look after the magic beasts they keep in the pasture there! I believe I can put this experience to use working on your ranch! I won’t say a word of complaint no matter how early you make me get up in the morning or how hard you make

me work. And I promise you, sir, that I will absolutely work my butt off!”

Sleip folded his arms, regarding the lizardfolk boy in stony silence for quite some time as Reptor stood perfectly still, desperately maintaining his bowed position as cold sweat began to bead on his face. Even so, he didn’t raise his head an inch.

Finally, Sleip let out a long breath and turned around, facing his back to Reptor.

*I-I knew it...* Reptor thought, gritting his teeth. *He’s gonna turn me down...*

“I trust...” Sleip said, in a clear but uncharacteristically quiet voice, his back still turned. “I trust there will be no problem with treating the first three months as a trial period for your employment?”

“H-Huh?” said Reptor, looking up in surprise.

“Don’t say ‘h-huh,’ boy,” said Sleip. “Give me a proper response.”

“O-Oh! Y-Yes, sir!” said Reptor, bowing down the full ninety degrees once again. “Thank you very much for the opportunity!”

*I hate to admit it...* Sleip thought as he looked back over his shoulder at Reptor. *That kid might be a lowlife scumbag after my Rislei, but lately he’s started showing signs of having a backbone...and maybe even a sense of responsibility...*

“You did it, Reptor!” Rislei cheered from behind him.

“Yes! Thank you, Rislei!” said Reptor.

*Although,* Sleip thought, gritting his teeth at the sound of their conversation, *whether I’ll permit him and Rislei to be friends is another matter entirely!*

### ◇The Celestial Plane◇

“There,” said Zofina, looking up at the Central Control Tower in the middle of the Celestial Plane with a sigh. “That’s the last of my responsibilities taken care of for the day. And now that I’ve handed in the medicinal powder I received from the world of Klyrode, I believe it is time I took a rest.”

Zofina stretched and set off on foot down the street. All around her, other

celestials went this way and that about their business for the day, their otherworldly nature made clear by the wings possessed by nearly every member of the crowd. Zofina, too, displayed her own pair of wings openly here in her home world.

“It has been a while since I’ve had a break...” Zofina mused. “Perhaps I should go for a bowl of sweet red bean soup from my favorite shop. In that case, I’ll first have to go to the Tower of Teleportation to apply for permission to visit the world of Palma...”

“Oh, Miss Zofina!” said someone passing by on the street. “Good afternoon.”

“Ah, yes, good afternoon,” Zofina replied, giving them a quick smile and bowing her head in greeting as she walked on by. A few steps later, though, she stopped in her tracks, quickly wheeling around. “Th-That person!” she said. “Was that...? No... It couldn’t be...” Utterly perplexed, Zofina scanned the crowd left and right to try and find the person who had greeted her.

Some distance away, a girl watched Zofina from behind the cover of a nearby building. “Phew! That was a close one! I was so surprised to run into someone I know, I greeted them without thinking!” The girl—Elinàsze—grinned slyly to herself as she placed her hand on the pendant around her neck. “Although, if Miss Zofina is here, I believe it’s safe to assume that this is, in fact, the Celestial Plane.” She looked down at the pendent and nodded, satisfied with her handiwork.

Incidentally, rather than the plain but comfortable clothes she wore while working in her laboratory, Elinàsze was dressed in an outfit similar to those of the passing celestials.

“Now, this jaunt was only meant to be a test, to see if my Teleportation spell could take me all the way to the Celestial Plane. But as long as I’m here, I certainly wouldn’t mind seeing the inside of a library or two...”

Elinàsze took in the city around her, giddy with excitement. Truly, she resembled nothing more than a child with a new toy.

◇Klyrode Castle—Third Princess’s Office◇

The Third Princess’s office was on the second floor of Klyrode Castle. It was



there that the Princess did her work as her sister's advisor on internal affairs, gathering information from all across the kingdom pertaining to internal administration. Ordinarily, Her Highness could be seen here in her office most days, thick volumes of paperwork carried under her arms as she ran about, busy with her many tasks.

The Third Princess, however, was currently staying at Flio's house, where she had been for a number of weeks now.

Right now in the office, three women lay sprawled out on the sofa in the middle of the room. One was lying flat on her back atop the sofa itself. Another was sitting sprawled out on the floor, propped up against the sofa's foot. The third was sitting down on one of the cushions, her upper body folded fully over her lap. All three were snoring through their fitful sleep.

The morning sunlight came streaming in through the window, falling upon one of the women's faces. "Nnh..." Alba—the one folded up on her lap—moaned, forcing her eyes to open and sitting herself up. "I-Is it morning already...?"

Alba stood up and stretched her stiff and aching body, then looked around at the mountain of paperwork surrounding her with a heavy sigh. "It hasn't even been a month since Her Highness the Third Princess left the castle... How could we have built up such a huge backlog of unfinished work?" she said. "We still haven't even had time to look at half of these documents... I can't say it's anything we haven't handled in our time in General Affairs, but this volume is just simply too much!"

"In General Affairs, we only had to process twenty documents a day, at most..." agreed Potrie, the one who had been sleeping propped up against the foot of the couch. "But here, we're given five books worth of paper every single day! This isn't fair at all!" she cried, her voice trailing off into a miserable wail.

Alba sighed and nodded her head in agreement. "We really underestimated her workload. We knew Her Highness always seemed to be frantically busy with something, but I for one never imagined that she did *this* much work every single day..." *And before the Third Princess was assigned to this job, the Maiden Queen used to do this in between her other duties—although she was the First*

*Princess at the time... she reflected in disbelief. R-Really... The two of them are just outrageously good at managerial work...*

“Hey, Alba...” Potrie said. “Maybe we should put our egos to the side and ask for more people to help us out. This is our fourth day straight of working through the night, and we still have three entire day’s worth of papers we haven’t even looked at yet...”

“Then this will be your fourth day’s worth, I take it.” The doors to the room swung open and a woman stepped inside—Cygnus, the Third Princess’s administrative aide, carrying a hefty folder containing the day’s usual five books worth of documents.

“A-Ah...” said Alba. “Yesterday’s reports are here already, then?”

“That they are,” said Cygnus, setting the documents down on the table in front of a very distressed looking Alba and Potrie with a hefty *thump*. Cygnus turned her gaze over towards the two of them, frozen stiff in the face of the sheer volume of work that lay before them. There was something distinctly icy in those eyes of hers. “You are aware, of course, but Her Highness the Third Princess customarily finishes reviewing these documents before taking her breakfast for the day. Don’t tell me...” she added, her gaze turning icier still. “You can’t do it?” She tilted her head to the side in a deliberate affectation of innocent confusion, looking provocatively over at Alba.

“I-I never said that!” Alba snapped, squinting angrily at Cygnus. “W-We’ll do it! We’ll do it all!” *I-Is this revenge for the things we said on the first day...?* she wondered, a bead of sweat forming on her forehead. *Well, fine! We’ll get this done and walk out of the office with our heads held high! After all, the Third Princess is getting back the day after tomorrow, isn’t she?*

“Oh, and by the by,” Cygnus said, giving Alba another one of her looks. “Her Highness the Second Princess contacted me earlier. It seems Her Highness the Third Princess will be extending her sabbatical by another month.”

“What?!” Alba and Potrie exclaimed at once, freezing in place in shock at the news. As for Sansa, who was still asleep, when she finally woke up and heard that the Third Princess would be requiring their services for another month, she fainted immediately, falling unconscious once again.

## ◇Houghtow City—Flio's House◇

“And so, these serpent magic beasts that have been appearing around the Magical Kingdom of Klyrode—the Hydrana fragments—have been showing up as part of something called the Final Tribulation,” Flio said, sitting in a chair in the living room as he explained what he had learned to the household.

“According to Zofina, it's a sign that the world of Klyrode is on the cusp of true peace.”

“There are nine of them in total if I'm not mistaken, yes?” said Rys, counting on her fingers. “We have one that my lord husband and I caught during our hunting date, one Ghozal caught at the Houghtow College of Magic, one caught by Dalc Horst in front of the Fli-o'-Rys General Store, one Sleip caught at the magic beast racing hall, one Garyl caught while he was at work protecting Ellie, one Wyne caught in Dogorogma, and one Elinàsze caught while she was out searching for medicinal herbs...”

“And Hugi-Mugi showed up at the Fli-o'-Rys General Store earlier with one of the serpents themselves,” volunteered Ghozal. “They were trying to sell it, by the sound of things.”

“Which means...” said Rys. “We've accounted for eight of them in total. I suppose, then, we can expect one more serpent to make an appearance?”

“Most likely, by the sounds of things,” said Flio, meeting his wife's eyes. “The nine parts of Hydrana are supposed to fuse and evolve into a nine-headed serpent—something called a Beast of Annihilation. But we've already defeated eight of the parts...”

“If it's only the one, I wouldn't expect any great difficulty in subduing it, as long as it doesn't appear in a very densely populated area, but we should still all keep our guards up for the time being,” Rys said, stepping up closer to Flio. “And that's why, my lord husband, you and I should go on hunting dates every day from now until we find it! It's the only logical course of action!” Her cheeks flushed and a grin on her face from sheer excitement at the prospect, Rys took both of Flio's hands in hers.

“About that...” Flio said. “I've tried casting a Search spell with a range of the entire Magical Kingdom of Klyrode, now that I know how to recognize one of

the Hydrana fragments...but I couldn't find any in the area."

"Hrm," Ghozal agreed. "Hiya and I tried looking too, but we didn't get any results either. It could be the ninth one was already defeated, somewhere we haven't thought to look..."

"Excuse me?!" said Rys, her eyes snapping open as her blush deepened to an angry crimson. "Ghozal, you rotten old bastard! Why would you bring that up *now* of all possible times, right when I had just come up with a good pretext for my lord husband and I to go on regular hunting dates together!"

"Ha ha ha!" Ghozal laughed heartily. "Well, excuse me for that!"

Flio couldn't help chuckling at Rys and Ghozal's exchange.

Just then, a woman's voice came from outside the house's front door. "Hellooo!"

"Yes! Be right there!" said Rys, putting her argument with Ghozal on hold for a moment and running up to get the door, Flio following along behind her. They opened the door to see Telbyress standing in their entryway.

"Hee hee... Heeey, everyone," she said. Her face was a distinct shade of red and her expression was slack. It was evident that she had been drinking.

"Well, if it isn't Telbyress," said Rys. "Is there something you need?"

"Not quite," Telbyress said. "I jusht made some liquor the other day, and it came out real real well! S-Sho well I thought I should share shome of the joy with Mishter Flio and hish family, to thank you for all your shupport..." With that, she picked up the bottle of liquor she had set down by the door and placed it in front of Flio and Rys with a heavy thump.

The moment Flio and Rys got a good look at the bottle, their eyes went wide with disbelief.

"M-My lord husband..." Rys marveled. "C-Could it be...?"

"I think so..." Flio answered, glancing back and forth between Rys and the bottle. "I think it's exactly what you're imagining, Rys..."

The bottle Telbyress had offered them was massive, reaching all the way up to the waist from the floor. The issue, however, was what was inside.

“You shee...” Telbyress explained, beaming from ear to ear as she tapped on the glass bottle’s side. “I heard from Hokh’hokton that liquor made with a pickled shsnake ish particularly tashty, and I jusht had to try making it for myshelf, and it turned out to be delishioush!”

Inside the bottle, they could see a familiar serpentine magic beast.

“That magic beast...” Rys whispered to her husband. “That’s one of the Hydrana fragments, is it not...?”

“That’s right...” Flio whispered back. “No doubt about it...”

“And not only that...” Telbyress continued. “Thish liquor doeshn’t jusht tashte good, it hash all kindsh of other effectsh too! It’sh a nutritional shupplement... It helpsh recover fatigue... It promotesh good shleep... It even increases a woman’sh fertility...”

The instant those words left the fallen goddess’s mouth, Rys sprang into action. She dashed right up in front of Telbyress, swiping the bottle from right under her nose. “Excuse me...Telbyress?” she said. “Did you say that this liquor has the effect of increasing a woman’s fertility?!”

“Yesh, that’sh right!” Telbyress answered. “Sheemsh like that’sh one of itsh many effectsh!”

*Pop!* Rys removed the bottle’s cork with a quick press of her thumb and immediately took a huge swig of the contents.

“R-Rys!” Flio exclaimed, doing his best to stop his wife from downing the bottle in an instant. “Y-You know it’s not good for you to drink it all at once like that!”

Rys, however, kept on drinking with alarming force, the contents of the bottle rapidly draining away before the family’s eyes.

“Wah?! L-Lady Rysh?! D-Don’t drink *all* of it! Leave shome for me!” protested Telbyress, trying desperately to stop Rys as well.

Finally, Rys removed the bottle from her lips and turned to look towards her husband. “Oh, but, my lord husband, think about it!” she said. “Garyl and Eliàsze are all grown up, and Rylàsze is going to be starting school herself before

too long, you know! In that case, it's high time for something like this..." And with that, she returned to the bottle, in spite of Flio's and Telbyress's best efforts to persuade her to slow down.



## Afterword

Thank you so much as always for reading this book.

*Level 2 Cheat* has reached its fifteenth volume. I had a particular theme in mind for this one: starting a new stage of life. The children of Flio's house and all their classmates at the Houghtow College of Magic are all moving on, while meanwhile the world faces a trial before the world of Klyrode can properly begin its age of peace. I hope you all enjoyed the new developments with Hero Gold-Hair's crew as well, and learning more about the setting of the story and its many planetoid worlds.

I'm sure you're all used to it by now, but the new volume of the manga adaption will be going on sale at the same time as this book. As the writer of the original story, I can't wait to see what they have in store for us in volume 8!

Also, I would very much appreciate it if you would check out my other projects, *Otherworld Izakaya: Sawako's Tale of Seizing Prosperity with Slender Arms* (Japanese: *Isekai Izakaya Sawako-san Hosoude Hanjouki*) and *Convenience Store Service in Another World* (Japanese: *Isekai Konbini Omotenashi*), now available in both manga and radio drama form!

And last but not least, I would like to once again thank Katagiri for the fantastic illustrations, everyone at Overlap Novels involved in the publication and business side of things, and everyone who's picked up one of my books from the bottom of my heart.

January 2023, Miya Kinojo





# Chillin' in Another World

WITH LV 2

## SUPER CHEAT POWERS

# 15

Story by Miya Kinojo  
Illustrations by Katagiri









Name | Hero Gold-Hair | 8

“You  
maniac!  
What do you  
think you’re  
doing,  
attacking us  
out of the  
blue like—  
Hey! Watch  
it!”

Name | Tsuya | 8



“Tch!  
This one’s  
persistent!”

Name | Ben’ne | 8



# Bonus Short Stories

## Elinàsze's Desire

*This story takes place some time after the events of this volume.*

One day, as usual, Elinàsze was cloistered away in her chambers poring over a hefty grimoire she held open in her arm. The walls of the room around her were all lined with shelves, each containing innumerable other volumes full of arcane secrets.

“Well, well...” she said, nodding along as she read. “I’ve never encountered a spell like this before! I suppose it just goes to show how large the cosmos is, that even after all the different magic grimoires I’ve collected, I can still find things to surprise me. Although...” she added with a cunning smile, touching a finger to the pendant around her neck. “I suppose this isn’t a book I could have obtained through normal means after all...”

The pendant Elinàsze was wearing, of course, was a copy she had made of an item in the angel Zofina’s possession—something she needed in order to enter the Celestial Plane herself.

“This book is just something I copied from the library when I went to the Celestial Plane the other day to test out my new pendant, but it’s turned out to be quite an interesting volume! If only I had known there were such fascinating books in the Celestial Plane at the time, I would have made far more copies from their catalog...” Elinàsze said, giving a chagrined smirk as she closed the book and set it back down on her desk. “Even with this pendant on hand, I might very well invite suspicion if I make my visits to the Celestial Plane too frequent. I’ll have to wait a suitable amount of time before I take a second trip.”

With a single wave of Elinàsze’s finger, the book floated up off the desk and stored itself away in one of the bookshelves lining the walls of the room. “All I need to do is keep up the pace,” she said. “I’ll collect more and more grimoires

and learn more and more about magic, all so I can be more and more useful to papa!” As she spoke, Elinàsze pressed her hands dreamily against her cheeks, a faraway look coming over her eyes. “And then...maybe...papa will tell me I’m a good girl and pet me on the head...lots and lots and lots...”

With her cheeks flushed and a distinctly dopey smile on her face, it was hard to imagine that this was the same Elinàsze who usually came across as a cool and levelheaded beauty. Such was the weight of her positively pathological fondness for her father Flio.

## **One Day, at the Fli-o’-Rys General Store**

*This story takes place some time after the events of this volume.*

It was nearly time to close up shop for the day, but the Fli-o’-Rys General Store was still busy with customers.

“I-Is it just me, or are there meowre customers than usual today...?” Uliminas wondered to herself.

“Ha ha ha!” Ghozal laughed, approaching the hellcat from behind. He was carrying a large crate full of merchandise to restock the shelves as if it weighed nothing at all and grinning cheerfully. “So business is booming! Nothing wrong with that, is there?”

“Meow... I suppaws not...” she admitted.

“Come on!” said Ghozal. “This is no time to be standing around in a daze! You’ve gotta help at the register! Our new hire, Snow Little, looks like she’s in over her head!”

“Mew don’t gotta tell me that!” Uliminas snapped even as she rushed over to the counter at Ghozal’s urging. “I was just about to!”

From her seat in Cal’Cha Teahouse, Zofina gazed idly at the scene inside the shop.

The brand new teahouse was something Calsi’im and Charun had created

together—an establishment where customers could enjoy a variety of teas prepared by Charun herself and paired with sweet confections. It hadn't been long at all since they had first opened their doors, but since then it had been drawing crowds of customers day after day.

*Haahhh... What a day... Zofina thought as she lay with her upper body flopped down on the table top. Who ever heard of a hole opening up in the bottom of a planetoid world? And to think, they made me repair the whole thing all by myself! I know we've been short on hands, but this is ridiculous! It's been days and days of work without any break. My magic and spirits are both just about at their limits...*

The hole that had appeared in the bottom of the planetoid world Klyrode had in fact been put there by none other than Hero Gold-Hair during his battle with the gargantuan Hydrana fragment, but Zofina herself knew nothing about that particular episode. Her orders from the goddess responsible for the world of Klyrode were simply to conduct repairs.

Zofina lay collapsed on the table, not moving an inch, until Charun came by and gently placed a cup of tea right by the side of the angel's face.

"That smells nice..." Zofina muttered, lifting her head as if drawn toward the aroma. She placed the rim of the cup to her lips and took a sip of the beverage. "Oh, my...!" she gasped. "Th-This is just...simply incredible!"

"You seem to be quite tired out today," Charun said, "so I added some medicinal herbs with magic restoring properties to the blend, to see if they might help."

"Miss Charun..." Zofina said, finishing the cup in a single gulp. "I am terribly obliged for your kind consideration. I can feel it seeping into every corner of my exhausted body..."

"Now, would you perhaps care for another cup?" Charun offered.

"Y-Yes, please!" said Zofina. Dutifully, Charun poured a second helping of tea into her empty cup.

*Hahhh...* Zofina thought, a smile coming over her face as she watched the liquid pour from Charun's pot. *That aroma... That flavor...! With this, I can give it my all for another day...*

All around her, the other customers of Cal'Cha Teahouse were smiling happily as well.

Everywhere one looked in the Cal'Cha teahouse, one could see customers like Zofina smiling happily as they drank their tea.

## **The Second Princess and the Maiden Queen**

*This story takes place some time after the events of this volume.*

It was night, and the Second Princess was sitting in a chair in her private chambers, her elbows propped up on the desk in front of her and her head clutched tight in her hands. She had been sitting frozen like this now for a significant portion of an hour.

The Second Princess let out a heavy sigh—far from the first that very evening. “It’s just...” she said, “as much as a late bloomer as my sister can be, I really thought *something* would happen if I got her and Garyl alone together...”

A few days earlier, at the Oracle's recommendation, the Maiden Queen had made a journey to the north to meet with Sage Star-Reader in the Woods of Seclusion. The sage had asked for her to come with as small a retinue as possible, and the Second Princess had capitalized on the opportunity to send Garyl, who had only just been inducted into the Order of Klyrode, as her one and only bodyguard, giving him and the Maiden Queen some time alone. Alas, however...

“It really boggles the mind...” the Second Princess lamented. “The two of them were alone for a number of days—and even at night—but it seems like nothing happened between them at all!” She sighed yet again in deep exasperation. “That Garyl... I know he loves my sister, but he insisted on driving the carriage all through the night both on the way to the forest and back!”

She slammed her fist down on the table with a heavy *thunk*.

“If he’s a man, he should act like it! Be decisive for once!” she snapped, before sighing once again. “Oh well,” she muttered, a self-deprecating smirk coming over her face. “That simpleminded earnestness of his is exactly why I support their relationship in the first place...”



Meanwhile, in her own chambers, the Maiden Queen lay motionless atop her bed, her face buried in her pillow. For her part, she had been in this pose for hours.

*Ahhhhhhhhh!!!* the Maiden Queen thought, screaming internally to herself as she lay in bed, her face a brilliant shade of scarlet. In her mind, she kept replaying the moment when she and Garyl had arrived back at the castle.

*“E-Excuse me... Garyl?”*

*“Yes? How can I help?”*

*“W-Well... I-It’s just... I wanted to thank you for all your help on this trip...”*

*“There’s no need for thanks! I was just doing my job as a knight of Klyrode!”*

*“O-Oh... I see...”*

*“Well then, if that’s all, have a nice evening!”*

And with that, Garyl had dropped her off at the castle entrance and left to return the carriage to its lot.

*No!* the Maiden Queen thought. *That’s not it at all! I wanted to ask Garyl to dinner as thanks for his services, but somehow I let him get away! Perhaps I should abandon all pretense and simply invite him to my room...but if I did that, everyone at the castle would find out about our relationship!*

The Maiden Queen lay with her face buried in her pillow, replaying that scene again and again, tormented by regret.

“Hahhh...” At once, the Second Princess and Maiden Queen both let out one final heavy sigh.



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Chillin' in Another World with Level 2 Super Cheat Powers: Volume 15

by Miya Kinojo

Translated by Meteora Edited by Samantha J. Moore

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