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

author
Nazuna Miki
illustrator
Kabotya

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Character



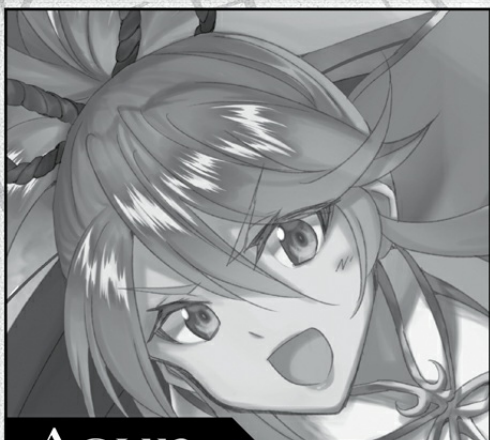
Lardo

One of the three ancient dragons who once threatened the world. She advises Liam while dwelling in his body. Somewhat old-fashioned due to her long lifespan.



Liam

Count Hamilton's fifth son who is actually a transmigrator from another world. He loves magic more than life itself.



Asun

A bright and energetic hunter. She was originally in a party with Liam.



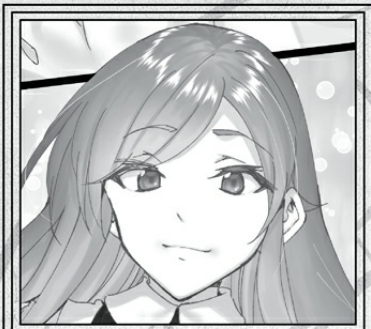
Dypho

One of the three ancient dragons who once threatened the world. She started hanging around Liam after falling for him and his magic prowess.



Jodie

A motherly hunter. She was originally in a party with Liam.



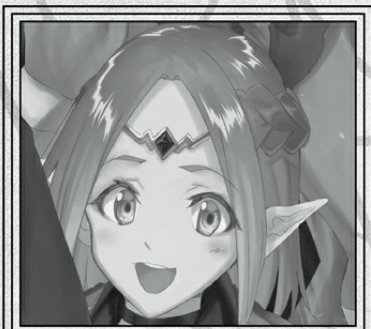
Scarle

The prudent and insightful first princess of Jamille Kingdom. She made Liam a baron



Chris

A tomboyish wolfman. She attacked Liam to protect the holy land but joined him after learning the divine dragon dwells within him.



Reina

A devout elf. She began following Liam after receiving his guidance.



Flora

The illegitimate child of Parta's grand duke. She was sent to ensnare Liam in a trap but joined him after he saved her.

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When the sun rose on Liam-Lardon, I crawled out of bed, changed clothes, and headed to the dining hall with eager steps. *I wonder what's for breakfast today!*

With their innate dexterity and increased know-how on human cuisine through Bruno, the elven maids were only getting better at cooking with each passing day. From warm homemade meals you'd find in a family restaurant to gourmet dishes served only at the most luxurious banquets, the elves were stocking up on any and every recipe they could get their hands on. Every meal was a new treat and a pleasant surprise.

"Oh, there he is!"

"Master!"

A whole crowd of elven maids rounded the corner. Their faces lit up instantly, and they wasted no time surrounding me.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?" I asked.

"You've yet to change your clothes, haven't you, Master?"

"Huh? No, I already did..."

"That won't do. You must dress more dashing!"

"More dashing?" *How exactly do I do that?* My gaze fell to my outfit, which I felt was plenty dashing—after all, it was noble attire, prim and well designed from every angle.

"Please try this on, Master," said a maid as she brought out a jacket and proudly held it up. It was black and red, decorated with golden aiguillettes.

"Did you make that?" I asked casually, only to be swarmed over by the eager group of maids the next second.

"Yes!"

“We made it for you!”

“So please! Do try it on!”

Well, if they made it for me, then who was I to turn them down? I accepted the jacket and passed my arms through the sleeves—or rather, *tried* to. I frowned in confusion. There was no hole for my arm to slip through; the sleeves were sewed shut.

“Oh, no need for that. Simply drape it over your shoulder.”

“Drape it...?”

“Yes, like this!” The elven maid took the jacket and set it over my back.

Ah, so it's more of a mantle than a jacket... The sleeves are just decoration.



“Woow! How dashing!”

“Our master is the coolest!”

The maids squealed and cheered, the sight of me wearing their handmade article leaving them all jumping in excitement. Some were even too moved to speak. *T-Talk about an overreaction...*

“But what *is* this thing?” I asked.

“This is what’s in style these days,” a maid gushed.

“Really?”

“Of course! Master, you are a king, aren’t you?”

“Um... Yeah. I am.” I reluctantly nodded. Truth be told, I still didn’t feel like much of a king. That said, I knew that I needed to step up to protect the monsters of this land.

“Until now, you’ve only dressed as a noble,” the maid continued. “This, however, makes you look far more kingly.”

“A complete upgrade!” another agreed.

“Really...?” I lifted my arms, peeked over my shoulder, and peered at my reflection in the window, taking in my entire outfit. I wasn’t sure it warranted all their squeals and screams earlier, but it did look pretty cool, I’d give them that.

What’s a cool pose? I tried folding my arms, letting the jacket-style mantle flutter behind me. Without warning, one of the maids collapsed.

Startled, I rushed to her side on the ground. “Wh-What’s wrong?”

“My eyes have been blessed...”

“Huh?” I had no idea what she was on about, but she seemed to be fine. Physically, at least.

Slowly, she regained her footing. I followed suit and returned my attention to the rest of the maids—they were still around me, all with dreamy and blissful looks on their faces.

“Uh...” I began, snapping them out of it. “Well, thanks for this. I’ll make sure to wear it from now on.”

“Thank you very much!”

“We’ll make more!”

“Okay.” I nodded and watched them giddily scamper away.

Then, I heard Lardon chuckle. *“Quite the lady-killer, hm?”*

“Don’t tease me...”

“I am not teasing you.” Noting my confusion, she went on. *“You humans complicate far too many things. A man simply needs to be strong—and you were most certainly the very image of power earlier.”*

“Oh...” That, I understood. Animals were like that too—males were all about strength and power. I kind of wanted to refute her first point, but she wasn’t exactly wrong about it either.

“That is why you are excellent,” Lardon continued. *“Your looks are swell, and your mana is undoubtedly top class among humans.”*

“Really?”

“When it comes to magic, you would surely fall within the top five.”

“Ohhh...” That made me happy. *Really* happy. Of course, it was flattering to be told I looked cool, but nothing could beat being complimented for my immense mana and—more than anything—receiving praise for my magic, which I poured my heart and soul into.

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“Master.”

Just as I was relishing in Lardon’s praise, Reina showed up. Serving as the chief of the elves, she was the only one among those working in this mansion who didn’t wear a maid uniform. She stopped in front of me and primly bowed from her waist.

“What’s up, Reina?”

“A guest has arrived,” she reported.

“A guest? Who?”

“Your father.”

“What?”

My father, the head of the Hamilton house and a proud noble of Jamille, had come knocking? Now *this*, I wasn’t expecting.

I couldn’t help but feel a little wary of this sudden visit. A while back, Albrevit had come by and caused some trouble. We had to reciprocate his discourteous attitude a bit, but Gai and Chris clearly went overboard with the stunt they pulled after he left. *Did father come here to rebuke me for it...?*

“What shall I do?” Reina asked calmly.

As different as she might be from Gai and Chris, I nevertheless often felt the need to tell the three of them how to act. While Gai and Chris were the types to charge in headfirst, Reina tended to lurk in the back and wait patiently, persistently, and dare I say *endlessly* for the perfect time to strike. Frankly, I found her more frightening than the other two. Even her supposedly innocent “*What shall I do?*” sounded more like “*How shall I dispose of him?*” to my ears.

“Let him into the reception hall and treat him courteously. I’ll follow.”

“Understood.” Reina bowed once more and left.

Fortunately, unlike Gai and Chris, I could mostly trust Reina not to run wild as long as I'd given my orders, so I saw her off with peace of mind.

Meanwhile, I stood in place for a while longer. Turning father away at the door was simply out of the question, hence my instruction to let him in. There were no problems up to this point—we treated pretty much every guest the same way. The issue lay in what father had come here for.

I sighed. “Well, I guess thinking about this won’t lead me anywhere.” Nothing wasted more time than pointless speculation, all the more if I was the thinker and the matter was unrelated to magic. Even Lardon would agree.

Rather than racking my brain here, it would be faster to go hear it from the man himself.

I left the mansion and arrived at the reception hall. The elven maids guided me to an especially luxurious parlor, where my father was waiting for me. He turned my way when he heard the door open.

“It’s good to see you again, father,” I greeted him.

His eyes opened wide. “L-Liam...?”

“Hm?” I stared back, puzzled. *What? What’s with his reaction?* “Er, yes. I’m Liam.”

“R-Right... Of course. You’re Liam.” He nodded stiffly, his perplexed gaze glued to me all the while.

Seriously, what’s going on with him? I reined in my confusion and took a seat across from him. The couch was soft and plush, as Bruno had procured our parlors nothing but the best.

An elven maid swiftly entered and began serving us with coffee, tea, and snacks. I watched as she deftly set everything up, then nodded once she finished. “Good work,” I said.

The maid smiled and, with a bow, excused herself from the room. Unlike the maids in my mansion, the maids in the reception hall were thoroughly composed—the cream of the crop, selected by none other than Reina. After all,

we wouldn't want the giddier girls to commit any kind of discourtesy in the place where we welcomed our guests.

Just as I was inwardly nodding in satisfaction...

"Oh my gosh! Master praised me!"

"Awww, good for you!"

I heard some very giddy squeals right before the door shut. *We can hear you... I'll have to ask Reina to reprimand them later.* Whatever the case, this was unacceptable for staff of the reception hall.

"My apologies, father. Our maids haven't been educated properly."

"O-Oh, I suppose so... Well, that happens with the younger servants," he replied absently, seemingly not offended by the maid's behavior.

That only made me even more perplexed with his odd behavior. Especially his reaction when he first saw me... *Seriously, what's up with him?* "More importantly, what brings you here today?"

"Ah, you see..."

"Could this be about my eldest brother?"

"Albrevit?" Father cocked his head, not an ounce of fakeness in his expression. He looked genuinely confused.

Was I wrong? I thought that if he was going to come here for something, it'd be the incident with Albrevit. How anticlimactic... Still, I checked just to be sure. "He came here the other day. Is your visit unrelated to his?"

"Certainly," he answered. "Did he do something again?"

"Oh, nothing much." If it was unrelated, then there was no need for me to bring it up. What was more, father asked if he did something "again." I sensed the many struggles loaded behind that word.

"So?" I urged him on. If this wasn't about Albrevit, then I had nothing—he'd have to clue me in.

"Y-Yes. You see..." Father's eyes swam around the room. No more words came from his stiffly gaping mouth, leaving an awkward silence between us. He

drank some of his tea as though he was mustering the courage to speak, but his lips remained pursed.

Suddenly, I got a feeling. *Could it be...?*

I broke the silence first. “Is this about your achievement?”

To say father was shocked would be an understatement—he very nearly jumped from his seat. In contrast, I simply nodded in understanding. Now that I thought about it, what else was there but this?

The nobles of Jamille Kingdom could only hold their status for up to three generations. The head who made an achievement would be the first generation, and the title would be passed down to two more generations thereafter. The fourth generation would have to relinquish their status and become commoners. To avoid that, before the fourth generation took over, they needed to gain an achievement that the state would recognize. Only then would their status be reset and they could pass the title down for another three generations.

Nobles typically passed down their titles and retired at a certain age, but my father, the third generation head of his house, would no longer be a noble the moment he passed his title down to his heir—the fourth generation head. Hence his desperation for an achievement—he couldn’t say it was no longer his concern just because it was the generation after his.

Father heaved out a very burdened sigh. “So you can tell... Yes, you’re right. That is what I came for.”

“So you’ve yet to make an achievement.”

His face twisted bitterly as he nodded. “That is correct.”

“His defeat before me must have been quite painful,” Lardon chimed in.

Indeed, he had tried to subjugate Lardon, known then as an evil dragon, to gain an achievement. It was an operation that ended in failure.

“And some men tend to shrink back after failing once—just like that one.”

I gazed at my father, finally understanding. Some people simply couldn’t bear the thought of failing yet again, much like my father after his dragon

subjugation ended miserably. I mulled over my decision for a while. Then, I met his eyes.

“I understand,” I said. “What can I do to help you appeal an achievement to Jamille?”

Father drew in a sharp breath, his eyes wide in shock—far too wide, if you asked me.

“Father?”

“Are you...really Liam?”

“Huh?” There he went again, asking such weird questions. Just what was going on with him today? How was he seeing me?

“M-My apologies. Forget I said that.”

Lardon chuckled, and I curiously raised a brow. She sounded terribly amused. I waited for her to explain why, but moments passed and only silence came.

Now that's rare. Lardon didn't usually hold back when explaining her amusement. I mean, it was great that she was in such a good mood, really, but I sure wished she didn't leave me hanging like this.

Father awkwardly cleared his throat. “S-So...”

Oh, I almost forgot about him.

“It's as you say,” he admitted heavily. “As such, could you...grant me a favor? Say, like Bruno?”

“Oh...”

At present, Bruno had essentially been granted a monopoly of all this country's trade, from manastones to all our other sources of income. He told me that it had been counted as an achievement and extended his nobility rights.

I nodded and stood from my seat. “Okay. Give me one night. I'll think of something.”

“O-Okay. Thank you.”

“You can spend the night here. See you tomorrow.” I turned around and left

the room, calling over an elven maid as I passed through the door. "Prepare my father's accommodations."

"Understood."

As soon as I stepped out of the reception hall, I called out to a certain dragon. "Lardon? Why were you laughing earlier?"

"Hah. I was simply amused. You were finally looking the part."

"What do you mean?"

"Look in a mirror."

So she told me, but there was no mirror around. I approached a glass window nearby instead and peered at my reflection. There I stood, same as always.

"What is it?"

"Do you not look like a monarch?"

"A monarch...? Oh, because of the mantle?" The elven maids did give this to me to make me look "more kingly." It seemed to be serving its purpose.

Lardon chuckled once more. *"Ah, yes... You are fine as you are."*

"Uh..." *Why is she talking like I got it wrong? Was that not what she meant?* I scratched my head, perplexed as ever.

After parting from my father, I went to Scarlet's mansion to ask for her opinion on the matter. After all, she was Jamille's first princess—she'd know her country better than anyone else. Scarlet pondered on it for a while.

"The easiest method," she finally said, "would be to recommend your sister as queen consort to Jamille. That is your quickest and most acceptable choice at present."

"Oh, yeah... We had that option." Gosh, why did that never come to me?

"I have done some investigation on your household, Master. It seems your father has been hoping for such an outcome but has yet to achieve it."

"Right..."

Come to think of it, I first became Liam during the party they held for the birth of my sister—or rather, to celebrate the possibility of earning the easiest achievement in the country. Quite some time had passed since then, but my sister was still very much a baby. Of course there wouldn't be much progress yet.

"The proposal should be swiftly accepted if you, Master, were to recommend it."

"Really?" My eyes widened. There was no hesitation in Scarlet's voice, nor did it sound like she was trying to convince me; she spoke as if she were simply stating a fact.

"Indeed. Jamille wishes to improve their relations with you—a desire that has been growing with recent developments."

"What developments?"

"Dyphon," she said simply. When I cocked my head, she elaborated, "One of the three main players in the Tri-Draconic War alongside Lardon now greatly adores you. The masses have yet to learn of this, but the heads of state are

surely aware by now.”

“Is that so?” That was...kind of embarrassing.

“With the favor of two dragons of the Tri-Draconic War, you now hold in your hands the power to destroy an entire nation at worst.”

“At worst, huh...” She must be referring to the worst-case scenario where they turn both Lardon and Dyphon into their enemies. *Yeah... That’s definitely a nation-ending catastrophe.*

“Thus, it has become all the more imperative to form amicable relations with you,” Scarlet finished. “As such, I believe your recommendation to place your sister as queen consort will be approved with two hundred percent certainty.”

“I see...” She had a point, and besides, I could always trust her word. “All right, I get it. Then it’s settled.”

“Yes. Of course, I believe you must make it clear that your father asked for your recommendation.”

“Ah, right.” I nodded. That went without saying. I couldn’t be the main motivator if we were going to make this father’s achievement. It needed to be clear that I was only moving because he asked me to.

“And one more thing, if I may...”

“What is it?”

“I believe it would be more effective if Dyphon were to deliver the letter.”

“Dyphon? Why?”

“To flaunt that a legendary dragon is so head over heels for you, she would even run your errands.”

“Oh...” I didn’t know how that would work out with her, but... “All right. I’ll try asking her.” I thanked Scarlet and left her residence.

I once again sat face-to-face with my father in the reception hall as I relayed Scarlet’s idea. “Well? What do you think, father?”

“Of course!” he exclaimed right as I finished speaking. “I’d be incredibly

grateful!”

“Really? I feel like this isn’t much, though...”

“Not at all,” he insisted. Then, he suddenly settled back down, the light in his eyes fading into something more somber. “You see, Liam... I believe people have their limits in life. That must be why I failed the dragon subjugation all those years ago—because I dared to achieve more than I was capable of, far beyond my worth.”

“Father...”

“So this is more than enough for me. Besides”—his lips quirked into a bright smile—“any achievement grants a three-generation extension, so why bother taking the more dangerous path?”

“I see...” I nodded. He certainly wasn’t wrong.

While talking with Scarlet, I had thought of another possibility: to make my sister my wife. That is, the Hamilton house presenting Liam-Lardon’s king with a wife, much like how Scarlet was now with me. After all, a political marriage would strengthen ties between our countries, so the Hamilton house would undoubtedly be rewarded the achievement.

However, this idea only came to me because I was reincarnated and had no actual blood ties with the Hamilton family. There was no way for any noble short of royalty to actually be married to his own sister.

“So, please... Could I ask this of you, Liam?”

“All right. I’ll send Dyphon as my envoy.”

“Dyphon...?” Father blinked and, for a while, stared at me blankly—then my words sank in. He gasped. “Y-You mean...one of the other evil—I mean, divine dragons?!”

He hurriedly corrected himself since he knew she was one of my allies now. Well, it couldn’t be helped—he’d held that perception of her for a long time, so I didn’t place any special meaning in his slip of the tongue.

“That’s right.”

“C-Can you do that?”

“Probably. I was planning to ask her now.”

“Oh...” His shoulders sagged in disappointment. Perhaps he assumed it was already set in stone.

Regardless, I turned to the ceiling and called out, toward no particular direction, “Dyphon, are you there?”

A few seconds later, the ground rumbled. The noise grew louder and louder as it got closer, until—*boom!* An explosion blew up a wall in the room, kicking up a cloud of dust.

“Wh-What in the world?” Father coughed, eyes wide and bewildered, while I stood there watching calmly as Dyphon barged into the room.

“You called?” she said, not even casting my father a glance as she turned to me with big, innocent eyes.

“I have a favor to ask you, Dyphon.”

Father’s eyes blew wide. “D-Dyphon? This girl?”

Her sharp glare turned his way. “What’s with this guy?”

“Don’t lay a hand on him. He’s my father.”

“What?!” Her piercing glare dissipated in an instant, shifting into a much kinder and brighter look. The sudden flip left my father sputtering in confusion, but Dyphon simply beamed and exclaimed, “Then you’re my dad!”

Father’s jaw dropped. “Huuuh?!”

“What?” I asked. “How, exactly...?”

“Didn’t you say he’s your father? Then I should call him ‘dad’... At least, I’ve heard that’s what humans do.”

“Oh... That’s what you meant.” Right, I got where she was coming from. Dyphon wanted to have a child with me, so she believed he was her father-in-law. *I get it. I mean, I don’t accept it, but I get it.* “More importantly, Dyphon, I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Uh-huh? What is it? Do you want to warm an egg with me?”

“No, I don’t.” *Why an egg?* I wondered for a second but swiftly tossed the

thought aside. I went on to explain my request—that I wanted her to go to Jamille and tell them I was recommending my little sister to be their queen consort.

Dyphon would be serving as my “messenger,” as per Scarlet’s advice, but in this case there was a thin line between a messenger and gofer. I was kind of expecting her to get mad, but she simply tilted her head and said, “Huh? That’s all?”

“Will you do it?” I asked.

“Sure. No biggie.”

“Really? Thank you.”

“Buuut...” Dyphon shuffled over to my side and peered up at my face, less like the dignified dragon she should be and more like a needy cat. “Kiss me first.”

“Huh?”

“Kiss first, then I’ll deliver it for you.”

“Uh... All right.”

“For just one kiss...?” Father mumbled in a daze. The sight of one of the three ancient dragons asking me for a kiss like a maiden in love must have been too much for him, especially since he’d had such a bad experience with another dragon in the past.

After hesitating for a moment, I leaned over and kissed Dyphon on the cheek.



She fell silent.

“W-Was that okay...?” I asked.

Contrary to my fears, her face melted into a smile. “Eheh heh...”

I guessed that was enough for her.

“To our kind, the location of the kiss is of no importance. Besides copulation, everything else is more or less the same,” Lardon explained.

“All right. Here.” I handed the letter to the beaming girl—I’d prepared it after speaking with Scarlet.

Dyphon accepted the letter. “Who should I hand this over to?”

“Jamille’s...” I trailed off, glancing at my father.

“E-Either the king or prime minister will do,” he answered.

“Well, you heard him. Can you do it?”

“Hand it over to the human king, right? Easy! I’ll see ya in a sec!” Dyphon then left through the hole she’d smashed in the wall.

After seeing her off, I turned back to my father. He was still staring slack-jawed at the open hole. “Father?”

“Huh? Y-Yes?”

“That should settle the matter. You can return and make your preparations.”

“R-Right.” Father nodded and, for some reason, held his gaze on me.

“What’s the matter?” I couldn’t help but ask. He’d been staring at me like that every now and then since yesterday.

“Liam, you...”

“Yes?”

“You’ve...become very kingly.”

“Hm?” What did he mean by that?

“Have you always been like this? Or did your position spur on your growth? No...” Father quietly shook his head. “If that were possible, then Albrevit would

have long been far more..." He let out a heavy sigh and finally turned to me again, sitting up straight before deeply bowing his head.

"Father?"

"I thank you for your great benevolence...Your Majesty," he whispered solemnly.

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One afternoon, I was strolling aimlessly around the city when a noble vampire called out to me.

“Lord Liam, please try this!” he said, offering me a plate full of small pearl-like bits of varying shapes.

I took one and tossed it into my mouth. “Hmmm... It’s sweet. Is it some sort of candy?”

He bobbed his head. “It doesn’t have a name yet, but after seeing your manastones, I thought to make these by drying layers of sugared water.”

“Ohhh.” I took another piece and rolled it between my fingers. The layered structure was definitely similar to that of manastones. It didn’t have any odd flavor to it, so most likely no fire was used in the process. “It’s good. Thanks.”

The noble vampire visibly brightened at my praise. “Um, would it be all right for me to name these Liam candies?!”

“Are you sure? I didn’t help make them at all.”

“Of course!”

“All right. Go ahead.”

“Thank you very much!”

The noble vampire happily gave me a pouch of Liam candies, which I stuffed into my pocket as I resumed my walk—with little progress, however. Nearly each step of the way, monsters would call out to me in a similar fashion.

“Lord Liam! Please try these clothes on!”

“Lord Liam! Would you like to give our alcohol a try?”

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam, wanna play?”

As the city developed and took shape, its resident monsters began spending their time differently. The candy from earlier was but one example; everyone

had taken to making new things, coming up with novel ideas I never would have even imagined. The city was progressing even faster thanks to them, giving me all the more reason to walk around for any possible inspiration for magic.

Lardon chuckled. *"You truly love magic."*

"Yeah, I do."

"More than that one?"

I raised a brow. "More than who—"

An impact hit my side, and I instinctively braced myself with my foot to stay upright. I looked down, feeling a pair of arms wrap around me—it was Dyphon.

"Darling!" she crowed, nuzzling against me. "Hee hee, darling's scent..."

"Uh, Dyphon, that's kind of embarrassing..."

"Aww, why? I did you a favor a while back, didn't I? Can't I have this much?"

"I-I guess so." I couldn't exactly push her away now, not after that reminder, so I let her be. Looking around, I became aware of the many gazes now fixed on us, filled with curiosity—no, not curiosity...

"I wanna hug Lord Liam too..."

"Maybe later. If you try to go now, Dyphon will send you flying."

"For sure..."

It wasn't for the reasons I had in mind, but their stares were embarrassing all the same. I scoured the scene, desperate for an excuse to make it all stop, when I felt Dyphon's arms tighten around me.

"What's the matter, darling?"

"Well, uh... I was looking for something to eat," I blurted out.

"Are you hungry?"

"Not really... I'm just craving something new, I guess," I murmured, recalling the Liam candies in my pocket.

"Something new, huh? All right. Wait here."

"Huh?" Before I could even ask what she meant, Dyphon let go of me and

flew away at the speed of light. “And there she goes...but where to?”

“Perhaps to procure rare foodstuffs,” Lardon proposed.

“Oh... Like what? Any idea?”

“None. Ninety percent of the ingredients our kind knows would be considered rare by human standards.”

“Ninety?!” I shrieked. “Well, I guess there’s no guessing what she’ll bring, then...”

I popped another Liam candy into my mouth, deciding to just shrug it off. Lardon would be right here to tell me if whatever it was turned out to be harmful, so I set my worries aside and decided to continue my stroll until Dyphon returned.

“Make way, make way!”

Just then, a monster came pushing through the crowd. I’d never seen this guy around—he was humanoid with two arms and legs, but he had the head of a lizard and a thick tail sprouting from his rear. Unfazed by the many wary stares, he strutted my way with wide and confident strides, acting as if he owned the place.

“Aha! A human! Hey, kid—are you Liam?”

“That’s *Lord* Liam to you,” I heard someone growl before I could even answer. Whipping around, I found Gai the giant approaching, his eyebrows knit in annoyance at who seemed to be our latest intruder.

“Oh?” The lizard hummed. “You look strong. Well, not as strong as me, of course.”

“Is that so?” Gai answered. An indifferent response—it seemed being insulted to his face didn’t quite make him snap like hearing this monster speak casually with me.

“More importantly, who are you?” I asked.

“Ha ha! Well, normally, I wouldn’t even bother answering a human brat like you...”

His blatantly unnecessary foreword made Gai's eye twitch irritably, but I saw this reaction coming from a mile away, so I swiftly grabbed his arm and shook my head. Attacking humans was a big no-no, of course, but that didn't mean he could start a fight so willy-nilly with *monsters*—especially since this nation was populated mostly by monsters to begin with. I thought it would be best for us to hear him out till the end.

“Well, whatever. Listen well, all right? I am the Silver Thunderclap, the strongest *vritra* warrior!”

“Silver...Thunderclap?” I repeated.

“It must be a nickname of sorts.”

“He's introducing himself with his *nickname*...?”

“He certainly seems like the type, no?”

“Oh. Yeah, you're absolutely right.” He fit it perfectly. That said, calling him the Silver Thunderclap, even just in my head, was way too embarrassing. I decided to just call him “Vritra,” which I assumed was the name of his race.

Anyway, after Vritra introduced himself, he propped a hand on his hip and put on a smug smirk. His personality was getting clearer by the second.

“On that note,” Lardon suddenly added, *“perhaps you're not aware, but Gai and Chris also introduce themselves with their nicknames.”*

“Oh...” That was news to me. But, well, I'd say that was also par for the course for those two—which made me see Vritra in a new light. I was starting to feel rather fond of him too.

Unfortunately, it seemed Gai wasn't of the same mind. He looked at Vritra with cold eyes and huffed. “So, what business do you have here, *veetrash*?”

“I'm a *vritra*!” he snapped. “Hmph, whatever. Human!” He turned to me again. “Is it true that you built this city?”

“Huh? Well, yeah.”

“Well done. Not bad, I'd say.”

Once again, I had to hold Gai back from pouncing on the guy. “Well, thanks.

And?”

“I’ll gladly take it from here. Be grateful!”

I blinked. “What are you talking about?”

“Hm? You didn’t hear me?” Vritra shook his head. “Well, I guess humans don’t really have the best ears out there. I said, I’ll take it from here.”

“You mean...you want me to leave?”

“Sure do! I mean, a human being the king of monsters—now that’s just absurd, isn’t it?”

“Hm... I guess so.” Surely, many would think the same way if they didn’t know our circumstances, so I understood where he was coming from.

“So,” he drawled, “I’ll take it from here. Don’t worry, I’ll offer this place to my liege!”

“Your liege?”

“Yeah! A great being *actually* worthy of ruling monsters!”

“Ah...” I got the picture now. Basically, he was calling on me to surrender and submit. *Still, I can’t exactly...*

“Milord,” Gai grumbled. “Could you please release me now? I believe we must put this fool in his place.”

“Hm... You’re right.” I nodded and let go of his arm, but as he stepped forward to face Vritra, I called out to him. “Gai.”

“Yes?”

“You can’t kill him. Make sure to hold back.”

“Tell him,” Lardon cut in, “*I’m sure I can trust you to do that.*”

“I’m sure I can trust you to do that,” I parroted.

Instantly, Gai’s expression flipped from pure anger to a bright smile. “Of course!”

Damn, Lardon’s good. A single sentence, and Gai calmed down quite a bit. I was getting ready to cast Time Shift just in case he went overboard and killed

Vritra, but it seemed that was no longer needed, so I undid my preparations.

“What? You wanna go?” Vritra said.

“Certainly. You need to learn your place, veetrash.”

Vritra only laughed heartily. “Too bad! A big fella like you? I know your weakness.”

“Oh?”

“Behold!” Vritra instantly split into eight bodies, and each had a hand stretched out and fingers joined, as if to mimic a blade. “My Whirlwind Barrage!!!”

As their voices reached a crescendo, the eight bodies charged at Gai together—and then, suddenly, one was stopped in his tracks.

“What—?!” Vritra gaped. His arm was firmly in Gai’s clutches.

“You are nowhere near as quick as the boar woman.” Gai swung his club with his other hand, sending Vritra spinning vertically in the air and plummeting to the ground face-first.

Greatly pleased by Gai’s victory, cheers instantly broke out from our audience of monsters.

“You didn’t kill him, right?” I asked over the din.

“I’ve abided by your orders,” Gai assured me as he pointed at Vritra.

The poor guy’s head was stuck in the ground and his butt was pointed to the sky—a pretty comical position, really—but his occasional convulsions showed he was, at the very least, alive.

Vritra later woke up with a jolt.

“Wh-Where am I?!” he asked immediately, his eyes darting all over the place.

Having been quelled with a single punch, Vritra now seemed less like a threat and more like a naughty child. The onlookers lost their interest, and now only a third of the initial crowd remained.

“Are you awake now?” I asked, eliciting a flinch from the guy. “You’re pretty

tough, aren't you? I was going to heal you, but there was no need."

"Wh-Where did that man go?"

"You mean Gai?"

"Yeah! Tell me where he went!"

"Are you going to get revenge on him?"

"No! I must introduce such a strong warrior to my liege!"

"Hm..." So not only did he not bear a grudge against Gai for beating him, he even acknowledged and praised his strength. As I thought, I just couldn't bring myself to hate this guy. "Actually, who's that 'liege' you've been mentioning?"

"Well—"

Suddenly, something fell from the sky and rocked the ground, and once again, I found myself bound by a tackle and a pair of arms.

"I'm back, darling!" Dyphon announced. "Thanks for waiting!"

What horrible timing... "Let go of me for a bit, will you?"

"Huh? Why?"

"I'm in the middle of a serious discussion here."

"Who cares about that? Here, have some of this!" Willful as always, Dyphon dismissed my words and pushed an apple-like fruit against my mouth.

Meanwhile, Vritra's eyes grew wide as saucers. "L-Lord Dyphon?"

"Hm?" Dyphon gave him a glance. "Who're you?"

"Huuuh?!" That short question seemed to have knocked his soul out of his body. "H-Have you forgotten? I am the Silver Thunderclap..."

"Who?"

Vritra's jaw dropped miserably to the floor.

Wait... I looked at them back and forth. *Could it be...this guy's liege is Dyphon?*

Vritra was so down in the dumps, I felt bad just watching him. Taking pity on the poor guy, I turned to Dyphon and asked, “Are you sure you don’t remember him?”

“Hm...” She hardly looked interested when Vritra asked her, but now that I was pressing her, she seemed to give it some serious thought. “Hm, I wonder... Hm... Hmmm... Hmmmmm... Hmmmmmmmmmm—”

“Okay, I get it. That’s enough,” I hurriedly cut in.

A sideward glance revealed an even more depressed Vritra. It looked like my good intentions didn’t bring about any good results for him. The fact that Dyphon *genuinely* couldn’t recall him even after an entire minute of trying was the finishing blow that pushed him off the edge and into the pits of despair.

Thus, I changed tactics. “What about *you*, Lardon?”

Having lived through the same “time” as Dyphon, Lardon would be the next most likely to know. I could often count on her to possibly remember even human-related matters. And sure enough, she had an answer.

“I do,” Lardon said. *“Simply put, he is a worshipper of hers.”*

Bingo! “Her worshipper?” I asked.

“Correct. That being said, he is nothing more than a fly buzzing around her while harping on that he could serve her the best—a floundering fool.”

“Oh...” I turned my gaze to Vritra, who was still shell-shocked. *Yeah, that sounds about right.* That wasn’t very different from how he acted today—he came barging in and did this and that, all for Dyphon, who didn’t even remember him. I couldn’t help but pity the guy.

“You...” Vritra staggered to his feet. For a moment, I wondered if he’d recovered from his shock, only to see that he was glaring daggers my way. “You’ve deceived Lord Dyphon, haven’t you?!”

“No, I—”

“Raaaaah!” he bellowed and charged toward me—only to be eradicated by a beam the next second!

“Time Shift!” I instantly rewound time as far back as I could, up to the moment before Vritra was eradicated by the beam.

“You... You’ve deceived—”

I hurriedly grabbed Dyphon’s hand. Before I rewound time, she’d erased Vritra with an attack so swift that I didn’t have time to react, probably because of how he was acting toward me. I needed to stop her from erasing him from existence again, but I already used up nearly all my mana with Time Shift. I’d managed to rewind time but had no means to deal with the situation. With the mana I had left, forget Dyphon—I couldn’t even deal with Vritra.

What should I do?! My mind raced for a solution. Think!

In a moment of panic, I pulled Dyphon toward me and wrapped my arms around her.

Dyphon’s eyes widened for a moment, then she immediately returned the hug. “Oh, darling,” she crooned.

My distraction seemed to have worked. Dyphon was no longer paying Vritra any mind. With this, I’d saved his life, but...

“Wh-Wh-Wha-Wha-Whaaaaa...?!”

He took an immense amount of mental damage instead. The sight of Dyphon melting into my arms and swooning over like a maiden in love left Vritra malfunctioning like a broken machine.

“Oh...” Dyphon murmured. “I see... I get it.” She pulled herself out of my embrace and looked up at me with a bright smile. “You’re amazing, darling. You saved him, didn’t you?”

“Yeah. You noticed?”

“Mm-hmm. I could tell from your expression. Besides, you stopped me right in time. Time Shift, right?”

I nodded. She was immature and willful on a regular basis, but Dyphon was still a divine dragon like Lardon—clever and observant.

Dyphon giggled. “My darling’s amazing!”

“It’s not something worth praising me over that much...”

“It is,” she insisted. “You’re the only one who could protect someone from me.”

Really? Hm... I guess so.

“Oh, you...” Dyphon’s words melted into a pile of giggles as she glomped me once more.

“Ack!” Vritra was left with no time to recover from his shock. His sanity, which he had slowly salvaged while we were talking, was once again knocked right down by the girl’s giddy smiles.

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"You had best set the reins on her while you can."

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"Since you used Time Shift, that man must have been completely eradicated, no?" Lardon said, sharp as ever. Though, I'm sure this time it also had to do with her familiarity with Dyphon.

"You're right."

"Knowing him, this wouldn't be the last time he digs his own grave. Leave him alone, and he will get himself killed again."

Hmmm... We definitely can't have that. Even though I only just met him, I could already imagine things turning out that way. His soul seemed to be taking a little trip from his body right now, but once he regained his wits, he'd probably lash out at me and get himself blown to smithereens by Dyphon all over again.

Time Shift cost a *lot* of mana, with just a few seconds eating up every bit I had. Frankly, I couldn't save Vritra a second time. I looked down at Dyphon, blissfully nuzzling against me. *I need to stop her...but how?*

"What's wrong, darling?"

"Um... Well, you see..."

"Hm?"

Yeah, I got nothing. My head spun as I wondered if I could somehow fix this with magic.

Lardon chuckled. *"How very like you. Very well, allow me to help. Repeat after me."*

Oh, you're a lifesaver! I could always count on Lardon at times like this.

"I need to talk with this guy later," Lardon began.

"I need to talk with this guy later."

"About what?" Dyphon asked.

"You'll find out after. More importantly, I want to hear him out till the end, so don't lay a hand on him no matter what."

"You'll find out later. More importantly, I want to hear him out till the end, so don't lay a hand on him no matter what."

"Pfft..."

"Pfft... Huh?"

Dyphon cocked her head. "What's wrong, darling?"

I could hear Lardon stifling her laughter. *"Apologies, I couldn't help myself. You were repeating after me down to the last syllable..."*

Isn't it safer that way? This wasn't my area of expertise, so I felt better following her advice as closely as possible.

"Ha ha. You never change... Let us continue," she said. *"Sorry, it's nothing. Anyway, promise me you won't lay a hand on him."*

"Sorry, it's nothing. Anyway, promise me you won't lay a hand on him," I said, parroting her once more.

Dyphon's lips tightened. "Hmmm..."

"Please. Do it for me."

"Please. Do it for me."

Finally, Dyphon gave in. "Gah! Okay, I promise! I won't lay a hand on him, no matter what!" she crowed, clinging onto me with a bright smile. "Give me a second... Hup!" She held her hand out and cast a spell. Then, her upper limbs quietly faded away.

"What was that?"

"Time Leap," she answered.

"Time Leap... Is that a spell?"

"Uh-huh. I dropped my limbs off a day back. This way, I can't kill him even if I

wanted to.”

“You...what?”

She spoke like it was no big deal, but her explanation made absolutely no sense to me. Still, judging from the spell’s name and what she just said, it sounded like some crazy time magic spell. *I wish she’d tell me more...*

Just then, Lardon’s chuckle snapped me out of my thoughts. *Ack! This isn’t the time for this!* First, I had to do something about Vritra.

“Fight me, you coward!” was the first thing Vritra yelled the moment he regained his wits, after I had teleported him to the yard in the mansion for our talk.

“Thank goodness I stopped her,” I mumbled to myself, casting a hesitant glance at Dyphon’s twitchy smile. Vritra would’ve been long gone from this world had I not. “Why should I fight you?”

“You’ve tricked both Lord Dyphon and that guy earlier! You had to have used some sort of cheap trick to become the king of monsters as a human! I’ll beat you and reveal your true colors!”

“A cheap trick...” *So that’s how it’s gonna be, huh? Simply put...* “I just have to beat you, right?”

“Fool! I would never lose to a human like you!” he bellowed, splitting into clones like he did in his fight against Gai. I couldn’t feel any mana from them, meaning they weren’t made with magic. As I suspected, they were afterimages left behind through his high-speed movement.

In that case, I had just the countermeasure.

Among my familiars, Chris and Asuna also specialized in speed. At one point, I wondered, *“How would I fight them?”* I held out my hand, gathered my mana, and chanted the very spell I came up with to answer that question.

“Swamp!”

Instantly, the afterimages disappeared, and something transparent tangled around Vritra’s feet, hindering his movement as if trapping him in a wetland.

“Wh-What is this?!” he yelled.

All that was left was for me to give him a good whack. I drew my hand back, clenched it into a fist, and thrust it back out along with a barrage of mana. “Power Missile, forty-one rounds!”

“Wha—?!” Stuck in place, Vritra helplessly took all forty-one magic arrows. Of course, as soon as they hit, the magic entangling his feet disappeared, swiftly blasting him to the sky. “Buh— Argh— Hwagh!” He spun in midair while letting out some bizarre grunts, before plummeting back down and crashing into the ground headfirst.

“Wow! Wooow! Darling, you’re amazing! So incredible!”

Having decided the match was over, Dyphon ran up and—since she couldn’t hug me—began hopping all around me, her excitement practically radiating through the air.

“My sincerest apologies!” was the first thing Vritra said after I pulled him out of the ground. All his hostility was gone with the wind, nowhere to be seen as he bowed deeply before me. “I was wrong! Please forgive me!”

“Um, just what...?”

“Quite the simpleminded fellow, no?” said Lardon. *“You knocked him down, so he has acknowledged your strength.”*

“Oh...” Frankly, I wasn’t expecting this to happen after just one hit, but this certainly saved us a lot of time.

“You are strong—strong enough to be the king of monsters!”

“Hmph. Looks like you finally get it,” Dyphon preened.

“I extend my apology to you as well, Lord Dyphon!” Vritra prostrated himself before her, a gesture noticeably humbler than the one he gave me. “I jumped to the wrong conclusion!”

“Whatever. I don’t really care.”

Vritra flinched. “Uh... R-Right! You two look great together!”

“We do?” Her cold and disinterested eyes instantly sparkled as she leaned over Vritra. “Do you mean it?”

“Of course! Only the king of monsters could just barely be a match for someone of your stature!”

Dyphon giggled. “You’re smarter than I thought,” she mused, looking very pleased with his compliment. It looked like I no longer needed to worry about Vritra being erased from existence. “Darling,” she called. “You know, this guy’s got some promise, don’t you think?”

“Um... I guess?” I sensed a *lot* of bias from that assessment, but Vritra’s speed *was* pretty impressive, so I couldn’t discredit her just yet.

“Why don’t you give him a name and make him your familiar?”

“You mean, cast Familia on him?”

“Uh-huh!”

“Hm...” I turned to Vritra. “Say, do you want to live in this—”

“But of course! I belong wherever Lord Dyphon is!”

“All right.” I nodded. “For you to live here, I’ll have to cast a spell on you.”

“Roger that!”

I held my hand out toward him and cast Familia. I’d been calling him “Vritra,” but that was originally just the name of his species. This time, I gave him a proper name. “Starting today, you are Vajra,” I declared, finishing off the spell.

Light flashed, enveloping Vritra—now Vajra—then subsided, revealing to us his transformed body. His frame was smaller and his horns and wings remained, while his overall appearance became more humanlike.

“G-Goodness...!”

Of course, he also got stronger. Excited by his newfound strength, Vajra showed that he could now form six afterimages with much greater speed than before.

Inside the audience hall, I sat on the throne with wolfmen guards standing on both sides. According to Scarlet, I would soon encounter many situations where I must present myself as a king, so she recommended abiding by these formalities when needed. Wolfmen, blessed with both good looks and strength, were chosen to serve as these so-called ceremonial guards, protecting both my flanks and my image. They settled easily into their new role, like how most elves had taken posts as maids.

In any case, we were currently on ceremony because of the young man kneeling before me—Frank, a messenger sent by my father. I listened to his report and nodded. “I see. So the preparations are going smoothly.”

“Indeed. Lord Charles will personally bring the young lady to the capital next month.”

“Next month? So soon?”

“Yes! In fact, there have already been delays, as we needed to ensure the safety of their trip.”

No, that’s not what I meant... We were talking about my little sister, weren’t we? My little baby sister who was just learning how to walk? Yet they were already bringing her to the capital? I thought this was just going to be a marriage in name and engagement in essence, at least until she grew up...

“After delivering the young lady, Lord Charles would like to come and express his gratitude in person.”

“All right. Tell him I’ll be waiting.”

“Understood.” Still kneeling, Frank reverently bowed his head. He lifted his face a beat later. “I have also been entrusted with a certain item from Lord Charles. May I present it to you, Your Majesty?”

“Hm? You mean he brought me something?” I nodded, granting him permission.

Frank stood and gestured behind him, to one of his men on standby near the door. The subordinate nodded, leaned out the door, and whispered to someone else. Soon, several men came in carrying boxes and whatnot. The boxes probably contained money, while the others were likely all sorts of curios and antiques. They were wrapped in cloth, but I could tell from their shapes.

“We hope you can accept our humble offerings,” Frank said as his subordinates lined up the gifts before me.

I nodded. “All right. Thanks,” I said, watching as some giants came in and took the gifts away.

“And one more...” Frank cleared his throat. “Lord Charles has explicitly ordered me to ensure *this* reaches your hands.” He took out a book from his jacket.

My eyes widened. “Is that...?”

“Indeed, it is a grimoire—”

“Ohhh! What kind?” I leaped up to my feet and jogged over to Frank, taking the book from his hands. Lardon’s chuckle echoed in my head, but that was the last thing on my mind. My eyes were set on this new grimoire.

“My apologies, I am not very knowledgeable on magic... However, Lord Charles certainly acquired this grimoire from a trustworthy source,” Frank guaranteed. “It is suspected to be quite the grand spell, as no one has ever been capable of using it.”

“Wow, that’s great!” I opened the grimoire on the spot and began reading it under the watchful gazes of everyone in the hall. My eyes eagerly trailed over the text, but soon, I furrowed my brows and grunted.

“H-How is it, if I may ask?”

“Well, it’s a bit... Hm...?”

“Er, could there be a problem?” Frank asked, a mix of fear and panic on his face.

“A problem... No, not really. But this grimoire’s weird.”

“By weird, you mean...?”

“Well, this is a real grimoire, that’s for sure. But something’s off.” I tilted my head, giving the book another read. First off, this was definitely, without a doubt, a genuine article. However... “I feel like the spell won’t activate even if I follow these steps.”

“Oh...” Frank stared blankly, not quite following.

Lardon chuckled. *“I would suppose not.”*

“Hm? You know something, Lardon?”

“Indeed. This kind of grimoire was quite popular once, although not for long,” she explained. *“As you suspected, it is a real but incomplete grimoire, made intentionally so.”*

“Intentionally? But why?”

“Who knows? Humans do the strangest things,” Lardon mused. She very much sounded like she did know why.

“What did you mean when you said it’s incomplete?”

“If I were to use a simpler analogy... Yes, say you have a cake recipe, for example,” she began. *“It is simple and concise—clearly the recipe for a delicious cake. However, for some reason, you find no mention of sugar. Following the steps will surely leave you with a cake that looks and smells wonderful, yet a single bite would reveal it contains no sweetness whatsoever.”*

I gasped. “That’s it!” That analogy put everything into place.

Given a cake recipe with no sugar, a baker could still figure out where to slot it in. In that sense, now that I knew *something* was missing from this grimoire, I could easily figure out what to fill in, and where.

I reread the grimoire from the start, slotted in the missing piece, and finally cast the spell. The book glowed in my hand, a ball of fire emerging from my other.

“Fireball!”



“Ohhh! To have mastered it so quickly... Truly astounding!” Frank exclaimed.

I guess that was how it looked from his perspective, but in actuality, it wasn't quite such a smooth ride. Lardon, however, knew that and still had words of praise for me. *“Hah... You truly are a magic genius. Repairing an incomplete grimoire can easily be more difficult than simply making a new one from scratch.”*

I beamed, pleased by the praise and this new experience.

In the mansion's parlor, I sat facing Bruno with a table in between. It was a rather common scene for us nowadays, except this time, Bruno was clearly baffled and stuttering helplessly, his gaze flicking back and forth between me and the girl presently stuck to my side without a care in the world.

"Er, could this be...Her Majesty the Queen?" he reluctantly asked.

"No, she's—"

"That's right!" Dyphon crowed, jabbing a finger toward Bruno. "You've got a keen eye! Nice!"

"O-Oh... Thank you very much," Bruno answered, but when he turned to me, his gaze was full of doubt.

Suddenly, Lardon chuckled. *"Clever lad."*

Huh? Her praise took me by surprise.

"You are this country's top authority figure," she explained. *"The only person he needs to curry favor with. Hence, he will not trust anyone's words but yours."*

Oh... So that's what it was about. As always, she was worlds more attuned to these subtleties than me. *Well, setting that aside...* "No, she's not."

"Awww! Darling, you meanie!"

"Meanie? You're the one clinging onto me whenever you want..." I sighed and cast her a sideward glance, while Bruno looked just as perplexed as before.

Dyphon pouted. "Boo... What do you not like about me, darling? Is it because I'm a dragon?"

Bruno cocked his head. "A dragon?"

I nodded. "Have you ever heard of Dyphon?"

"What?" His eyes snapped to her. "From the Tri-Draconic War?!"

"So you know. That'll make this quick." I gestured to Dyphon. "This is her."

Bruno's eyes blew wide and his mouth fell agape. "S-So she is the legendary..." He trailed off and gulped. "A-As expected of you, Your Majesty. I am lost for words."

I raised a brow. "As expected...?"

"Indeed. Only you could possibly charm a dragon. It is my greatest honor to be able to do business with you."

"Hmmm..." I smiled wryly. Bruno was acting as humble as ever. He was actually my, or rather, Liam's older brother, so it was pretty impressive that he could so consistently act the way he did. "Anyway, what did you come here for today?"

Bruno nodded. "First, I would like to discuss Dragonstone."

"Dragonstone?" Dyphon echoed.

"He's talking about this." I summoned my item box and showed her a piece of pure white charcoal that I had made with spirit summoning. Bruno was selling these with the brand name "Dragonstone."

Dyphon took it from my hand and scrutinized it. "Did you make this?"

"Yeah. With magic."

She hummed. "Pretty impressive, darling."

"You can tell?"

"Uh-huh. Humans have always struggled with how to use fire." She turned to Bruno. "Do you use this in iron manufacturing?"

"Yes. Most of it is sold to swordsmiths," he answered.

"Figures. Such pure charcoal has got to be popular with them."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Does purity have anything to do with smithing?"

"Huh?" Dyphon blinked, seemingly caught off guard by my question. Bruno stepped in to answer instead.

"It does," he said. "Ordinary coal contains impurities that would stick to the iron and lower its quality. Hence, the purity of fuel is an important factor in iron

manufacturing.”

“Oh...” I turned back to Dyphon. *So she knew all that beforehand?* She mentioned it like it was so obvious too—a stark contrast to how she usually acted.

“She is still a dragon, after all.” Lardon chuckled, and I furtively nodded in agreement.

“Once again, I am grateful to you for entrusting the Dragonstone business to me,” Bruno continued. “Truly, words cannot fully express my gratitude.”

I shrugged. “Well, we’re getting our share too.”

“Thank you,” he said again, bowing deeply. “If I may, there is a suggestion I would like to make, Your Majesty.”

“A suggestion?”

“We have been receiving more and more inquiries, you see, as our patrons are greatly satisfied by your Dragonstone,” he explained. “They would like to know if you have any more such products to market. Perhaps you have something in mind?”

“Oh, I see... Hm... What about you?” I said, tossing the question right back at him.

“If you would take my humble opinion,” he began. “Humans cannot go without food, shelter, and clothing. Excluding extreme circumstances such as famine, these three remain a stable constant in the market.”

“Hm...” I never thought of it that way, but he wasn’t wrong. Food to eat, clothes to wear, and a roof to sleep under—these were all necessary in life.

“Among these, shelter does not often see new demand. Therefore, I believe you may choose between food and clothing.”

“All right. Give me a few days to think, Bruno.”

“Thank you very much!” Bruno stood and bowed deeply.

Later on, I stood in my room, pondering and staring hard at the large amount

of cotton piled up before me.

Among the three necessities, Bruno had recommended food or clothing. We already had the instant noodles for food, so I decided to come up with something for clothing—something I could make with magic, the same way I did with the noodles and Dragonstone.

Magic was a miraculous power. With it, anything was possible—and there was no way clothing was the exception. After a night spent on brainstorming, I came up with an idea to prove just that. I immediately put it to the test using all this raw cotton as materials.

“Spinning Wheel!”

The magic’s light enveloped the cotton, morphing it into a simple piece of clothing. I turned it over and stretched it a bit before nodding. “Good. It worked.”

“*That won’t do,*” Lardon said.

“Huh?” She sounded so sure, like she was just stating a fact, so I had no doubt in her judgment. But I still wanted to know the reason. “Wh-Why not?”

“*It is too complex. You crafted and executed a spell that creates clothes from cotton—a truly impressive feat, made possible with your magic talent.*”

“Th-Then...?”

“*Who besides you could use such a spell?*”

“Ah...” I blinked and took a moment. With experience came a better grasp at how difficult a spell was, and this spell, now that I checked, was definitely on the harder side.

“*This country is now home to over ten thousand monsters, but I would say only one or two can use your spell.*”

“Hrghhh...” Her words were harsh but true.

“*I would not go so far as to say the spell must be usable by all, but it must be by most, if it is to sustain a business. Dragonstone succeeded in that regard, for its production process was simple.*”

I nodded. Dragonstone, or pure white charcoal, could be made just by summoning and allocating tasks to a Salamander and Gnome. “Oh...”

“Hm? What is it?”

“I just thought of a good way.”

“Oh?” Lardon hummed, full of anticipation.

Now it was time for me to meet her expectations.

A few days later, Bruno and I stood inside a building that had been urgently built on one corner of the city, watching as groups of slimes cast spell after spell. Slimes had a habit of stretching vertically like rubber balls when casting magic, so from where we stood, the place seemed flooded with bouncy waves.

“That team processes the raw cotton, that one turns it into threads, and those guys weave them into cloth,” I said, pointing out each one for Bruno. “Lastly, that team sews it into the prescribed style.”



Finally, I faced Bruno. “By allocating the spells this way, we can make the exact same product in large quantities.”

“Are they truly identical...?”

“They sure are.”

“A-Amazing!” Bruno exclaimed, standing ramrod straight in excitement.

Clothes varied greatly depending on the tailor’s expertise, as well as factors like where they sourced the thread and how they sewed it together. In fact, any craftwork in general suffered from inconsistency in crafting time and product quality.

“With my spells, any mage can produce the same product. By allocating the work, the production time stays consistent too.”

“Amazing! This is revolutionary, Your Majesty!”

“R-Really?”

His enthusiastic reaction left me quite baffled. I mean, I *was* pretty proud of this. The idea of allocating the workload came to me when I thought back to the Dragonstone production process. Still, I never expected him to be this gung ho about it.

“Of course! This is *spectacular*! It will bring waves of change to the clothing industry!” Bruno was so excited that he forgot to mind his etiquette, which he’d persistently stuck to all this while.

Is this really such a grand feat...?

I sat on my throne in the audience hall as two people stood in front of me: Bruno, slightly bowing and hands kept low, and Reina the elven maid, chest out and chin up as she read several documents.

“That concludes my report on the export value of clothing for this week,” she finished.

I nodded, though frankly, I couldn’t quite process the numbers she had just spouted. I heard them, sure, but I couldn’t make heads or tails of them. “So, how is it, exactly? Are those numbers good or bad?”

Reina turned to Bruno. *Ah, so she doesn’t know either.* Well, she was incredibly capable, but a monster wouldn’t really understand human economy.

Under two inquisitive gazes, Bruno bowed his head and answered, “Lightly put, things are going swimmingly.”

“Oh, really?”

“Indeed. The quality is consistent and superb for its price, making it incredibly popular. However...” He shook his head. “Everywhere else is in disarray. In this week alone, your clothing exports have monopolized ninety percent of sales.”

“Wow...” I couldn’t wrap my head around all those numbers earlier, but I knew what ninety percent was—a pretty impressive chunk, that was for sure.

“Thus, I’ve successfully sold all the stock you’ve given me. I can continue handling future sales, should you wish...” He trailed off, glancing expectantly at me with his head still bowed.

I shrugged. “There’s no need to change things up. I’ll leave it to you, Bruno.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Reina,” I called. “How’s the production line?”

“Thanks to the simplicity of your spells, eighty percent can use at least one of them.”

“Ohh, that’s great!” I beamed.

This time around, I came up with a system of divided labor for magic production. Since a single monster couldn’t complete a product, I thought to split the process into almost twenty spells which, as it turned out, allowed most monsters to contribute. It felt great seeing my magic being put to good use.

“If we divide the applicants into shifts, it should be possible to keep the production going nonstop day and night,” Reina finished.

“Goodness!” Bruno exclaimed, and unlike before, I could tell how impressive that was. “Is that truly possible?”

“Yes. It is thanks to not only the great usability of the spells but also the lights that Lord Liam invented—the Liam lamps. Without them, nobody would be able to work at night even if they wanted to.”

“I see! Astounding as always, Your Majesty! You must have invented those lamps in preparation for this!”

“That’s a bit of a stretch…” I gave a tight smile. I didn’t have all this in mind when I made those lamps. I just thought it’d be a lot more convenient to have some lighting after dark.

“To aid with the evening production, I can select personnel from the incompatible twenty percent to light the Liam lamps. Is this acceptable?”

“Sure. I’ll leave it to you.”

“Understood.” Reina bowed and began jotting something down on her papers. I made the spells, but at this point Reina was probably more knowledgeable than me on how they were being used. These spells were made as a set, meant to be used by many people, so from now on it would be out of my hands.

“Speaking of,” Bruno mumbled. “May I ask about your taxes?”

“Our taxes?”

“Yes.”

“Our taxes?” I asked again, this time facing Reina.

“As per Lord Liam’s orders, we have not been imposing any taxes.”

“Oh, right. I recall a past country that did the same thing. What was it again...?” I cocked my head, failing to recall.

“Zaram, perhaps?” Bruno said.

“I think?” I wasn’t really sure. Well, he was probably right anyway. “If it were me, I’d just leave it as is, but...” I looked at Bruno. “What do you think?” I thought of telling Reina to just keep it up, but neither of us were very knowledgeable on economics, so I decided to ask Bruno for his opinion.

He frowned. “Well...”

“Is it a bad idea?”

“Not at all. A taxless country is akin to a miraculous paradise set under the gods’ protection, to say the least.”

“That much?”

“Indeed. I would wager most people think the same.”

“So it’s pretty impressive?” *Again?* I asked implicitly.

“It is,” Bruno affirmed.

“Then there’s no problem...” I mumbled. “But it looked like something was bothering you.”

“Indeed. This is ultimately just my personal opinion, but I find it unfortunate that the citizens of this nation do not understand how amazing this is and thus do not think to praise you for it. Of course, I understand that this is because monsters do not comprehend tax and the like...”

“Oh...” I gave it some thought, but Bruno did say it was just his personal opinion, so I ultimately shrugged it off. “Then let’s just keep it—”

“Lord Bruno, do you perhaps know how to remedy that?” Reina suddenly cut in, much to my bewilderment. “We deeply respect Lord Liam, but as you say, we have failed to comprehend the grace he has bestowed upon us. Is there any way we can make it so Lord Liam receives just praise for this?”

Bruno hummed, stroking his chin and thinking it over. I didn’t really care, but

they both looked dead serious. “You could try setting up a lottery.”

“A lottery?” Reina parroted.

“You mean *that* lottery?” I asked.

“Indeed. *That* lottery.”

Reina didn’t know, but I did—after all, I’d used it a few times before I became Liam. A lottery was basically a fusion of a raffle and gambling, where you bought a card with a number and won a huge amount of money if your number happened to be chosen.

“If nobody wins the lottery, the money is reserved for the next round,” Bruno explained. “In the case of this country, you could take a small percentage of tax and return it to the populace. In human terms, it would be akin to gifting a house to a newly wedded couple. Of course, you would need to think of something else that monsters would like...”

“I see... How does that sound?” I asked Reina. She insisted on having this discussion, so she’d be the better judge.

“It sounds acceptable to me. Of course, we would need to announce that it is a gift from you, Lord Liam.”

“Well, sure. I don’t really—I mean, yeah, that’s all right.” Reina seemed deeply concerned about this, so I didn’t want to derail us any further by saying that I didn’t really care. I’d best leave this whole matter to these two. “Bruno,” I called. “Sorry, but could you lend us your wisdom?”

“Gladly.”

“Thanks.”

“In that case, we have one matter to resolve: the return rate.” Seeing our confusion, he explained, “For example, lotteries return sixty percent of the budget to the winner.”

“Oh. Can’t we just give them everything? I never really wanted to earn from this anyway.”

Bruno gasped. “Everything?!”

As I raised a brow, I heard Lardon chuckle. “Hm? What’s up, Lardon?”

“Why not return everything plus an extra ten percent from your own pocket?”

Hm? I didn’t know why she made such a suggestion, but as always, it was best to follow her advice on anything nonmagic. With that, I turned to Bruno and replied, “Make it a hundred and ten percent. I’ll contribute the extra ten.”

“G-Goodness!” Bruno exclaimed. “One hundred percent is astounding, but to return more than the base... Y-You truly never fail to impress, Your Majesty!”

“Amazing, Lord Liam!” Reina cheered.

“Huh? Is it...?” I didn’t really understand what got them so excited, but in any case, there seemed to be no problem here.

If only I’d known what a hot topic this would become among the human countries...

The following afternoon, I decided to take one of my usual strolls around the city.

It had gotten a touch more prosperous after we began mass-producing and exporting clothes with my new assemblage of spells. My evolved familiars, now more closely resembling humans, would find Bruno's partnered merchants peddling their wares to them. With people, goods, and money going around, this city was bustling with business and vigor.

"Hmph! I've yet to show my true skill!"

"Me too! I haven't even gotten started yet!"

Amid the bustle, my attention was drawn toward two very familiar voices. Following the sounds, I found myself in an open parklike space where giants and wolfmen were having drinks. Gai and Chris were in the center of the crowd, having a drinking contest using entire casks as mugs.

Standing with one hand propped on his waist and another lifting the cask, Gai poured its contents straight into his mouth and finished off with a long and satisfied breath. "Haaah! How was that?"

"That's a very flashy way to drink," I mused.

"Oh, milord! Care to join us?" Gai offered.

"We've got great drinks and delicious meat, Master!" Chris crowed.

As the other giants and wolfmen began crowding around me, I turned to the two and smiled. "No thanks. Not today." These two always got fiercely competitive around me. They seemed to be having a blast right now, so I wanted them to stay that way.

"Is that so...?"

"Too bad..."

"Sorry. Here, take this as my apology." I took a cask from my dust box and

passed it to them.

“What is this?” Gai asked.

“Thousand-year-old alcohol, made from grapes,” I answered. “Enjoy it with everyone.”

“Ohh! Alcohol brewed by milord himself!”

“A thousand years old! Wowie! Thanks, Master!”

After gifting them with alcohol only made possible with my dust box, I left them to their merrymaking and went on my way. Once I stepped out of the open space, I cast a glance back and hummed in thought—until Dyphon appeared out of nowhere, crashing into me for a hug.

“Darling!”

“Whoa!” I fell to the ground, taking Dyphon down with me. “Dyphon...”

“Hee hee...” She burrowed her face against me like a cat. “You smell so good, darling.”

“D-Do I?”

“Mm-hmm! I love your scent!”

My lips stretched into a wry smile. As a man, I didn’t really know how to react to such a compliment.

“By the way, what were you up to?” she asked. “You had a weird look on your face.”

“I did?” I patted my face. *Was it that weird for her to notice?*

“I know! You were thinking about what we should name our child!”

“Absolutely not!” I snapped, mostly by reflex.

“Boo. Oh well,” Dyphon grumbled. I feared she might get mad or cry, but apparently, she didn’t really mind and just shrugged it off. “Then what *were* you thinking of?”

“Oh... That,” I said, pointing at the drinking party behind me.

“They’re having a party,” Dyphon observed. “Do you want to join them?”

“No, that’s not it. Do you see those piles of trash around them?”

“Uh-huh.”

“I’m sure they’ll clean up after themselves, but what if a sudden gust of wind blows by?”

“Then all that trash will scatter around.”

“Exactly.”

Incidentally, in relatively larger human cities, the governors would entrust the garbage disposal to merchants. They would typically hold a bidding process with several merchants to minimize the cost, but the bigger the city, the greater the cost.

“I was thinking of how to dispose of the garbage.”

“Don’t you have your dust box?”

“There are some things I can’t do that with.”

“Really?”

“Look.” I pointed at Gai as he opened the thousand-year-old alcohol. “I gave that to them earlier. I made it by letting it sit in my dust box for a thousand years’ worth of time. Some things, like that bottle, don’t decay even for that long in my dust box.”

Dyphon hummed. “How about burning it? Most things disappear without a trace if you use flames hot enough,” she proposed while mustering mana from within. Embers danced around her figure, painting a truly fantastical scene.

Unfortunately, I had to turn her down. “That’s dangerous. A fire strong enough to burn things to nothingness could destroy the city if it runs wild.”

“I wouldn’t lose control.”

“*You* wouldn’t. For sure.” I could definitely trust *her*, but that wasn’t enough.

Recently, I’d taken to making magic not just for myself, but in a way that was usable and accessible to everyone here in the city. So, sure, Dyphon and I could manage it, but that wouldn’t do. Leave a task entirely to one person, and everything would come crumbling down once they disappeared. Systems were

set up for this very purpose, and I needed one now for the task of garbage disposal.

I snapped out of my reverie when I noticed Dyphon trembling. “Hm? What’s wrong, Dyphon? Why’re you shaking so—”

“I LOVE YOUUU!” She suddenly pushed me down to the ground, pinned me between her legs, and peppered my face with kisses.

“Huh?! Wh-What’s gotten into you?”

“I love you, darling! Thank you for trusting me!”

“O-Oh...” It turned out she was moved by what I said.

“Come on, darling! Let’s make a baby! Our very own offspring! Come on, please?”

“I told you— Huh?”

“Darling?”

“Your...offspring?”

“No, *our* offspring!”

I stared vacantly at the sky, reminded of the Dyphon Junior I had defeated before. “Your offspring...” I muttered—then gasped. “Oh, I know! Sorry, move aside for a bit.”

Pushing Dyphon off me, I got to my feet and started looking around. Shortly, I spotted a nearby box. Opening the lid revealed nothing inside. “Perfect. This looks good.”

Dyphon followed me and asked, “What are you doing, darling?”

“Just watch.” I took out an empty bottle from my dust box. It spent half a year in there, meaning the bottle itself was five thousand years old, yet it showed no signs of decay. I placed it into the box and began rearranging the spell I used in my battle against the Dyphon Junior.

“Dimension Crusher!”

A dimensional rift swallowed up the bottle inside and ground it to bits. Soon, it disappeared as if it never existed in the first place.

"I get it! You'll mash it up by shoving it into another dimension!"

"Yep." Of course, I refrained from mentioning that I came to this idea from how I defeated her offspring.

"That's amazing! Way to go, darling!"

"Thanks." Dyphon hyping me up was nothing new, but I never turned down praises for my magic.

"But only you can use this, right?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"Well, from how you spoke earlier, it sounded like you wanted others to be able to dispose of garbage too. Then isn't this also a no-no?"

My eyes widened. "You're pretty impressive yourself," I mumbled. *She figured it out even though I never said it outright. That's an ancient dragon for you.*

"You're right. Ordinary monsters would struggle to dispose of trash instantly like this. But..."

"But?"

"But they can manage *this*."

I made a few more rearrangements to Dimension Crusher and placed another empty bottle in the box. Soon, countless fine holes began forming all around it, almost as if someone were poking through it with tiny needles. Slowly but surely, the bottle became fraught with holes.

"This way, a bottle can be disposed of in just ten minutes. More monsters should be able to use this spell. No, in fact, we should be able to automate it."

"Ohhh! You're the best, darling!"

Dyphon's praise lifted my spirits higher than ever. With this spell I'd derived from Dimension Crusher, Shredder, I continued to think of ways to bring about a garbage disposal system for our city.

KABOOOOOOOM!!!

My eyes snapped open and I lurched up from my bed with a start. A thunderous explosion was shaking the ground, and based on all the lights flicking on and the clamor buzzing from the city, I wasn't just imagining things.

"Wh-What's going on?" I murmured, noticeably hearing no response from the dragon inside me. I jumped out of my room, flew to the roof, and swept my gaze through the city, but I found nothing out of the ordinary.

Still, the shaking didn't subside.

What in the world...?

The next day, I was sitting at the round table in the palace's meeting room when Reina, dressed in her maid uniform and holding a report in her hands, entered and stood before me.

"Apologies for the wait, Master."

"Have you found the cause?" I asked.

She nodded. "We've, er... We've *found* the cause, yes."

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"We've discovered what seems to be a meteorite twenty kilometers north of the city. The loud explosion and shaking last night must have occurred when it impacted the ground."

Oh... But wait. "You said it *seems* to be a meteorite?" I was curious about the meteorite itself, but the odd lack of conviction in Reina's speech also caught my attention. "What exactly is going on?"

"We do not know. We're unable to conduct a detailed investigation," she explained. "The wolfmen we dispatched to the scene fell asleep as they made their approach to the meteorite."

My eyes widened. “What?”

Reina nodded grimly. “It occurs once they come within a fifty-meter radius of the meteorite. I’m afraid that’s all we know.”

“Fifty meters... Depending on the terrain, that could be just barely within sight,” I remarked. “You said they just fell asleep—they couldn’t resist it?”

“Yes. Chris didn’t even last ten seconds.”

“Seriously?!” Now that was shocking. Alongside Gai and Reina, Chris was among my three monster executives and one of my strongest familiars. *And even she couldn’t handle it? Just what in the world...?* I nodded grimly. “All right. I’ll go.”

“Are you certain?”

“If it’s caused by magic, then I’m our best bet.”

“Understood,” Reina swiftly assented.

Despite the tense situation, I found myself a little pleased by her clear display of trust in my magic prowess.

Detailed investigation aside, Reina at least had a location to give me, so I swiftly headed over with flight magic. “A meteorite, huh? I wonder if I can deal with it... Whatever *it* is.”

“Well,” Lardon murmured. “*It will probably work out.*”

I arched my brows; finally, she’d spoken up. “Lardon,” I said. “Is something wrong?”

“*What do you mean?*”

“You’ve been acting strange. Did something happen?”

“*Nothing you need to concern yourself over.*”

“Okay...” I replied, though it didn’t exactly abate my curiosity. It wasn’t every day she acted so strangely, after all. *Hang on... Didn’t this happen just recently? When was it again?*

“*There it is,*” Lardon said, snapping me out of my thoughts and drawing my

eyes forward. Instantly, I stopped dead in the air.

I gulped. "Is that...fog?"

Up ahead lay a dome of pale crimson fog curled over the ground, clearly obstructing *something* deep within.

"Is this really the place? But Reina never said anything about a fog..." As the elven chief and also one of my executives, Reina was especially prudent and competent. It was hard to believe she would fail to include such a striking phenomenon in her report. "Maybe it just appeared?"

"No. That is high-density mana, invisible to those who do not have enough mana themselves."

"Oh, so they just couldn't see it."

"Precisely."

"Then that must be what put everyone to sleep. Hm, what should I do?"

"Keep your wits about you. If you can see it, then you should be able to resist."

"Oh, okay. Got it." I nodded and flew toward the fog, as well as the meteorite hidden within.

Firstly, I landed on the ground right before the foggy dome. I knew I could trust Lardon's word, but still, it was better to be safe than sorry. If it turned out I couldn't help succumbing to sleep, then I'd much rather stumble and fall than plummet from the sky.

I eventually stepped inside. A beat later, I nodded to myself. "Ah. I see now."

A wave of drowsiness washed over me, the kind I'd feel while basking under the warm afternoon sun after having a nice meal. I felt like lying down and closing my eyes right this moment but, just as Lardon said, I could definitely resist the sensation. Staying on my toes, I approached the vague contours of the meteorite deeper within.

"It's cracked open," I observed once I got close enough. "The fog must have spilled out from inside that thing."

Lardon hummed noncommittally. *"I suppose."*

Each step closer to the source of the fog weighed a heavier drowsiness over my mind. The sensation was now much closer to feeling the gentle sway of a carriage after a hard day's work.

Lardon's chuckle snapped me back to attention.

"What is it?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking that you are now the third being to resist this fog, and the first among humans. Quite the feat, hm?"

"Huh? Third...and first?" That did sound like quite the feat, but I was a bit lost. "Who were the other two? Monsters?"

"No. It was me and Dyphon."

"Huuuh?!" I wasn't expecting such a grand ensemble... *Just how crazy is this meteorite?*

"You still haven't realized?"

"Huh? Realized what?"

"Only Dyphon and I could resist it. Does this not tell you anything?"

"Hm..." What? Was I supposed to know something about this?

"Here is a hint," Lardon added. *"You know of their existence, but not by name."*

"Hm... Hmmm..." My feet came to a halt as I tilted my head, pondering deeply on Lardon's pop quiz.

"Second hint: Scarlet."

"Scarlet? Does she know?"

"Certainly. She likely knows the name as well."

"Hm... You mentioned a name earlier too. So is it a human?" I asked, then flinched when I heard Lardon's stifled laughter. "Wh-What?"

"Nothing," she said after collecting herself. *"You truly never change, do you? Ah, yes, by the way—do you think you could replicate this magic fog?"*

"Sure. Like this?" From my outstretched hand, fog of similar albeit fainter

color emerged. I crafted the spell by visualizing the drowsiness constantly assaulting me.

“Ha ha ha ha ha!” Lardon suddenly burst into laughter—a very rare sound to my ears. *“Ahh... Truly, you never disappoint.”*

“Wh-What?”

“Never mind. Go ahead and see the answer for yourself. Surely, even a magic junkie such as yourself would realize once you look into the meteorite.”

“O-Okay.” A magic junkie... I mean, she’s not exactly wrong, but... Ah, whatever.

I moved toward the meteorite. After making sure I could bear with the drowsiness this close, I slowly levitated with magic and peered into it.

Inside lay a young girl, fast asleep like a fairy-tale princess.



“A girl?”

“Indeed. Her name is Paithon.”

“Paithon... Oh!” Suddenly, it clicked. *Lardon, Dyphon, and Paithon...* “She’s...a dragon?”

“It was about time you realized, you magic junkie. After all my hints too.”

“Urgh...” I furrowed my brows, feeling a little embarrassed by the teasing lilt in Lardon’s voice. She called me a magic junkie for the second time, but I couldn’t even find any defense for myself.

As Lardon said, this was my first time hearing the name Paithon, but I always knew there was another dragon besides Lardon and Dyphon who fought in the Tri-Draconic War.

“Good grief...” Lardon huffed. *“I am well aware that you only have eyes for magic, but any normal person would have at least begun to wonder about the last dragon after meeting both me and Dyphon.”*

“Urgh...” I had no words. Once again, Lardon was absolutely right.

Back when I first learned how to summon Salamanders and Undines, my mind easily went to the rest of the spirits and their summoning spells, and I prioritized collecting them all early on in my journey to learning magic. I was at present in a very similar case...but for some reason, my curiosity just wasn't stirred at all.

No, not for *some* reason. Frankly, it was probably because this had nothing to do with magic. But saying that out loud would just prompt Lardon to tease me more, so I shook the thought off. Instead, I turned my attention to the sleeping beauty, Paithon.

“She looks pretty young. Did she also reincarnate?”

“No. I look that young too, do I not?”

“Oh...” Now that I thought about it, Lardon and Dyphon both looked like young girls in their human forms despite having undergone reincarnation.

“Hmph. This one hasn't changed either,” Lardon mumbled. *“She exudes this fog when she sleeps—naturally, irrespective of her own will.”*

“So she can't stop it...?”

“Do you recall what I said earlier—that only three beings have been able to resist this?”

“Uh, right... Me included.”

“Exactly. Until now, besides Dyphon and me, any living being would fall asleep the moment they approach her.”

“Huh. How...docile,” I inadvertently murmured. Having fought both Lardon and Dyphon, I couldn’t help but measure up the trio, and the way Paithon put others to sleep made her look really peaceful in comparison.

Lardon chuckled. *“Docile? Are you sure about that? There is never any telling how long she will sleep for.”*

“Huh? Isn’t that the same for everyone?”

“Oh, certainly... But as far as I am aware, Paithon once went three years without waking.”

“Three years?!”

“Indeed. She is quite the sleepyhead.”

“I think she’s more than just a sleepyhead at that point!” I retorted.

“Now then, here comes the problem.”

“Ugh.” I flinched and braced myself. A problem here couldn’t be any good. Well, I’d probably understand if it was related to magic...

“Say she remains asleep in the same spot for three years. What will happen?”

“In that case...” I pursed my lips. “The living beings around her would also sleep for three years.”

“Indeed. Very clever.”

“I know because I was able to replicate it.”

“Ah.” Lardon chuckled. *“In any case, you are correct. While she is asleep, all who approach shall fall the same so long as her fog envelops them. Living beings consume energy even as they rest, and without external care, most would not even last a week.”*

A chill ran down my spine as my gaze turned to Paithon, blissfully asleep like an innocent child.

Suddenly, a bird fell from the sky. It swerved in the air and crashed to the ground, falling unconscious on the spot. It breathed quietly, out cold, and it

would remain so until Paithon awoke. My skin crawled; to me, it looked like it had closed its eyes for the last time.

“Scary,” I mumbled.

“This is one way to use sleep.”

“I’ll...keep that in mind.” Not like I’d want to use it that way. In any case, I turned my gaze back to the source of all this fog. “Say, Lardon... Will this fog spread?”

“No. It maintains a fixed range. You can leave it be and it won’t cause any harm.”

“But others might wander in...” My gaze fell to the sleeping bird. “They can’t see it if they’re not strong enough, right? Then someone might walk right in none the wiser.”

“Why not just put up another red barrier?”

She was referring to our national border. Well, that would work too, but... “I’ll wake her up,” I decided. I couldn’t just leave her be—she was an accident waiting to happen. It was much safer to have her up and about. “The fog will disperse if she wakes up, right?”

“Indeed... It will disperse, yes.”

“All right.” I approached Paithon and shook her shoulder. “Hello? Wake up...”

“Hngh...” Paithon knit her brows together and pouted.

Huh... Now that’s a surprise. Lardon said Paithon could sleep for years, so I was sure that just waking her would be a whole mission on its own, but it seemed she wasn’t a very heavy sleeper. I gave her shoulder another shake. “Hello? Excuse me?”

And just like that, she was up. Her eyelids fluttered open—

“Shut up. Die.”

I drew in a sharp breath and threw my hand forward, instantly putting up two barriers before me—one magic and one physical—ready for either kind of attack, but shockingly, both shattered at the same time.

“What?!” I sputtered, kicking the ground and taking distance. “She smashed through both...?”

“Because she’s half asleep,” Lardon piped in. *“Watch out. She’s not done.”*

“Ugh!” Heeding her warning, I put up tens of layers of both shields. The sound of them being smashed and shattered assaulted my ears as particles of mana scattered about, glinting under the sunlight.

Beyond the shimmer, I saw Paithon slowly getting up. Her eyes were dazed and half-lidded—an expression reminiscent of those who’d just gotten out of bed. At the same time, her eyes flashed and mouth scowled in very clear and unbridled *anger*.

“Annoying,” she mumbled as she raised both hands to the sky. A torrent of mana surged through her small body and exploded instantly.

“Argh!” I just barely had enough barriers to defend myself from the onslaught. I looked up after the explosion subsided, only to find that our surroundings had been reduced to a scorched wasteland. “Th-This is...”

“She is rather grumpy when she wakes.”

“Huuuh?! You didn’t tell me!”

“Because you did not ask. You only asked about the fog, not her.”

“Urgh...”

“I tried to hint at it too, but as expected, you are rather hopeless when it comes to anything but magic...” Lardon muttered, sounding faintly amused, even though now *really* wasn’t the time for that.

Paithon was glaring at me. Clearly, the sudden awakening soured her mood.

“You dare to interrupt my slumber?” she growled. “Foolish human. Die!”

Unlike the wide blast earlier, this time, her sights were set solely on me as she unleashed a mana bullet—a pure lump of mana, much like a power missile, but it was so dense that I could feel its crushing impact even through my shield.

Just like Lardon and Dyphon, her mana capacity was off the charts. *I don’t stand a chance at this rate!*

“Amelia Emilia Claudia!” I put up as many barriers as I could to buy myself some time against her mana bullets. Then, I began visualizing—and I completed the image right away, as it was something I did every day.

“Wake Up!”

My impromptu spell fell upon Paithon, whose lips curled into a chilling sneer. As if to say a mere human’s magic could do her no harm, she showed no signs of defending herself—and I couldn’t be more thankful. I would’ve had to make more adjustments had she blocked my spell, but there was no need for that now.

My new spell landed a direct hit. Paithon’s eyes promptly snapped wide open, and the hostility emanating from her being slowly receded. Then, lazily, she turned her head left and right.

“Huuuh?” Paithon drawled, her tone slow and sluggish.

“Oh?” Lardon chuckled.

“It’s a spell that gets rid of drowsiness,” I explained. “I’m a bit surprised it actually worked... You were right; she’s just a grumpy waker.” The sight of the girl innocently looking around the scorched wasteland made me smile in amusement.

“Oh, right!” I rushed to a spot near Paithon—I stood here just moments ago—and sighed in relief. “It’s okay. Thank goodness.”

“Hm? Ah... The bird.”

“Yeah. I gave it half of my barriers earlier. I’m glad they kept it safe.”

“Hah. Amazing.”

“Yeah. The absolute shields are really strong, aren’t they?”

Lardon chuckled. *“Yes. Let’s say they are.”*

“Huh...?” I cocked my head at her response, but there was no time to question her. Paithon was staring at me.

“Who are youuu?” she asked, languid yet with a curious look in her eyes.

I was baffled. No matter how you sliced it, standing before me now was no more than an innocent little girl. “Uh...” I cleared my throat. “I’m Liam Hamilton.”

“Ohhh. I’m Pipi. Hi.”

“P-Pipi?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Uh...” My eyes swam in confusion as I inwardly sought help from Lardon, but none came. It seemed she was intent on remaining an observer now, which meant I needed to somehow settle this myself.

Well, for starters... “Um, are you still sleepy?” From her sleeping fog to her grumpiness when she woke, this was clearly the first and most important thing I needed to check.

“Nope, not at all. I feel suuuper refreshed.”

“Really? That’s great.”

Paithon blinked. “Huuuh?” She shuffled over, close enough that our toes nearly touched, and began sniffing around me.

“Wh-What is it?”

“I smell Lala from you... Whyyy?”

“Lala... You mean Lardon?”

“Mm-hmm. Oh, did Lala bite you?”

“That’s one violent assumption!” That sent me reeling. *Her first thought is so...savage!* The image of Lardon, in her original dragon form, biting my head off came to mind.

“That’s a no?”

“Definitely a no,” I deadpanned.

“Huuuh? But I’m sure I smell her... Hmmm?”

“Wh-What is it this time?”

“I smell Deedee too...”

“D-Deedee... I guess that’s Dyphon?”

“Mm-hmm. Why do I smell them both?”

“Uh...” I wasn’t sure how to explain everything. “Well, long story short, Lardon and Dyphon are on pretty good terms right now.”

“Reaaally?”

“Yeah.”

“Sooo, how many died?”

“Wha— *That’s* your question?!” My jaw dropped and my voice cracked. It was random and absurd—and she asked it with such a straight face!

“You said Lala and Deedee are friends nooow... Stuff must have happened and tens of thousands died, right?”

“Just how bad was your relationship?!” I blurted out. I knew they didn’t exactly get along, but had it been *that* bad?

Just then, it came to me.

“Oh... The Tri-Draconic War.”

The war was named that way by the humans, but from the perspective of the three dragons, they were just having a fight—one so big, the puny humans thought it was an all-out war. In that sense, I supposed it wasn’t so strange for Paithon to assume tens of thousands had died.

I was snapped out of my thoughts when I noticed she was staring at me. “Wh-What is it?”

“Those two are friends nooow?”

“Huh? Well, yeah.”

“Because of you?”

“I...guess?” I nodded slowly, uncertain of whether I could take credit for it.

As I was giving it some thought, I sensed a wave of mana and flinched, my gaze snapping to the sky. *This mana... It's Dyphon!*

She came flying at an incredible speed before crashing right into me and wrapping her arms around me. "Darling!"

"Whoa!" The impact knocked me to the ground even as I put up a barrier to protect myself—which worked, but the excess impact was instead passed to my surroundings, creating a ten-meter crater with me at its center.

Dyphon clung to my waist as she looked up at me in concern and asked, "Are you okay, darling?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"I came in a hurry because I sensed some bad energy around you."

"Bad energy..." I turned to Paithon, who was still looking at me in a daze... No, actually, she was staring intently.

"Hm?" Dyphon followed my gaze, and her brows shot up. "Paithon?!"

"Ohhh. Deedee."

"What the heck are you doing here?"

"Well, this place feels reaaally comfy."

"Comfy?"

"Uh-huh. Like, suuuper warm and fuzzy. And it smells good too."

I looked up at the sky as I pondered over her words. She made it sound like she'd found the perfect spot to nap under the sun, but the weather wasn't *that* good today. Besides, there wasn't much to call "fuzzy" here outdoors.

While I was frowning in confusion, Dyphon sniffed at the air and nodded. "Oh, what? You were talking about darling's scent."

Paithon tilted her head. "Daaarling?"

"Uh-huh. Darling's scent. It got stronger just now, didn't it?"

Paithon took a whiff as well. "Ohhh, it did," she drawled, her expression relaxing into a blissful smile. "So this was *your* scent?"

“Huh? I-Is it?” I asked Dyphon. She was the one who started talking about the “scent,” after all.

“It sure is,” she answered.

“I don’t smell anything, though... What do I smell like?”

“Oh, right! Humans can’t tell...”

“No. *You do.*” Lardon suddenly broke her silence, drawing my attention.

“What do you mean?” I asked her.

“We refer to the mana residue from using magic as ‘scents.’”

“Residue... Oh, *that.*” Mana residue was a pretty familiar concept to me by now, and we had a tangible product of it too: manastones, or bloodsouls, as they were known. Mana residue was also what kept the city’s various infrastructures running. “I get it. So you guys refer to those as scents.”

“Huuuh? You’re lying,” Paithon said. Contrary to her languid tone, she sounded very certain. “There’s no way a single human can make such a nice scent.”

“I’m not lying. This is darling’s scent!”

“Liaaar.”

“Hrghhh... Darling!” Dyphon turned to me, her lips twisted into an indignant pout. “How’s your mana? You still got some left?”

“Huh? Well, yeah...”

“Okay!” Dyphon nodded, grasped her arm, and— Blood sprayed into the air. Dyphon ripped her left arm off, spurting red from her open shoulder while gripping the severed limb in her right hand.

“Dyphon?!”

“Turn it back,” she said breezily.

“R-Right! Time Shift!” I yelled without hesitation. Nearly all my mana granted me three seconds to rewind, safely restoring Dyphon’s arm—but she was already grabbing it, ready to rip it off again.

I reached out and stopped her. "That's enough. It's done."

"Okay!" Dyphon beamed and nodded. She swiftly understood that I already rewound time and turned her gaze back to Paithon. "Well? How's that?"

The other girl sniffed at the air again. "Whoaaa..." She looked like a cat that had caught a whiff of catnip. "It's true... The scent got stronger. Even though he's a human..."

"What'd I tell ya?" Dyphon's lips quirked smugly.

Meanwhile, Paithon turned to me, her gaze still dreamy from the so-called scent. "Woow..." she slurred, entranced. "Are you really human?"

We flew back to the city with Paithon in tow. Since there was no way I could just leave her there, plus with her growing interest toward me, I decided to bring her back with us.

The moment we landed at the city entrance, Paithon tilted her head. “Huuuh? What a weird city...”

“Weird?” I asked.

“Mm-hmm. So many little creatures I’ve never seen before...”

What little creatures...? Puzzled, I followed Dyphon’s gaze as she swept her eyes over the rows of buildings to the passing monsters. I couldn’t quite figure out what she meant, however.

Suddenly, she reached out and grabbed a passing elf by the hair. “What’s this one called?”

“Eek!” The elf flinched and looked at me wide-eyed. “Lord Liam? Huh? Wh-Who’s this?”

“Sorry about this,” I told her, then turned to Paithon. “Uh, could you let go of her first?”

“What’s this one called?” she repeated.

“Huh? Oh, um... Kellen, was it?”

Kellen the elf gasped. “You remember, Lord Liam?!”

“Well, yeah. I came up with it.”

She beamed, overcome with emotion. “Thank you very much!”

Paithon kept a steady stare on the elf the entire time. “Kellen...” she mumbled. “I’ve never heard of a monster like that.”

I blinked. “What? Oh, no, you’ve got it wrong. She’s an elf, and her *name* is Kellen.”

“Huh? She’s a monster, but she has a name?”

“Yeah.”

“Hmmm? But why?”

“Why?” I repeated, cocking my head.

Dyphon, who’d been silent since we returned, suddenly hugged my arm and grinned with pride. “That’s just one of the things that makes darling so amazing!” she preened, piping in only to brag on my behalf.

“Woow...” Paithon drawled. “You must be *really* amazing for Deedee to praise you like that.” She seemed genuinely impressed, as dull as she sounded.

Just then, a call came in through Telephone, a spell that allowed communication over a distance. “Hello?”

“Master, may I ask where you are right now?” Scarlet asked.

“I’m at the city’s western entrance.”

“So you’ve returned! I shall head over right away!”

“Did something come up?”

“Yes!”

I heard her voice go up a pitch at the same time as her hurried footsteps. Even though she was making her way toward us, she remained connected—a feat not possible in an ordinary tin can telephone. Incidentally, this spell was, in essence, its wireless version.

Long ago, humans discovered that it was easier to hear distant sounds by placing their ears against the ground and, later on, learned that sound carried through solid matter. These discoveries spurred the invention of a device made to convey voices across a distance.

To carry voices between two points, the device’s most primitive design made use of a string. As easy as it was to lay out, however, it could easily be cut and struggled to transmit sound when it wasn’t taut. Thus, the strings were replaced with much sturdier wires, leading to the creation of the tin can telephone.

The use of wire made it so the two connected points were fixed in place. My

spell, on the other hand, had a very big merit in that it wasn't stationary; we could communicate while on the move, just as Scarlet was doing now.

"We've discovered the identity of the meteorite," she went on.

"The identity..." I glanced at Paithon. She returned the look and cocked her head.

"You see—"

"It's Paithon, right?"

"Ah... Y-You were already aware?"

"Yeah. I mean, she's right beside me."

"Huh...?" She'd frozen in place out of shock—I could tell just from her tone—but her urgent footsteps picked up again and reached us before long.

"Master!" Scarlet called as she rushed to my side. "Wh-Where is Lord Paithon?"

"Here." I pointed at her.

Paithon met Scarlet's gaze and tilted her head again. "Yeees?"

"Th-This young girl...? Oh! But her form is just like those of Lord Lardon and Lord Dyphon! Then she must truly be..."

"Yep, this is her. Right, Dyphon?"

"Uh-huh. It's as darling says."

"G-Goodness..." Scarlet stammered out, as Dyphon's confirmation made it beyond doubt. Wide-eyed, she took in the sight of Paithon in utter awe.

It was Scarlet from whom I learned of the Tri-Draconic War in the first place, and it was also her who recommended I build a city here, within the promised land that Lardon had left behind. The three dragons of the legend naturally meant much more to her than they did to me.

While under Scarlet's intense gaze, Paithon broke into a gaping yawn. "Sleepy," she mumbled.

Scarlet blinked, jolted out of her trance. "Huh?"

“I’m gonna take a quick naaap...”

“Uh-oh...” I instantly mustered my mana. “Wake Up!”

The spell did its job and blew her drowsiness away. Paithon’s half-lidded eyes blinked widely, any sign of sleepiness gone in an instant.

“Whew...” I breathed out in relief.

But the next moment, her clear and sober expression warped. “Ughhh... I’m not sleepy... I want to sleep, but I’m not sleepy!”

“P-Paithon? What’s wrong?”

“I wanna sleep!” she yelled, stomping her feet in frustration and cracking the ground beneath us open. She acted like a child throwing a tantrum, but of course, no ordinary child could have caused this much devastation with just a stomp.



I soared into the air to avoid being swallowed up by the crevices.

“Ahhh!”

“Wh-What is this?!”

Scarlet and Kellen weren't so lucky, however, so I mustered my mana and chanted, “Gnome! Save them!” Heeding my command, the manifested earth spirit mended the ground under the two, saving them right in the nick of time.

“Oh boy. Here we go again.” Dyphon sighed as she looked at Paithon, having clung to my arm as I flew up amid the frenzy. “Paithon's been like that since way back. Her mood turns south if she can't sleep when she wants to.”

“A-Are you serious...?”

“Very human of her, isn't it? That's why I just couldn't get along with her,” Dyphon mused, unaffected by the surrounding chaos.

Ugh, I didn't know that... “But she didn't get mad when I did it earlier...”

“Really? Maybe she just woke up then? She's easier to calm down when she's had her sleep.”

Dyphon hadn't been there, yet she diagnosed the situation with great accuracy. Considering how long they'd known each other for, it was safe to say Paithon had always been like this.

In any case, I knew what I had to do now: put her to sleep. *Easy enough—with a strong sleeping spell!*

“*Amelia Emilia Claudia...* Sleep!”

“How dare you!” Paithon screamed, her face red with anger, but she stopped resisting when she realized the nature of the magic. “Oh... Thanks.”

Welcoming the spell, she fell to the ground and was snoozing away within seconds. Her expression was so serene, it was hard to believe she made all these cracks over the ground just moments ago. Unfortunately, she was the only one at peace right now—I still had one more problem to face.

“Item Box! Dust Box!” Clicking my tongue, I summoned both my magic boxes around her and sucked in the fog that began seeping out of Paithon.

“Wow, darling! Great idea!” Dyphon cheered.

My shoulders sagged as I breathed a huge sigh of relief.

I couldn't just leave an ancient dragon lying around by the side of the road, so I brought Paithon to the palace. It was safer to keep her within arm's reach, and besides, we had tons of extra rooms here.

As I gently set her down in one of the bedrooms, she mumbled, "Can't eat any more... Too stuffed..."

I chuckled, finding her sleep talk a bit cute. "I wonder what she's eating..."

"She likes having magma for dessert," Dyphon piped in.

"She likes *what?!* " I wasn't really expecting an answer to begin with, much less something so outlandish. "Wait, does she really eat magma?"

"Uh-huh. Oh, but only when she's in her dragon form. In this form, she just likes super spicy food."

"That's a bit more reasonable, I guess..."

"She swallows chili peppers whole."

"I take it back! That's still too much!" I exclaimed. My gaze wandered back to the girl on the bed, slumbering away like a fairy-tale princess. *She's just a bundle of surprises, isn't she?*

Just then, I caught sight of Scarlet—she hadn't stepped into the room and was just loitering around the entrance—peeking inside with a stunned look.

"What's wrong, Scarlet?"

"Th-This feels like a dream," she mumbled in a daze. "The divine dragons, all gathered in one place..."

"Oh..." Considering her deep reverence for the dragons, her reaction made sense.

"I-Is there anything I can do?"

"Hm? Well..." I looked at the sleeping girl and the two magic boxes beside

her, still absorbing all her fog. Even if Scarlet hadn't offered, I'd have to do something about that eventually. "I guess...you could make a pillow."

"A pillow?" she asked.

"Yeah." I turned to Dyphon. "What kind do you think she'd like?"

"Hm... A cute one, maybe? The frilly kind that little girls would like."

"Well, you heard her," I said, turning back to Scarlet. "Could you make one?"

"Hm, a pillow... I see." She nodded, though the question "*Why a pillow?*" was plainly written on her face. She probably thought it a strange request to make, even for the sake of someone who liked sleeping as much as Paithon.

"I have something in mind, so please," I told her.

Scarlet nodded in the end. "I understand. I will do as you say." And with that, she left the room.

Once the door shut, Dyphon asked me, "What are you planning, darling?"

"Well, Paithon seems interested in staying here, doesn't she? Then we have to do something about her fog. I mean, we can't just let her keep putting everyone to sleep."

"That's true. Some monsters could die from just a few days, like the slimes."

"Yeah, they'd totally dry up after just three days..." I smiled slightly, half amused. Water was more important to slimes than food, as it comprised a large percentage of their body. They would undoubtedly shrivel up without water intake for three days. "So I need to do something about it."

"Haven't you already?" She gestured to my magic boxes.

"I can't just stick with her all the time. Besides, I'd really like to use my boxes..."

"Oh... Then why not toss her in some other place?"

"Like in Another World? I thought of that too, but then I'd need to move her in every single time she falls asleep."

Dyphon hummed. "So what's your plan?"

My lips quirked into a smile. “I actually have one already, you see—it’s something we’ve been using in this city.”

Here, my past efforts would be proving their worth. All that experience led me to a solution right at my fingertips.

A few days later, Scarlet brought a pillow exactly as Dyphon had recommended: cute and frilly, the type that would fit right on a princess’s canopy bed. “Thank you for waiting, Master. Will this do?”

I turned to Dyphon for her approval. “Well?”

She shrugged. “I guess so? She likes these kinds of things.”

“Good.” I nodded and slotted a manastone into the pillow. Then, I slowly and carefully pulled Paithon’s pillow from under her head, slid in this new one to replace it, and finally dispelled my two boxes—and Paithon’s fog, rather than spilling out in every direction, was being drawn into the new pillow instead.

Scarlet’s eyes widened. “Wh-What is this...?”

“You know the lamps we have around the city?”

“Y-Yes. The ones that are powered by manastones and automatically light up at night...”

“Well, this pillow is the same idea. The manastone inside automatically absorbs her fog, with Paithon’s mana from the fog further feeding it.”

“Er... That means...”

“That the manastone powers itself,” I summed up. “It’ll constantly consume and absorb the fog no matter how long Paithon sleeps, basically stopping it from spreading out.”

Scarlet’s eyes shone. “Goodness, what an ingenious solution! I would expect no less of you, Master.”

“She might not like the pillow, though.” I cast a glance at Paithon, who was still snoozing away with a blissful smile.

“Hnnn... Let’s all sleep together...” she mumbled.

What terrifying sleep talk... But anyway, the fog was safely being consumed by and drawn into the pillow. Even if she didn't like the pillow, I just had to take the manastone out and place it into something else.

"Whew..." I placed a hand on my chest in relief. "At least we don't have to worry about her fog now."

Yesterday's events had struck inspiration in me, so I holed up in my room the following day, focused on honing my mana using the hint I gained from Paithon's pillow.

To begin with, magic improved through practice, much like how running regularly improved stamina. However, these both had their limits; once you ran out of mana, you'd have to wait and recover before casting another spell.

Paithon's pillow, however, functioned by collecting and reusing the fog—that is, the *mana* gained from casting the spell. More precisely, the spell embedded in the manastone absorbed Paithon's mana and then reused it to operate the spell, maintaining the cycle and keeping it functioning.

I tried to apply that to my own training. To put things simply, I quantified the mana and magic by hypothetical units:

Until now, I could only cast 100 magic units with 100 mana units. But using this new method of mana recycling, I could regain fifteen percent of the mana units out of the 100 I used. Then, I could get a further fifteen percent of those units in turn, and so on and so forth.

Omitting the detailed calculations in the middle, milking this method would ultimately earn me around 117 magic units in total, undoubtedly increasing my training efficiency. It didn't look like much, sure, but considering that my current mana efficiency was at fifteen percent, raising it to fifty with this training method would double my overall training efficiency.

At least, that was what I was going for, but... "Hm... This is tough."

"*What is?*" Lardon asked, readily since it was currently just me—well, *us*—in the room.

"Oh, I'm thinking about my mana return rate. It's at fifteen percent now, but I could probably raise it to almost twenty soon... But, well..."

"*You see your limit, do you?*"

“Exactly.” There was no way Lardon wouldn’t know what I had already figured out. “With this method, my limit would be thirty—no, twenty-nine percent.”

“Oh? Impressive,” Lardon mused. *“You are correct; that is your limit with that method. You would need another technique to raise your return rate any further.”*

“Figures... Ugh, I’m stumped.” As I groaned, Lardon’s chuckling drew my attention. “Hm? What’s gotten into you all of a sudden?”

“Oh, I just found it quite remarkable that you can perceive your own limit at this early stage. Anybody would find their limit upon hitting it, but it takes quite the skill to deduce it beforehand.”

“Hm...” Lardon’s praise was nice and all, but I was still left at a dead end.

“In any case, just give it your all. It would be nice if you could reach one hundred percent.”

“No, that’s impossible.”

“Oh?”

“With the human body, the limit would be eighty-seven percent. Maybe dragons like you could reach up to ninety-five percent at most...”

“Ha... Ha ha ha ha!” Lardon suddenly burst out laughing. I thought I was being serious, though.

“Wh-What is it this time?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

“I highly doubt that...” Not with how she was laughing, that was for sure. *Well, as long as she’s happy, I guess...*

“Speaking of,” she said, clearly changing the topic, *“it seems Paithon has taken up residence in this city.”*

“Hm? Well, yeah.” I was still going to ask her if she wanted to do so, but Lardon seemed quite certain of it, and she knew Paithon pretty well. Maybe it was all but official at this point.

“That means all three of us have gathered.”

“Now that you mention it, yeah.”

“Are you not curious about the reason for the Tri-Draconic War?”

“Well...” I’d forgotten about that. “Not really.”

“Oh? Why not?”

“I mean, it’s already over, isn’t it?”

“And what makes you think that?”

“Because you three didn’t go for each other’s throats the moment you saw one another.”

“That’s how you see it, hm?”

“Am I wrong?”

“No... Well, not necessarily, I suppose.”

It seemed I wasn’t too far off the mark, at least. Then all was good. “In that case, it doesn’t really matter.”

Lardon chuckled. *“Good grief... Sometimes, I wonder what you are—a fathomless mind or simply an idiot.”*

“I’d actually be offended if you thought the latter...” I mumbled before resuming my mana practice.

My mind was now set on two goals: to reach twenty-nine percent with this method at hand, and to discover a new method to breach that. My proficiency in multicasting came in handy; with it, I was able to process and brainstorm toward both goals at the same time.

Scarlet was sitting at her desk, busily writing a letter, when the doors to her room suddenly flew open.

“I’m coming in,” Dyphon announced as she barged in.

Despite the blatant and jarring lack of common courtesy, Scarlet instantly dropped what she was doing and clambered up to her feet. “L-Lord Dyphon?!” she sputtered, hurriedly offering her own seat.

“Ah, it’s fine. No need for all that.” Dyphon waved her off. “I’m leaving once I’m done anyway.”

“U-Understood... What business could you possibly have with me?”

“I’m sure you could tell, but Paithon’s planning on staying in this city.”

“Y-Yes.” Scarlet nodded, having already pieced together that likely outcome.

“Tell me, what will the humans think if they see all three of us have gathered together?”

“Er, I...”

“If it’s hard to say, then just don’t. It’s not like I came here to nitpick.”

Dyphon had been frank and unreserved from the moment they met, but Scarlet could sense boundless dignity and pressure from her very being—a constant reminder of the insurmountable wall between dragons and humans.

“What I’m trying to say is that, well, isn’t there some groundwork that needs laying? Some political maneuvering or diplomatic whatnot?”

Scarlet stared vacantly for a moment, then gasped, seemingly regaining her bearings. “Yes... Yes, I believe so.”

“Then get it done,” Dyphon said. “I’m sure darling wouldn’t even realize it’s a problem.”

“Understood. How shall I...?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t know. Humans just love complicating everything, and I really can’t be bothered. It’s up to you,” Dyphon said, waving her hand.

“I understand.” Scarlet gracefully bowed.

Having said her piece, Dyphon spun on her heel and left with light and breezy steps.

Now left alone in her room, Scarlet dropped her gaze to her table—to the letter she was writing before Dyphon came in, for precisely what she just instructed.

“She said the same thing as Lord Lardon...”

Scarlet was writing the letter at Lardon's advice, which she had given a few days ago when she appeared before Scarlet without warning, quite like how Dyphon did just moments ago.

Scarlet's lips curled into a smile. "Master is truly amazing," she whispered to herself.

Lardon and Dyphon realized that some political maneuvering would be needed and came to Scarlet, knowing well Liam would need help in this aspect. Two dragons, existences beyond human comprehension, moved for her master's sake.

Their clear and indisputable devotion brought a smile to Scarlet's face.

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“Morning, sleepyhead.”

That day, I awoke to somebody sitting astride me. My eyes fluttered open as I stared ahead blankly, my head still muddled with sleep.

“Going back to sleep? Okay, me too.”

The person straddling me leaned forward and nuzzled their face over my chest. The cozy weight and pleasant warmth tempted me back to sleep, and my eyelids slid closed...

“Hooold up!” I yelled, instantly wide awake, and startling the girl on top of me. She squeaked cutely as I gaped at her in disbelief. “Paithon?!”

“G’morning... Getting up now?”

“What...? No, wait— *Why?*”

“Why what?”

“Why are you on top of me?”

“Ummm... I wanted to say thank you.”

“Huh?” I blinked and tilted my head.

“Mm-hmm. Thanks for the pillow.”

“Oh, that...” I sighed and nodded. “Did you sleep well?”

“Mm-hmm!” Paithon beamed.

“Oh yeah? That’s great.”

Where Lardon was wise and thoughtful and Dyphon bright yet cynical, Paithon was pure and sincere—a disposition that came across clearly through her gratitude. While it was startling to wake up with her straddling me, I calmed down when I saw the depth of her innocence. She wasn’t getting off me, but I didn’t really mind anymore.

“Really, thank you so, so, sooo much. It’s been three hundred years since I last slept that well.”

“I have a feeling that’s not an exaggeration,” I said wryly. These dragons always spoke on such a large scale, which I’d actually been finding rather amusing as of late. “Anyway, are you not going to sleep anymore?”

“I will later. The weather’s good today.”

“Hm?” I craned my neck to look out the windows. “Oh...”

The sunlight filtering in through the glass seemed to hint at refreshing weather ahead. To me, this would be a good day to study magic, but I guessed to Paithon, good weather simply equated to more comfortable naps. I couldn’t help but chuckle; we just met, but I was already thinking that she never changed.

Paithon cocked her head. “Hmmm? What is it?”

“It’s nothing.”

“Okaaay... Say, wanna nap with me?”

I raised a brow. “It’s still morning.”

“Oh yeah... Then wanna go back to sleep with me?”

“No thanks. I have stuff to do today.”

“Stuff? What stuff?”

“Like training my mana.”

“Huuuh? But why would you do that?”

“What do you mean, why? Because I want to get better at magic...”

“But that just happens while you sleep, doesn’t it?”

“It doesn’t! I’m human, unlike you!” I blurted out, caught off guard by her response. “Hang on—do you dragons gain more mana as you *sleep*?”

“Mm-hmm. Sleep is important.”

I gaped. “Well, sure it is, but we humans *lose* mana if we just sleep, you know?”

“Reaaaally?”

“Yeah. Not just mana—our physical condition would deteriorate too.”

“Awww. Being human must suck.”

Well, you dragons are just too out there, I almost said but held back.

“Sooo,” she continued. “How do you train? Can I keep lying down here or will I get in the way?”

“Huh? No, you won’t...”

“You suuure?”

“Yeah. I’ll show you now.”

I cast Magic Missile, the weaker version of Power Missile, eleven times—just enough to place a suitable burden on my mana core—and made them fly around the room like fireworks. When they dispersed, I absorbed the mana and used it for the next round of spells, completing a cycle of how I reused and honed my mana.

I looked back at Paithon. “So I just repeat this...aaand she’s asleep.” *Already?!*

Paithon woke with a gasp. “Oh, sorry... I got sleepy.”

“Well, it’s all right...”

“But that’s cool,” she drawled. “I’ve never seen someone reuse mana like that.”

“Oh... So you *were* watching.” I chuckled. I thought she’d slept through the whole thing. “Anyway, it makes sense you’ve never seen anyone else do it. After all, I just came up with it.”

“Wooow. You made it?”

“Sure did.”

“Whoa... Huh?” Paithon, who was still on top of me, suddenly leaned closer.

“Paithon? What is it?”

“Your body and soul are dissonant...?” Paithon peered down at me with curious eyes as I stared back in confusion. “Yeah... Especially when you use

magic. But whyyy? And your soul is much bigger than your body, kinda like us?”

“My soul is big...? Huh, I feel like I’ve heard that somewhere before...”

“From me,” Lardon chimed in.

“Oh, right.” I got what she was saying now. Lardon told me something similar when we first met—something about having a big soul in a small body or whatever. I’d been having so much fun learning and practicing magic that I completely forgot—I wasn’t always this boy named Liam Hamilton, and that I just found myself in his body one fateful day.

“Whyyy?” Paithon drawled.

Unfortunately for her, I had no answer. “I don’t know either.”

“You dooon’t?”

“I’m just me. I’m not sure how else to answer.”

“Oh... Well, I guess that works out, actually.” She shrugged. “How about you have the excess portion of your soul sleep with me?”

“What?” *What did she just say?* I cocked my head in confusion, but her next words blew all of it aside.

“If you do that, your mana will recover faster even when you’re awake.”

I drew in a sharp breath. Her proposal was precisely what I wanted. Sleepy or not, it seemed a dragon was still a dragon.

She grinned. “I wanna thank you for the pillow. Okaaay?”

I nodded without missing a beat.

“What should I do?” I asked.

“Just sleep,” Paithon answered.

“That’s all?” I glanced around the room. I hadn’t gotten off the bed since waking up, mostly because of Paithon straddling me. *Do I really just have to go right back to sleep?*

While I was spacing out, the weight on top of me vanished. Paithon shifted to my side and tugged on my arm, then rested her head on top of it like a pillow. Quietly shutting her eyes, she mumbled, “Nighty night,” then fell back asleep so smoothly, it was as if she were never even awake.

“Uh-oh,” I muttered, hurriedly casting magic to absorb the fog that had begun seeping out of her body.

She didn’t bring her pillow... Should I make her some fog-absorbing pajamas? Hmmm... But she falls asleep no matter what she’s wearing. I should give this a bit more thought.

Shelving away that new task, I slowly closed my eyes. I had to cast Sleep on myself since I was no Paithon, but as heavy drowsiness assaulted me, a certain thought struck my muddled mind.

Wait... I could have just used her fog to fall asleep...

Then, I completely blacked out.

I open my eyes and look around. I’m in my room...

But I can’t get up... Why...?

My mind’s so hazy, my arm feels like lead... Oh, it’s Paithon...

“Ah...”

I remember now... I fell asleep with her.

Must be why my mind's so muddled... Ugh, I can't think straight...

Why did I sleep with her again...?

What should I do...?

"Why not use magic?"

"Magic..."

Is that Lardon...?

"Yes, it's me. You could manage something with magic, no?"

"Magic..."

Magic... Right, magic... Magic can wake me up...

No more thoughts... Just cast magic and wake up...

"The ceiling again..."

When I opened my eyes once more, I was met with a familiar ceiling. The next thing I noticed was a weighty sensation on my arm, which Paithon was still using as a pillow. That peaceful, almost angelic sleeping face reminded me of the first time we met.

"It seems you're awake now."

"Oh! Thanks for your help, Lardon."

"It was nothing. In fact, I rather enjoyed seeing you cast magic so naturally despite your degraded mental faculties."

"Aha ha..." I couldn't tell if she was praising or teasing me.

"So? How was it?"

"Well... I felt like I was dreaming. My mind was all muddled, and I felt like I wasn't myself. I'm trying to think back to it now, but it's all slipping between my fingers like water... But yeah, that definitely felt like a dream."

"Yet you were unmistakably moving. You had enough mental capacity to cast a spell too. How was your mana?"

"Oh, no issues there." I nodded firmly. Most of my memories were shrouded

in fog, but I clearly remembered sensing my mana. “It recovered much quicker than usual, just like Paithon said.”

“Is that so? Good for you.”

Despite the praise, I pursed my lips. “Hm...”

“What’s the matter? Not happy?”

“Well, I’m sure you could tell—I was awake, but my mental capacity was so low, I could hardly do anything. It’s no different from just falling asleep like usual.”

“Is that so?”

“No... No, wait.” My gaze was pinned on the ceiling, as was my arm under Paithon’s hold, but my mind was completely elsewhere. “I’d say I was about seventy percent asleep earlier... If I adjust that percentage, I should be able to make use of this.”

“Oh? Quite the interesting idea. But can you do it?”

“I’ll give it a go.”

I envisioned the dreamlike state I’d been in and latched on to the image. The dreamworld Paithon swept me away to, and that feeling of having seventy percent of my soul asleep and only thirty percent awake... I grasped the lingering sensations and dropped it into my new spell— “Hemisphere!”

I stared at the ceiling and wondered: *How many times have I woken up now?*

The answer immediately came to me: This was the fourth. And like the past three, Paithon was lying beside me as my mana recovered quickly—not as much as earlier, no, but definitely more than my usual.

“Are you awake?”

I tried to answer Lardon, but no words formed on my tongue. *Ah, right. I cut off my speech.* Losing stuff like speech or my sense of smell wasn’t fatal, so I came up with a fifty-fifty split and put certain parts, or should I say functions, of my soul to sleep. With this, I could just barely go about my day while quite literally half asleep.

“You truly think of the most intriguing things,” Lardon said, chuckling mirthfully. “And then to make them all into reality—it is truly impressive.”

My everyday routine was composed of two general tasks: practicing magic in my room or strolling through the streets. I was strongly inclined toward the former, but I often gained bouts of inspiration while walking outside and watching the citizens go about their day, so I made sure to slip in a few walks whenever I could. Today was no exception.

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“Out for a walk? Can we join?”

I was wandering the city under the early afternoon sun when Sli and Lime, the neo-slime duo, came bouncing around my feet. They spoke with their signature childlike lisps, jiggling excitedly like cute puppies wanting their owner’s undivided attention.

“All right,” I said. “Come with me.”

“Yaaay!”

“We love you!”

I resumed my walk, now with a couple of slimes in tow. Much like these two, monsters would often come up to talk the moment they caught sight of me. After a cycle of walking, stopping, and chatting, we came across Gai the giant just before a bend, carrying an unconscious human over his shoulder.

“Milord! Out for a stroll, I see,” he greeted me with a smile.

“Yeah. Who are you carrying over there?”

“Ah, this is a spy who intruded upon our territory. I was on my way to lock him in the cells.”

“A spy?”

“Indeed.” Gai nodded. “Although I’m uncertain as to why, small groups sometimes try to cross your barrier—always covertly, if I may add—so I make sure to capture them. They have been increasing in numbers as of late, so we

might be needing more prison cells soon.”

“Really?”

Gai nodded. “Indeed, it started right around the time Ms. Dyphon came around, and all the more after Ms. Paithon followed. I’ve heard from Reina that humans are particularly fearful of the three dragons and are thus trying to grasp some information.”

“Oh...” This was the first I heard of it. It left me a little shocked.

That evening, Bruno and I sat in the palace’s dining hall as the elven maids served our meals. When I shared with him what I heard from Gai earlier in the day, his eyebrows furrowed grimly as he said, “This country fares extremely well in that regard.”

“Hm? What do you mean by that?” I asked.

“There is a significant absence of information leakages.”

“Information leaks...?”

Bruno nodded. “When you lived in our manor, I believe you must have heard your fair share of rumors and news from foreign countries, yes?”

“Yeah, I did.” Not just in the Hamilton manor but even in my past life, before I became Liam.

“That does not happen with this country. The citizens have all sworn loyalty to Your Majesty and would never leak your information. Mr. Gai and Ms. Chris also deal with the spies. Incidentally,” he added, “no spy has ever been released, so it is said that no intruder can leave this country alive.”

“Seriously?!” *That’s so...ominous.* I had mixed feelings hearing that about my country.

“Hence, some also approach me in hopes of buying information.”

“Oh, right. You *are* trading with me.”

“Indeed. I believe I am seen as the only human who can freely come and go in your territory.”

“Hmmm...” This, I found rather interesting. “Selling information, huh? So is there anything in particular we should let them know?”

Bruno blinked. “What?”

“What?” I stared back, just as stupefied.

“Er... Your Majesty, I’m not sure I understand...?”

“I mean, you said those people are trying to buy info, right? And that you can make money with it?”

“H-Heavens, no! I would never dream of betraying you...”

“Huh?” *Betray me?* Why would he say that?

“Do not tease your brother too much.”

Lardon’s sudden interjection left me even more confused. “What do you mean, Lardon?”

“In human society, that man would be seen as a traitor once he sells your information to outsiders.”

“Really? But...does it actually matter? It’s not like I want to hide anything.”

“Hmph... Well, I wonder.”

I turned back to Bruno. “What kind of information do they usually ask for?”

“Mostly...about Your Majesty’s strength,” he reluctantly answered. “People only know that this country was founded and now prospers under your grace, so your individual strength is a point of great curiosity for most.”

“I see... All right. You can go ahead and exchange that info for cash.”

“Er... T-Truly?”

I shrugged. “Sure.”

“Are you certain?” Lardon asked as well.

“Yeah. It makes no difference to me if they know. Besides, they’re asking about my magic, right, Bruno?”

“Indeed.”

“Well, my magic improves each day and I’m also constantly inventing new spells. They’ll be getting outdated info at best, so it’s whatever.”

Suddenly, both Bruno and Lardon fell silent.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

Bruno cleared his throat. “N-Nothing... I was simply in awe.”

“Huh?”

Lardon chuckled. *“He must be overwhelmed by your open-mindedness.”*

“Oh...” My open-mindedness? How did things come to that? In any case, I could still see reluctance in Bruno’s face, so I reassured him, “You can sell my information, Bruno. No worries.”

Later on, I stumbled into Gai while I was strolling the streets again. He had just returned from outside the city, this time with a group of giants in tow.

“Milord! I have returned!”

I rushed over to them. “Gai, you’re all covered in blood! What happened?”

The giants’ huge and well-toned bodies were drenched in blood—though it didn’t seem to be theirs, given how they all looked fit as a fiddle.

Incidentally, none of the passersby so much as batted an eye at the sight. Ninety-nine percent of this country’s population were monsters; it would take more than a bit of blood to faze them. This kind of scene—a group of bloodied warriors standing in the middle of a peaceful street—was one you’d never witness in human cities.

“Hm?” Gai blinked and looked down. “Goodness, I certainly am. Our opponents were rather tough this time, you see.”

“Are you hurt?”

“’Tis but a scratch, milord. A few bottles of alcohol, and I should be good as new.”

“I see...” I sighed in relief.

It didn’t look like he was putting on a tough front. He actually looked ready to fetch a few bottles and drink his wounds away.

Giants (and some wolfmen) were the most tenacious fighters. Oftentimes, a few wounds from battle would actually invigorate them, as with these giants right now.

“Still, they must’ve been really tough to have wounded you.”

“Individually, they were not much. Their coordination was exceptional, however,” Gai remarked, triggering a series of comments from the giants behind him.

“Yeah! They always managed to outnumber us somehow.”

“I just blinked, and suddenly, I was surrounded!”

“It was tough, but it was a good fight, that’s for sure.”

The battle-hungry giants were quite satisfied with their opponents this time around. *They must’ve been very formidable foes...*

I pondered on that for a bit before nodding. I summoned my dust box, took out a bottle of matured wine, and handed it to Gai. “Drink this with everyone—think of it as your reward.”

“Ohhh! We are ever grateful, milord!” Gai beamed, and the giants behind him erupted into cheers.

I watched as they disappeared down the street, eagerly heading for a tavern.

That night, I sat in my office in the palace while Reina stood in front of me with some documents in hand. Dressed in her maid uniform, she was here to report on the matter I’d asked her to look into out of curiosity.

“According to our investigation, the humans that Gai and the giants fought are from Tierre.”

“Tierre?”

“The Mercenary State Tierre,” Reina clarified. “A country we’ve never been involved with until now since they are rather far from ours.”

“A mercenary state? Does that mean there are a lot of mercenaries there?”

“Nearly half of their population, yes.”

“What the—?!” I reeled in shock. That was *way* more than I was imagining, even for a place called a mercenary state. “Why so many?”

“I haven’t investigated that far... My apologies.” Reina slumped glumly.

“It must be due to their barren land,” Lardon chimed in.

“Lardon? What do you mean by that?” I asked.

Reina flinched, but she kept silent and perked up her ears, even though she

couldn't hear Lardon.

"Do you know what the oldest job is in human society?"

"The oldest?" I felt like I'd heard the answer to this before. "Hm... Prostitution?"

"Indeed, for women. But what of men?"

I mulled it over for a moment but came up short. "Uh... Sorry. No clue."

"Mercenary work," Lardon answered. *"It is quite like prostitution in the sense that all one needs is their body—a job that can always be done as a last resort."*

"Ohhh..." I marveled, genuinely intrigued by the topic. "That would mean humans have been fighting since way back."

"Indeed. Humans naturally gather and establish tribes, from which it's only a matter of time before they wage wars over territory and whatnot. And where military might is needed, so are mercenaries—thus the job came to be. The fact that the vast majority of the country's people take up such a 'last resort' job means that their land must be poor and infertile."

"Because they have no other means to feed themselves?"

"Precisely." Lardon chuckled. *"One mistake, and this country could have very well been the same."*

"Urgh..." I could easily picture it happening. This nation was populated by monsters, all far more powerful than humans. Abundant land or not, Liam-Lardon was way more likely to become a mercenary state compared to human countries. "Well, setting that aside, why did Terre suddenly decide to mess with us?"

"I only have knowledge, not information."

Fair enough. I turned my question elsewhere. "Reina, do you know?"

"I'm afraid not. My apologies..."

"Hm... Then look it up. It bothers me that they're attacking us when they're so far away. Since they're mercenaries, someone might have hired them."

"Understood. I shall investigate further." Reina bowed and left the room.

Lardon huffed. *“Common sense would dictate it to be one of the three countries.”*

“You think so?” I cocked my head. Lardon spoke decisively just now, which she didn’t tend to do unless she was absolutely certain of her words. *So, this is the handiwork of one of the three countries after...all? Wait.* I frowned. “Hang on... It could still be another country.”

“What makes you think that?”

“You said ‘common sense would dictate,’ right? You’re only speculating, so it could still turn out otherwise.”

“Are my words enough for you to judge so?”

“Well, you only talk this way when you’re trying to get me to think more, so...”

A short silence passed before Lardon burst into laughter. I didn’t even need to see her to tell that she was genuinely pleased.

“Am I wrong?”

“No, you are correct. What I said was no more than baseless conjecture. That said, it is almost certain.”

“But not a hundred percent,” I finished, earning an approving hum from Lardon. “Then I’d best make sure.”

“What will you do?”

“I’ll tell Gai and Chris to capture the leader of the next band of Tierre mercenaries they find.”

“Then? Will you torture them?”

“I’ll use magic.”

Thus, I began to visualize that magic, starting with assembling a magic circle before me. Recently, I’d changed the way I crafted spells—first by making the magic circle with a broad framework, then making minute adjustments from there. It was kind of like molding a rough shape with clay before working out the smaller details bit by bit.

“This spell will make the target answer any question honestly.”

Lardon chuckled. *“Such a simple spell—I’ve no doubt you will successfully craft it.”*

Unlike earlier, Lardon now spoke with full confidence. With gratitude swelling in my chest, I went on to assemble and revise this new spell.

A few days later, I cast the spell on the mercenary leader captured by Gai and learned that the Duchy of Parta was behind them. It turned out to be one of our three adjacent nations in the end.

Nevertheless, Lardon sounded greatly pleased as she told me, *“You’ve learned to be more astute, and that is enough.”*

“That concludes my report on Mercenary State Tierre.”

Scarlet was standing before me, report in hand. I had figured she would know more about Tierre and that it would be better to ask her than to have Reina investigate from scratch—and I was right. The contents of her briefing left me speechless.

“They’re *really* poor...” I lamented.

“Indeed. Tierre’s land is terribly infertile, making it impossible to raise crops. That said, they have no other sources of income or sightseeing spots, nor is their location vital in the slightest. Ironically, that is also why they have never been invaded and have remained independent to this day.”

“Lardon was right on the nose, then. They really have no way to survive other than working as mercenaries.”

Scarlet nodded. She looked far less sympathetic compared to me, as she already knew about that country beforehand.

“However,” she continued, “they hold quite a bit of pride in their work, and their children grow up with suitable education too. They are often treated as useful pawns because they will work as long as they are paid.”

“Which means they will always have work.”

“Precisely.”

I was feeling a little bad for them, but this was good to hear. They weren’t in the worst possible straits, at the very least. In any case, I got a picture of what was going on over there.

“Milord!” Suddenly, the door slammed open, and Gai came barging in with a thunderous look on his face.

I jerked back to my seat. “Huh? What’s got you looking like that, Gai?”

“Milord! Please allow me to execute those fools!”

“Whoa. That’s...extreme. What’s gotten into you all of a sudden?” I asked with a frown. Gai had his moments of viciousness, but this was something else.

“I speak of those fools—the ones I captured and locked into the cells!”

“The Tierre mercenaries?”

“Indeed!” Gai stomped into the room, propped both hands on my desk, and loomed over me. “Their insolence knows no bounds. They were speaking ill of you!”

“Oh...” I nodded. “Well, that only makes sense. I gave the order to capture them, after all. Of course they’d be mad.”

In fact, it’d be strange if they *weren’t*. I had my fair share of run-ins with mercenaries, and every last one of them was a ruffian through and through. Their insults were par for the course.

“Even so, some things simply cannot be forgiven!”

“Hm... I’m surprised you came to ask for permission first.”

“I was instructed by Reina,” Gai admitted. “She said that you must have further use for them, considering you had ordered to confine them in prison.”

Nice one, Reina! In actuality, it wasn’t for such a big deal—I just wanted to draw out some more information from them after hearing Scarlet’s briefing. But Reina must’ve used that excuse to stop Gai from running wild, and I was nothing but grateful to her for it.

“Anyway, executing them is out of the question.”

“What...?” Gai pouted, clearly discontent.

“Gai, you looked a lot like Chris just now.” I stifled a smile. *Is it because they’re always around one another?*

His jaw dropped from the shock. “Wh-What did you say?! I looked...like the boar woman? *Me?*”

“Yeah. You’re like siblings.”

Gai choked up, utterly speechless. It seemed my words rattled him deeply.

No, but really, they looked alike just now. Was it really so shocking? Watching

them squabble, I often thought they got along so well that they might as well get married, though it seemed they weren't quite of the same mind.

Unable to recover from the shock, Gai staggered out of the room like a lost soul.

"Is he okay...?" Scarlet muttered, her concerned gaze on his pitiful back.

"Well... Probably. Once he runs into Chris, he'll pick a fight with her and be right back on his feet." I could easily imagine it happening; we practically saw them fight every day.

Scarlet nodded. "So, what will you do with the mercenaries?"

"I'll keep them locked up for a bit then release them eventually."

"Is that acceptable?"

"I don't hold it against them. They were just doing their jobs." I still didn't know a lot about Tierre, but what little I did know had earned them my sympathy.

"Will they not come again if you release them?"

"Hm... Will they?"

"Yes, for so long as Parta is intent on antagonizing you. Moreover," she added, "the other two countries may join the fray, with the belief they can lay all the blame on Parta as long as they also use Tierre."

"Oh, right, there are those two as well... Would they really pull something like that?"

"Unfortunately so... After all, neither Jamille nor Quistador have fully acknowledged you."

While we'd been on rather good terms recently with Jamille, Parta, and Quistador, the three nations deeply connected to the divine dragons, this was surface level at best. It was unfortunate, yes, but it couldn't be helped.

"Because of that, I believe something should best be done about Tierre while we have the chance," Scarlet continued. "Right now, they should only be working for Parta due to the contract's order of priority."

“Huh? There’s such a thing?”

“Ah, yes. *Tierre* is oddly upright in that regard. They can be hired with money, but they will never discard a contract once signed. That is how they earn their clients’ trust.”

“I see... Then what if I sign a contract with them?”

Scarlet blinked. “What?”

“They wouldn’t antagonize us as long as we’re contracted, right?”

“Well, that’s... Er...” Scarlet’s face scrunched up in bewilderment. My suggestion caught her totally off guard, and for once, she took quite a while to recover. An entire minute went by before she responded. “In all likelihood, yes...”

“Then let’s give it a try.”

“But when the contract ends—”

“Does it look to you that we’ll be able to hire the whole country for one—no, ten years?”

Scarlet swallowed her words. It seemed the idea never even occurred to her. She took a bit of time to think again, but by the end, her gaze was resolute.

“Most likely,” she said. “*Tierre* should also welcome longer contracts—if they are paid in advance, of course.”

“Do we have enough?”

“But of course. Our national treasury is filled to the brim thanks to your goods and innovations. We should be able to hire such a small country for an entire century, much less a decade.”

“Then let’s do that.”

“Very well.” Scarlet straightened her back and nodded firmly. Then, her expression relaxed into a smile, and she looked at me with deep respect. “What a novel idea. You truly never fail to impress, Master.”

As I was about to leave the whole matter to Scarlet moving forward, Lardon suddenly spoke up as she was leaving.

"You had best handle that deal yourself," she advised.

I gestured for Scarlet to stay in the room. "What do you mean?"

"Such long-term contracts are not normal for mercenaries. They likely would not trust a mere subordinate to bring them such a deal. As the king of this country, your involvement would lend more credibility to the matter."

"I see." I'd heard that company presidents would often attend the more important business talks themselves. I never had to care about these kinds of stuff, but now that Lardon mentioned it, it did make a lot of sense. "All right. Scarlet, I'll handle the talks myself. Bring me to... Their leader should do. Bring me to him."

"Understood! I shall return once I've confirmed which cell he's being held in."

"Okay." I nodded.

After a bow, Scarlet spun on her heel and left the room. Her straight posture and confident gait captivated me for a moment. She usually called me her master and worked as my subordinate, but at her core, she was a princess through and through. Her movements were so elegant and sophisticated, she could easily capture the gazes of those around her.

"For the negotiations," Lardon said, snapping me out of my daze, *"could you simply mimic my words?"*

"You want me to repeat after you?"

"Indeed. I have something in mind, you see. I would like to do it myself, but they would look down on me in my human form, and using my dragon form is simply too much."

"Hm..." I didn't know what kind of negotiation she wanted to do, but she had

a point about her two forms. It would've been nice if she could appear as an adult, but it sounded like she couldn't. "All right. I just have to repeat after you, right? Verbatim?"

"A little variation will do no harm."

"I'd prefer to be on the safe side. What if..." Humming, I began forming a spell on the spot. "Marionette!"

A magic circle appeared, engulfing me with its light.

"Oh? What kind of magic is that?"

"Oh? What kind of magic is that?"

"Hm? You..."

"Hm? You..."

"I see. You are parroting my words."

"I see. You are parroting my words."

I nodded as my mouth moved on its own. Through this spell, my control over my mouth was taken from me and linked to Lardon instead. Incidentally, I could decide the parameters of the linkage when casting the spell. I set it to only my mouth this time.

"A rather simple spell, but it's impressive how spontaneously you crafted it."

"A rather simple spell, but it's impressive how spontaneously you crafted it."

I smiled hesitantly, a bit embarrassed. It sounded like I was praising myself.

"Hmph... Rest assured. I shall refrain from praising you until this is dispelled."

"Hmph... Rest assured. I shall refrain from praising you until this is dispelled."

I'd appreciate that, I thought, my lips still quirked awkwardly.

A while later, Scarlet came back and guided me to the prison—one of many, for there was never an end to the intruders crossing our red barrier. We entered the underground facility and descended to the lowest level. The stagnant air knit my eyebrows together.

“His cell is on the farthest end,” Scarlet told me.

“Good work,” I said, still copying Lardon’s words.

Scarlet’s brows shot up, then her lips curled into a smile. “Th-Thank you!”

Why does she look so happy? I wondered as we continued down the corridor and found the cell I was looking for—the one at the very end, just as Scarlet said.

It was small, made of metal, and surely not easy to escape from. Inside was a one-eyed man dressed very much like a ruffian. Had I run into him in town, I would have guessed he was either a bandit or a mercenary.

The man glared at me. “The hell’s a kid doing here?”

Scarlet gasped. “How rude! Do you have any idea who this person is?!”

“It’s fine.”

“But Master—”

“Scarlet.” I was simply repeating Lardon’s words, but I felt like Lardon was also telling me to look straight at Scarlet, so I did. With no need to pay attention to my own speech, I instead focused on holding my gaze on hers.

Scarlet drew a sharp breath. “U-Understood...”

I nodded and turned back to the man.

“You... Just who...?”

“I am Liam Hamilton, the ruler of this nation.”

His eyes widened. “What?! Monster King Liam was just some brat?!”

Monster King...? I felt like I heard that title before. Was it already that widespread?

“So you know. That makes things quick.” Lardon’s casual acceptance and, outwardly, mine, made me cringe a little inside. **“Are you of significant station in Terre?”**

“Just kill me already. We mercenaries are prepared for death the moment we’re caught.”

“Oh? But what of your subordinates?”

“They’re the same.”

“And the people of your homeland?”

The man narrowed his eyes. “You... Just what are you planning?”

“No need to stand on your toes. This isn’t a bad deal for you.” Once again, I followed Lardon’s mental instruction: I sat cross-legged on the spot so the man was no longer looking up at me through the cell bars. **“What kind of contract have you made with Parta?”**



The man scoffed. “You think I’d just spill the beans?”

“Allow me to change the question, then. When will that contract end?”

He frowned. “What the hell are you even getting at?”

“You see, I am thinking of forming a contract myself once it’s over.”

“What?”

“You heard me. That wouldn’t pose any problems, now would it?”

“You... Seriously, what are you thinking?”

“It’s simple. I’ve heard you never betray your client while a contract is in effect.”

“Obviously.”

“With that in mind, I’m hoping to contract your entire nation. Say, for a decade or so.”

The man gaped, at a loss for words. After a while, he finally managed to wring out, “Wh-What are you saying...?” His tone betrayed the bewilderment he still felt.

“Shall I explain more simply?”

“No, I meant... What are you after?”

“Ah, an even simpler question. Do you still not understand? I want to cull our enemy forces with money.”

Silence followed. With his jaw set, the man fixed a firm, searching gaze on me. He understood our offer; now, he was just trying to figure out my ulterior motive. Lardon didn’t instruct me to, but I daringly met his gaze.

“Nothing but empty promises—”

“Hm... This space...” I spoke over the man and looked around the tight underground cells. **“It seems just about wide enough.”**

“Enough for what?”

“I will show you. Item Box.” My magic wouldn’t activate from Lardon’s words even if the chant came from my mouth, so I simply cast the spell a beat later.

“You need proof, yes? I can show you the gold right now.”

Following her lead, I piled up gold coins from out of my item box.

I got this money from trading with Bruno. Technically, these belonged to the state, but I kept it in my item box since it was the best safe around. I laid the coins out for the man to see, and sure enough, his jaw dropped at all the sparkling currency.

“This should be enough.” On cue, I stopped taking coins out and faced the man. **“Well? Is it?”**

“I-It is, but...”

“Why, is there a problem?”

“I can’t decide something so huge on my own. I need to pass this deal back to Terre...”

“Of course. A single commanding officer cannot decide for the homeland on the spot. Scarlet.”

“Y-Yes!” she answered, sounding a little startled by my call.

I cast a glance over my shoulder. **“Release this man.”**

“A-Are you certain?”

“We need him to bring the deal back to his country.”

“Understood.” Skilled as ever, Scarlet swiftly regained her composure and bowed. She took out the key and opened the door to the man’s cell.

The man watched us with narrowed eyes. “Are you sure?”

“Hmph. You too?” I chuckled. **“These talks cannot progress until you deliver the message. Did you not say that yourself?”**

“I didn’t think you’d just let me go...”

“It almost seems to me you are rather reluctant to go yourself.”

The man gulped. “I’ll ask one more time: Are you sure?”

“Then I shall ask you as well: Are you sure you don’t want to go before I change my mind?” I smirked, as Lardon mentally instructed.

The man stepped out of his cell, his face still scrunched in confusion. “Give me something as proof.”

“Take ten percent as earnest money.”

“Wha— *Really?!?*”

Ten percent was enough to hire the mercenary state—in other words, feed Terre’s citizens—for an entire year. It was undeniably a huge sum for them.

“I...” The man gritted his teeth. “I’ll definitely convince them—I swear it. So just sit tight and don’t change your mind.”

“Sure.” I nodded and turned to Scarlet. **“Release his subordinates and arrange for their transport.”**

Scarlet bowed and took the man outside, leaving just me and Lardon.

“That’s enough.” I found it a bit funny how I parroted her words even though we were alone, but in any case, I finally dispelled Marionette.

My shoulders relaxed. “Phew. Gotta hand it to you, Lardon. You totally took charge back there.”

Lardon chuckled. *“I could say the same to you.”*

“Huh? But I didn’t do anything. I was just your puppet, really.”

“It is unthinkable for a king to fully devote himself to such a role. Ordinary humans, when given such status, would feel reluctant in some way.”

“Does status have anything to do with it?” I cocked my head. “I mean, you’re way better than me at these things. This had nothing to do with magic, so I would never have come up with what you said.”

“That mindset is what I am saying is so impressive.”

“If you say so...” *What’s so impressive about it, really? Well, if she insists, then whatever...*

As I looked up at the stairs that Scarlet and the man left through, my mind soon abandoned those thoughts, filled instead with the feeling that this incident with Mercenary State Terre was finally going to reach a favorable end.

I was quietly sitting in my room when, without warning, Dyphon burst through my bedroom wall screaming and crying.

“Darling, you meanie!” she yelled as she threw herself over me.

“Whoa!” I cast a barrier on the fly, but she easily broke through it and knocked me to the ground. “Owww... Wh-What are you doing, Dyphon?”

“You meanie!” she repeated, clinging to my waist with a teary glare, almost like a sulky child.

I arched a brow. “What did I do?”

“I heard from that girl! She said you lent your body to Lardon!”

“That girl?”

“The one who quit being a princess!”

“You mean Scarlet?” After a short pause, I realized she was talking about Marionette. “Oh, that? Well, I lent her my *mouth*, sure, not really my body... I’m surprised you knew, though. I never told Scarlet about it.”

“Of course I’d know! I know how Lardon talks when she takes over a human and acts like some mysterious divine spirit or whatever!”

“Oh... Have you ever given an oracle or something to that effect?” I asked inwardly, to Lardon.

“Hmph. Who knows?”

I blinked, a bit taken aback by her curtness. *Did something happen between her and Dyphon?*

“Darling, let me do it too! I wanna try!”

“Try what?”

“Using your body!”

“Oh... Not my body. Just my mouth.”

“Just your mouth?”

“Yeah, to talk.”

“That works too!”

“Hm...” I cocked my head. Dyphon figured out what had happened all on her own just from hearing about how I spoke back then, and I even gave her full disclosure. She shouldn’t be misunderstanding Marionette’s effects, but she still seemed interested. “All right.”

“Really?!”

“Sure. Where should we go?”

“Here’s fine!”

“Here?” Last time, I made Marionette because I needed to negotiate with someone, but clearly there was nothing that necessitated such a spell here in my room, with just the two of us present. “You sure?”

“Uh-huh!”

“Hm... Okay.” I set my curiosity aside; it was probably better to see what she had in mind. I faced Dyphon and began casting the spell. “All right, here I go—Marionette!”

Light enveloped us both, and a faint sense of loss washed over me as I created a link between our mouths.

“Testing, testing. One, two... Wow!” Dyphon and I said at exactly the same time, after which she giddily tightened her embrace.

What a strange feeling. Last time, Lardon’s voice echoed only in my mind, but now, both our voices rang loud and clear in the air.

“Hooray! I’m controlling darling’s voice!” Dyphon crowed, then hopped away from me.

“Can I do this too? Wheeeeeee!” This time, only I was speaking.

She probably spoke only in her mind—not too dissimilar to how Lardon did it, but this time, I couldn’t hear her voice in my head, so it sounded like only I was

speaking from my perspective.

Dyphon made me clear my throat, then looked me right in the eye. I met her gaze, since it just seemed like the right thing to do.

“Dyphon... No,” I began. “Honey.”

I blinked. *Honey?*

“Oh my gooosh! Darling called me honey! It’s me! I’m honeeey!” Dyphon squirmed and squealed—also using my voice, which only made me feel weirder than I already did.

Besides, I didn’t call her that—she just made me. *Is this all she wanted to do?*

Suddenly, Dyphon smoothed her expression and gazed at me.

“Honey...” I whispered, my voice coming out low and breathy. “Go on, say it. Hm? What do you want me to do to you?”

“Ah...” A questionable breath spilled from both our lips.

Suddenly, Dyphon convulsed and collapsed to the floor, panting heavily.

“Oh, you naughty girl... I haven’t even done anything yet, and you’re already like this?”

“Ah... I-I’m sorry...”

Okay, I think I got it. Dyphon basically wanted to hear these sorts of “sweet nothings” from my mouth. Yeah, I got it... But, uh...

“Darling... M-More...”

But I was now saying what she wanted to hear from me *plus* her responses, and honestly, I couldn’t bear to listen anymore. Hearing myself whisper these sweet nothings was embarrassing, but even that couldn’t trump the shame of hearing myself squeal and moan like that.

After a bit of thought, I restructured and recast the spell.

“Oh? But you’d be fine with anyone, wouldn’t you?”

“No! You’re the only one for me, darling!”

With this new arrangement, speech would only be linked when there was a

conscious desire to do so. Now it just sounded like I was flirting with, or rather, talking down to Dyphon.

Okay. This should do.

I let Dyphon do as she pleased for a while longer.

The next afternoon, Gai and Chris came to see me. They loomed over me with bloodshot eyes, breathing heavily like angry beasts.

“They must be crushed!” Gai bellowed.

“Let’s go crush them!” Chris exclaimed.

I blinked widely. I knew they got along pretty well, but they were rarely this in sync.

Chris glared at Gai. “Hey, cut it out. Stop copying me.”

“That would be my line,” Gai said with a scoff. “I thought you were a boar, not a copycat.”

“Ugh, I’m neither! What I am is pissed, that’s what! I just wanna crush them!”

“I will be the one to crush them.”

“No, me!”

“Me!”

Aaand they’re back at it again. I chuckled. It was almost comforting, seeing them squabble like always. “All right, all right. I take it you’re both talking about the same thing?”

“Indeed!”

“Those guys from Parta!”

I nodded. As expected, they were talking about the recent hot topic. “So you’re saying you want to crush Parta?”

“Indeed! Milord, simply give the order, and I shall crush one of their cities in three days to set an example.”

“Why, you! Pick *me*, and I’ll do it in *two* days!”

“Hmph! Is that the best you can do, boar woman? I could do it in one.”

“Don’t look down on me! Half a day’s all I need!”

“One hour!”

“Ten minutes!”

As per usual, their argument heated up as they began butting heads—literally, as they stuck their faces close enough to headbutt one another.

I watched them with a frown. “I wonder...”

I understood where they were coming from. After all, Parta used *Tierre* to mess with us. Negotiations with *Tierre* about the ten-year contract had progressed and they were practically under my wing now, so Gai and Chris no longer saw them as a target. Instead, their anger was redirected in full force toward Parta. I couldn’t imagine they’d settle down just because I told them to.

While I was racking my brain on what to do, the door to the room cracked open, and Scarlet came shuffling in.

“Excuse me, Master... Oh my.” Her voice and movements were calm, a stark contrast to the two walking explosives in front of me. She stared at the two, startled. “What is going on...?”

“Oh, don’t mind them. It’s just the usual,” I said.

“Ah, of course.” Scarlet nodded and brushed it right off.

Gai and Chris fighting was par for the course in this country. At worst, they could get into a bloody fight, beat one another black and blue, and still nobody would bat an eye. But if they actually tried to kill each other—now *that* would be noteworthy. Anyway, their dynamic was practically common knowledge in this country, so Scarlet was bothered for no longer than a moment.

“Master, I have a request,” she said.

“What is it?”

“Please permit us to impose sanctions upon Parta.”

Instantly, Gai and Chris paused and swiveled their heads to Scarlet.

Unfazed, Scarlet continued, “The Duchy of Parta must pay a just price for their act of betrayal.”

“It wasn’t exactly an act of betrayal, was it? It’s not like they’re subordinate to us.”

“No, it *is*,” Scarlet insisted. “They broke your trust. Even between friends, that is an act of betrayal.”

Well, when you put it that way... “I guess so.”

“Therefore, I believe they must be sanctioned appropriately as punishment. Please give me permission to officialize this.”

“Well said, Ms. Scarlet!”

“I always knew we could count on you!”

Gai and Chris leaned eagerly over Scarlet, their eyes sparkling brightly. Scarlet simply smiled in response.

“Sanctions, huh? I guess that’s fine...” If all three of them were so eager about it, then I’d be willing to bet that ninety percent of our population probably felt the same—so why not? It would be best to do something to quell their outrage. “What should we do?”

“Give me your order, milord!”

“I’ll go crush them right now!”

Gai and Chris were just going on about the same stuff as earlier, so I let it go in one ear and out the other. I looked to Scarlet instead. “Do *you* have an idea?”

Scarlet nodded. “Master, may I ask if you have a spell for beautification? Or if not, could you craft one?”

“Beautification?” I paused and scoured through my memories. “Hm... Nope. I got nothing. What do you have in mind?”

“A spell that, for approximately one day, makes the target look, hm...five years younger. Yes, that should do.”

“A spell that makes the target look younger...?”

“Yes. A purely outward effect.”

“Let me think...” I mumbled as I ran through all her conditions in my head. Finally, I nodded decisively. “Yeah. I can do that.”

“Could you turn it into a grimoire as well?”

“Sure. That’s easy enough.” Handling grimoires and Ancient Memoria was trivial for me now. “So I just have to make a grimoire?”

“Two,” Scarlet corrected. “We will send them to Jamille and Quistador.”

I tilted my head. “Weren’t we talking about punishing Parta?”

“Of course. We shall say that we could only manage to produce two of these grimoires and exclude Parta.”

“Hm... And then?”

“That is all,” Scarlet said with great confidence.

That’s all? What would that do? I cocked my head in confusion, as did Gai and Chris.

“Ms. Scarlet, I say we must find a punishment that will inflict them with more pain.”

“Yeah! Why don’t we all just charge in and crush those guys?”

Scarlet smiled. “No noblewoman would not desire such a spell. As a woman of royalty myself, I can guarantee you this: They will surely begin pestering their husbands for the grimoire.”

“Hm?”

“So what?”

The two monsters were still clueless, but I finally pieced it together. “I get it... Even a king would be weak to his wife and harem.”

“Precisely. You are correct, Master.” Scarlet smirked. The look in her eyes sent a chill down my spine. “Neither Jamille nor Quistador would stand to benefit from giving their grimoires to Parta. I believe the gentlemen of Parta’s upper class will have quite a hard time dealing with their wives for a while.”

I nodded. “I see now. Nice one, Scarlet. Let’s go with that.”

Scarlet’s smile brightened from my approval. “Thank you very much, Master.”

After that, things progressed exactly as Scarlet planned. Having been excluded

from our little gift-giving endeavor, the upper class of Parta quickly scrambled to curry favor with me.

I had been trying out all sorts of methods in my effort to train and increase my mana, and this afternoon I'd come to the woods in the palace courtyard to try something new: practicing in the woods, just like I used to back when I first became Liam.

Nothing really changed even in this setting, but I got my answer—the location had nothing to do with the results of my training. I gladly accepted this new information, as the more magical knowledge I had, the better. On top of being useful, I was also just happy learning more about what I loved.

In any case, now that I knew the location didn't matter, there was no reason for me to leave so soon. I stayed in the woods and continued training my mana, comfortably sitting cross-legged on the ground...when suddenly, I felt a stare digging into the side of my head.

I looked over to meet the owner of the persistent gaze—it was Paithon. She was crouching on the ground, eyes drowsily half-lidded as always. Thankfully, though, no fog was coming out of her.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I was watching you."

I cocked my head. *What for?*

"I heard that you can grant any wish. Is it true?"

"Huh?"

"I heard that you can grant me any wish just once," she repeated.

"That sounds straight out of a fairy tale," I mused.

In any case, it just struck me where this was coming from: Dyphon. The dragon took a *huge* liking to Marionette. After the first time, she kept coming and pestering me to cast it again. She seemed to enjoy being dominated and talked down to by me.

Anyway, that was probably what Paithon heard about.

“I can’t grant you *any* wish,” I said, and Paithon noticeably drooped in disappointment. “But why do you ask? Is something troubling you?”

“Huh?” Paithon looked up at me in surprise.

“If so, I’ll see if I can help.”

“Something troubling me...”

“Yeah. I’m not too keen on granting you some selfish wish, but if you’ve got a problem, then I’ll do my best to help.”

Paithon stared at me more for a while. “Are you...a good person?”

“Oh... Uh, I’m not sure,” I said, a bit embarrassed.

“So...” She cocked her head. “A bad person?”

“I sure hope not.”

Paithon hummed and nodded. “Just a plain old person,” she decided.

“Why does that sound the most offensive?!” I retorted. Somehow, her neutral compromise left the biggest impact.

Paithon didn’t respond, as if she’d already lost interest in that silly little exchange. Instead, she looked down and fell into thought, probably considering my offer.

Well, Paithon wouldn’t ask for anything weird—

“Give me a kid.”

“PFFFT!” I choked on my own saliva. *I take it back—her request is as weird as it gets!* “What are you saying?!”

“I want to birth your egg.”

“No, that’s not what I was asking!”

“But your child would be able to sleep with me.”

“Ah...” My thoughts settled down at once.

This must be a serious matter for her. Whenever Paithon slept, she released a

fog that put living beings to sleep, which only Lardon and Dyphon could resist—until I came into the picture. I was only a human but had the mana to resist her fog, so she grew attached to me.

I fell silent for a while. “Give me some time. I’ll come up with a better way.”

“What better way?”

“A way for not just one child, but for everyone to be able to stay by your side, even when you sleep.”

Paithon pursed her lips, then nodded. “Okay. I’ll wait.”

“Great.”

“Now...” she mumbled. “You listened to my wish. I will give you something in return.”

“Hm? But I haven’t done anything yet...”

“Humans work harder when they’re paid in advance.”

“Aha ha...” *Well, she’s not wrong. Hm... Should I ask for some sort of ancient magic in return?*

Come evening, I was sitting in my office as Scarlet stood in front of me, her posture as prim as ever.

“Master, I have a report,” she began. “The Duchy of Parta requests to send a delegation.”

“A delegation?” I echoed in confusion.

“I believe their goal is to curry favor with you. Recently, not a single nobleman of Parta has been spared their wife’s carping.”

“Oh, because of Anti-Aging?”

Scarlet nodded. “I believe so.”

They want to come over and apologize, then. I was impressed. Things really went as Scarlet planned. *Lardon’s no pushover, but I guess Scarlet’s got the upper hand when it comes to politics and nobility.*

"Hmph..."

I heard Lardon huff, but before I could dwell on her further, Scarlet asked, "What shall we do?"

I cocked my head. "What do you mean?"

"In my humble opinion, they are being far too presumptuous. If we do not humiliate or threaten them in some way, Parta might look down on you and simply do the same thing again."

"Really?"

"Oftentimes, humans do not learn their lesson if not the hard way," Scarlet said with a solemn nod.

"Well, that's a problem..." I mumbled, equally solemn.

Scarlet knew the mindset of a noble quite well, so I knew I could trust her on this. I didn't want to have to deal with this issue time and time again. I tried to think of something, but as always, when it wasn't about magic, asking others was more efficient than racking my own brain.

I looked at Scarlet and asked, "What should we do?"

"I have an idea."

Unexpectedly, Lardon cut in to volunteer an answer. Her eagerness took me aback, but I welcomed it. Sure, Scarlet knew a lot about nobility, but Lardon also had a deep understanding of human nature. Her advice would definitely be useful in this situation.

After pausing in shock for just a moment, I asked, "What do you have in mind?"

"We simply need to strike fear in them, no?"

I passed the question to Scarlet, and she answered, "Yes. Absolute fear that will wipe away any thoughts of antagonizing Master ever again."

"Very well. You may entrust this to me," Lardon said, and I passed the message again.

"If the divine dragon says so, then I have no place to speak further." Scarlet

reverently bowed, and if she was in agreement, then there was nothing left to discuss. Still, I couldn't help but wonder what Lardon had in mind.

"You will see on the day itself. You've no need to prepare in any way."

"Oh... Really?"

"Indeed. Simply sit back and watch."

"Okay..."

That just got me even more curious, but with Lardon seeming dead set on it and me having no input to give when it came to these sorts of things, I shrugged it off and decided to wait as told.

A few days later, I stood outside the city gates where the main road passed through.

This place was essentially our city's front yard and the first thing visitors saw, so as per Scarlet's advice, we spruced up the road with all sorts of glamorous decorations and ornaments.

Soon, the Duchy of Parta's delegation appeared on the horizon and slowly came walking down the road. Behind me were my three monster executives, Scarlet, and other prominent figures of our country. Besides that and the decorations, we didn't prepare much else to welcome them.

Although I was told to wait, I couldn't hold back anymore and asked Lardon, "Is everything all right?"

"Hm... We should get started now."

"Okay. What should I do?"

"Nothing."

"Huh?" *Still? When the delegation's right there?* And here I was thinking, in typical Lardon fashion, she'd give me a sudden curve ball and make me come up with a spell on the spot. I was bracing myself too, ready to take on the challenge, but it seemed I was wrong. I tilted my head, perplexed.

"No matter what happens henceforth, simply stand there with your head held

high.”

“That’s all?”

“Indeed. No matter what—do you understand? That is the most important part.”

“All right. I’ll do that.”

I had no idea what was going on, so I’d best play along. I wasn’t casting a spell, but I could at least hold my head up high. I took a deep breath, straightened my back, and looked straight ahead. It was then that my body glowed, and Lardon appeared from within, her dragon form manifesting behind me. From out of nowhere, two more dragons appeared: Dyphon and Paithon.

They—all three dragons of the legendary Tri-Draconic War—stood tall and gathered behind me.

Instantly, the monsters around us erupted into gasps and murmurs, but that reaction was tame compared to the humans in the delegation. They froze on the spot and paled.

Just as I was wondering why, an explanation came right on cue from the human most knowledgeable on the three dragons. Scarlet looked at me, eyes sparkling in awe. “How marvelous, Master... It appears as if you’ve subordinated the three dragons!”

Finally, I understood Lardon’s plan. By showing that the Monster King subordinated the three dragons, she managed to instill fear in the entire delegation.



To that effect, I did my utmost to maintain my confident pose. Later on, I would hear that not only the three dragons but also my daunting aura had frightened Parta's delegation beyond words.

Then and Now

It was hell on earth.

Lightning struck and storms billowed throughout the blackened sky. Any greenery had long since died and withered, leaving the earth fraught with parched cracks moistened only by boiling magma.

This land, once blessed with nature, had become the very picture of hell, all by the hands of three dragons:

Lardon the Faceless.

Dyphon the Blitztress.

Paithon the Dark Herald.

Three transcendent beings trampled upon the puny life on this earth as they fought to end one another.

Dyphon deflected Lardon's strike, consequently blasting away half of a vast mountain range, before charging in to counterattack. However, Paithon intercepted her with a ghastly screech and bit down on her.

The two crashed to the ground, entangled in a bloody scuffle, and the river they rolled over dried up under the black aura spilling from Paithon's maw. These transcendent beings did not know this puny river was one that flooded every year, causing the humans much suffering. Now, it perished as mere collateral damage as Paithon assaulted Dyphon's scales.

As Dyphon writhed in agony, Lardon joined the fray, viciously biting down on her other side. With two dragons subduing her beneath their jaws, Dyphon once again roared in pain—a screech so shrill, it made hairs stand on end, mountains tremble, and skies shake.

However, her suffering did not last long. Paithon released Dyphon and bit down on Lardon instead. Her teeth were sharp and glare piercing, warning the other not to steal her prey.

Soon, the two dragons left Dyphon and set their sights on one another, but rather than welcoming this repose, Dyphon was angered that they dared to disregard her. She took to the skies, high as her pride, and rained her fiery breath over them both. The two dragons responded identically—by intercepting the attack with their own breaths.

Three attacks clashed in the air and pushed viciously against one another, causing a force so great that a dimensional rift formed where they met. The rift drew in the world around it—the black rain falling over the dried riverbeds, the magma gushing out of the crumbling mountains, and even the lightning and thunderstorms ravaging the skies. Nothing was spared, save for the three dragons who had caused it all.

As the dragons fought, even the world itself was no more than a measly stage that crumbled beneath their might. Amid this devastating cataclysm, the humans could do naught but flee in fear from what could only be described as the end of the world.

It was a time when despair was known intimately by all.

“What should we do?” I asked the dragon dwelling within me. My question was about the business proposal Bruno offered me just a few minutes ago.

“Jamille wants to build an official residence here, do they?”

“Right. Should I accept?”

“That would depend on how much you want to favor your brother,” she said, tossing the ball back into my court.

“Hm? Really?”

“Indeed. The fact that they made such an official request through a single merchant... Ah, I suppose he is a noble, albeit a low-ranking one. In any case, the fact that they proposed this through him means that he is their only route to you,” she explained. *“It must be quite the responsibility by human standards. Should that man succeed, his prestige and status will rise significantly. So...”*

“If I want to be partial to him, then I should accept?”

“Precisely.”

I hummed. “All right. Thanks.”

Lardon was always giving me advice. She was a lifesaver, honestly, since I was hopeless when it came to anything but magic, and her advice was never off the mark. Rulers often had advisers by their sides, but to me, Lardon was wiser than any adviser or sage in this world. I was really glad I met her.

I was wondering how I could express my gratitude—

BOOM!!!

—when the wall of my room was suddenly smashed to bits. The rubble scattered inward and kicked up a dust cloud, and from outside came a young girl. Her long pigtails fluttered behind her, matching well with her cute and lovely features.

“Darling!” The moment Dyphon saw me, she threw herself forward and wrapped her arms around me. “Hee hee... Ahh, I just love, love, *love* your scent!” she crooned, nuzzling her face against my chest.

My cheeks flushed in embarrassment, but with nobody else in the room and already knowing how stubborn Dyphon could be, I didn’t bother telling her off.

“What were you up to, darling?” she asked.

“Oh, I was just getting some advice from Lardon.”

“Ugh...” Dyphon stuck her lip out in a pout.

Come to think of it, these two used to be on bad terms, didn’t they?

“You don’t need to ask her, darling,” she said. “Come to me, and I can tell you everything you need to know, from tomorrow’s weather to the truth behind this world!”

“Uh, I feel like I *really* shouldn’t know that,” I replied with a wry smile. My gut was telling me that whatever that truth was, it was something I mustn’t know, no matter what.

Dyphon clung to me and hummed sweetly. “Darling...”

“Yes?”

“Hug me,” she crooned.

“Uh... Like this?” As requested, I pulled the smaller girl into a hug. Her cheek pressed against mine, and a pleasant feminine scent tickled my nose. However, Dyphon frowned and grumbled in discontent. “Dyphon? What’s wrong?”

“Her scent is mixed in with yours...”

“Her?”

“That idiot who’s brazenly lodged into you.”

“Oh, you mean Lardon... Wait, you can smell her?” I sniffed my sleeve, but I couldn’t tell at all. “Uh... You don’t like it?”

“Mm...” Clinging to my arm, Dyphon looked up at me and then shook her head. “No. Your scent is still stronger, so I can bear with it.”

“All right.” Well, I’d be surprised if my body didn’t produce my scent the strongest. Anyway, thankfully, she didn’t seem to have any problems with it—

“Nighty night...”

“Whoa!” I flinched, startled by the sudden weight on my back.

Paithon had appeared out of nowhere and, instead of entering with a greeting like any normal person, made herself known with a “nighty night,” of all things.

Just a beat later, she fell asleep, and her body began producing fog. Before it could knock out any and all living beings around us, I summoned my dust box to absorb it all.

“Ugh, what the heck? She’s here again, this cheeky girl,” Dyphon grumbled as she glared at the girl clinging on my back. With Dyphon still in front of me, I was essentially sandwiched between them. “Hey, you. Get away from my darling, will you?” She grabbed Paithon’s head and began shaking it side to side.

“Whu...?” Paithon opened her eyes and stared at Dyphon in a daze.

“Get away from my darling. Are you stupid? You wanna die? Well, I can help you with that. Come at me!”

Paithon blinked and, after a short pause, yawned. “No thanks. I’m sleepy,” she mumbled as she buried her face in my back and fell asleep again.

“Ugh! Why is she always like this?!”

“Now, now. We should let her sleep when she’s sleepy, shouldn’t we?” I said.

“Hmph... If you say so...” Dyphon pouted but thankfully backed down.

She looked just like any other sulky child, so I couldn’t stop myself from patting her head.

“Oh... Hee hee.” Dyphon didn’t seem displeased in the slightest, so I had no reason to withdraw my hand. She beamed as I continued to pat her head.

They looked like they were going to start fighting for a second there, but fortunately, everything turned out all right. *All’s well that ends well*, I thought, breathing a sigh of relief.

Alas, Liam was sorely mistaken.

To him, stopping Lardon, Dyphon, and Paithon from fighting was no more than a peaceful little episode in his everyday life—but to others, it was not so.

“Hm? Scarlet?”

Scarlet had witnessed that scene when she stopped by the room, and it left her speechless. The Tri-Draconic War was the most catastrophic event in all of human history; it was a time when the world nearly came to an end as the dragons sought to ruin one another.

Her knowledge of that war left her speechless now, at this picture of the three dragons coexisting in the same space, all thanks to a single human.

“Master... Truly, there are none other like you in the world.”

Scarlet’s respect and admiration for Liam had reached new heights.

Afterword

I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novel author. I sincerely thank you for picking up a copy of *I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic Volume 5*.

Thanks to everyone's support, we were able to publish five whole volumes, making this my second longest series to date. Seeing volume after volume getting published, I feel like I'm constantly receiving the readers' votes of confidence, and each time I am both happy and extremely honored. It feels as if the readers have entrusted this series to me, so I will continue to do my best for so long as I have these expectations placed upon me.

This fifth volume follows the very same concept as the first four. Putting it this way, it sounds as if the content is rather static, but recently on social media I saw someone comment on a certain popular manga series as such:

"I went to a ramen shop and got the ramen that I wanted."

Personally, I believe that this is a very important outlook. The readers must have picked up this fifth volume because they had read the first to fourth volumes. In which case, I must deliver this volume to them with the same concept. Anyone would raise a brow if they were served high-quality French cuisine at a ramen shop, so I will do my utmost to serve the ramen that the readers purchased this fifth volume for.

Moreover, if you just happened to grab this fifth volume and decided you enjoyed it, well, you now have four more volumes to enjoy catching up on. Please do give it a try, as these purchases will go toward a sixth volume in the future.

Now, my words of thanks:

To Kabotya, the illustrator, thank you as always. The three dragons on the cover are so unbearably cute.

To my editor and TO Books, thank you very much for publishing this volume.

Thank you, thank you!

And to all the readers, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I now set my pen down while praying that this volume will sell well so I can bring you the next one too.

Sincerely,

Nazuna, May 2021







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Volume 5

by Nazuna Miki

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