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

author
Nazuna Miki
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Character

Liam

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



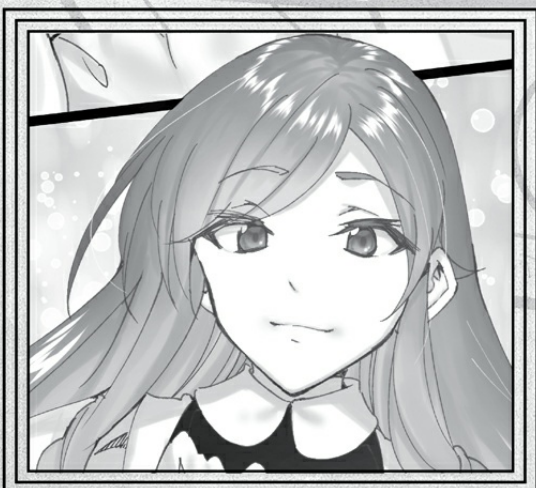
Asura

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



Jodie

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



Scarlet

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

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A flash of light illuminated the room in an instant. The windows were all shut, blocking off the high afternoon sun outside, but the white light that manifested in the ceiling made the space much brighter than any seeping sunlight ever could.

“W-Wow... So this is magic...” Flora whispered, astonished by the spell she had cast herself.

This girl was delivered here from Parta as a bride but had since moved into our town and become my familiar, giving her the opportunity to now cast this illumination magic spell.

“Can you dispel it?” I asked.

“I will try.” Through the Ancient Memoria, Flora attempted to cast the spell to undo this magic. It took her a few minutes since she had yet to master it, but the room soon dimmed again.

“Looks like you’re all good.”

“Yes... This is amazing, Liam. Everyone can use this magic, right?”

“Yep. I plan to lay the high mithril silver out under the roads *and* everyone’s houses,” I answered under Flora’s astonished gaze. “Then, I’ll load them up with some spells I’m planning to make. There’s the spell you just used for lighting, but also some simple nonoffensive flame magic for cooking and water magic to use in place of wells...”

“This wasn’t all?”

“I mean, we’ve got our hands on tons of high mithril silver. I wanna make the most of it, not just for battle.”

“Even then, are there not more useful places to use it on?”

“No. This will do.” I thought back to my life before I became the fifth son of a noble house. “Light, fire, and water... If everyone can easily access those three

essentials, then they would have much more time to accomplish other things. That's why this is imperative."

"Oh..."

"Ha ha."

"What's wrong, you two? I mean, Flora?" I realized Flora couldn't hear Lardon, so I asked her first.

"Oh, um... I was just thinking how this newly built town is already enjoying a much more convenient lifestyle than Parta's capital."

"Really?"

"Yes. Parta's monarch, the Grand Duke, as well as the nobles... None of them think of how the citizens live like you do."

"That...sounds like a tough country to live in." *But I get what she means.* Before I became Liam, it was painfully obvious how little thought the upper class of society ever gave to our lives.

"So...I think you're amazing, Liam."

"I'm just doing what I want to, though."

"Please, there's no need to be hum—"

"No, I mean it. Making, practicing, and using magic... That's all I really want in life."

Flora's gaze sparkled as she nodded quietly. "I understand," she murmured.

Why's she looking at me like that?

"Ha ha."

"There you go again. What is it this time?"

"*Shall I take a guess at her inner thoughts?*" Lardon teased. "*He says that, but he still tries to better everyone's lives, while those in Parta would only try to better their own. What an amazing person,' is what I wager she is thinking.*"

"O-Okay..." I muttered. Lardon probably wasn't too far off there, judging from the look of respect on Flora's face. *This is kinda awkward, though. I should*

change the topic...

"Milord, can you hear me?"

"This voice... Gai?"

As luck would have it, Gai suddenly cut into our conversation. He was using Telephone, which—unlike Telepathy—made his voice audible to those around me. Of course, Flora could hear him too. The girl flinched before staring with much intrigue at this relatively new spell of mine.

I quietly sighed in relief now that her attention was diverted. "Is something up?" I asked Gai.

"Some humans have come seeking an audience with you."

"An audience? Who is it?"

"She claims herself the captain of Quistador's Dragoons."

Flora gasped. "The Dragoons?!"

"Do you know about them, Flora?"

"I do! Quistador's Dragoons are very famous. They're a unit of dragon riders."

"Dragon riders... That sounds incredible."

"It certainly is. Their dragons are very strong and well-trained, and they're as loyal as dogs to their riders and as ferocious as lions to their enemies."

"Wow."

That...sounds impressive, all right.

From Flora's room, we teleported to one of the meeting points I had set. Soon, I saw Gai and several other giants leading a group of dragon-riding humans this way.

Wow. So those are the Dragoons, the dragon riders, huh? They looked just as cool and gallant as their title made them sound. I could easily imagine they were plenty popular in Quistador.

However, once they got close enough to see me, the dragons abruptly stopped in their tracks. They froze in place, only moving to lower their heads to

the ground.

“What’s going on?!”

“I don’t know! The dragons won’t listen!”

“Hey, settle down!”

“Mine is frightened!”

They were still far enough that their bellows sounded no louder than whispers to my ears. *What’s going on over there?* It didn’t seem like they were gonna get any closer, so I figured I’d go over to them instead.

“Eek!”

That moment, the girl at the very front who seemed to be their captain yelped in surprise. The dragon she was riding suddenly bolted up on its hind legs, looking terribly frazzled—as did the other dragons in their crew.

“Y-Your Highness, it’s him! The dragons are afraid of him!” One of her subordinates pointed at me.

“Uh... Me?” I was frankly still a bit lost, but I decided to step back a few dozen meters. Even from this distance, I could easily tell that the dragons were calming down. “Huh... They actually were afraid of me? But why?”

I heard Lardon chuckle. *“You must have triggered those lizards’ survival instincts.”*

“Survival instincts?”

“Wild animals fear the strong. It is in their nature.”

“Okay...” *I’m not sure how to feel about that,* I thought wryly.

The dragons were so frightened, I actually found myself feeling bad for them. In that regard, they were completely different from Lardon and her kids. “But still, isn’t this too much? They don’t look that different from the Lardon Juniors...”

“Do not lump me and mine in with those lizards,” Lardon grouched, sounding vexed for once. *“I do acknowledge the similarities in our appearances, but only to the extent as humans are to starfish.”*

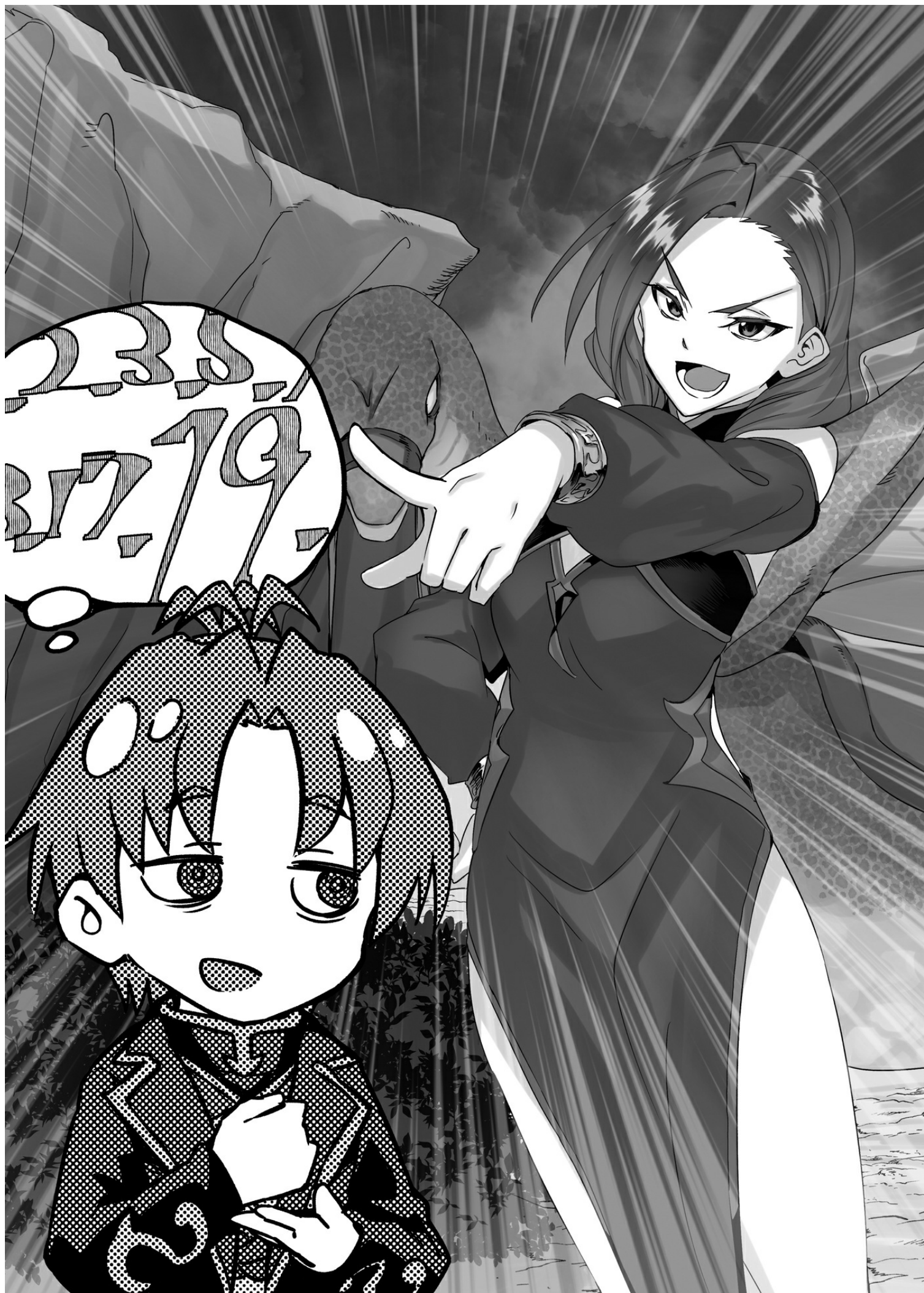
“That’s barely similar at all!” *Not even monkeys? Really? Wow...* “Right, my bad. Guess I judged a book by its cover.”

“As long as you understand.”

Meanwhile, the captain seemed to have given up on controlling her dragon and hopped off its back. She strutted right over to me, stopped just five meters away, and gracefully held her hand up by her mouth.

“Oho ho ho!” She threw her head back and laughed heartily. “Hear me! My name is Sheila. Sheila Austrom! I am the nineteenth princess of Quistador, as well as the first head of the Austrom house.”

“Oh... A prime number...” I mumbled for no particular reason, unable to keep up with this unique new character who suddenly popped up in front of me.



“Are you Liam Hamilton, the king of this nation of monsters?”

“Y-Yeah. That would be me.”

“Splendid.” She thrust a finger toward me. “I challenge you to a duel!”

My mouth fell agape at the sudden and incomprehensible development.

“Sorry? A duel, as in...?”

“A foolish question! What else must people do in order to better know one another?”

“Um... Maybe share a drink or—”

“They must fight!” she interjected, and with some very manly words too.

“Uhhh...”

“Oho ho ho! You seem quite baffled. Yes, I know what you want to say.”

“Oh, you do?” *And here I thought she was entirely beyond comprehension—*

“I’m certain you wish to point out that intercourse is a much faster method for a man and woman, but alas, you are a child, and I am a virgin. In other words, such a method is not viable for us. Bereft of that, we are left with the second best option.”

“Huuuh...?” *I stand corrected. She is beyond comprehension.* Besides, I had absolutely no reason to fight her. I needed to find a good way to turn her down and send her back on her way. Though I could also hear her out if there’s some good reason for—

“Now then, fight me. This way, I shall determine whether you are worthy of being Quistador’s ally.”

I sucked in a breath. “Quistador’s ally...” So, she must want to talk about forming an alliance. Well then, I had all the reason I needed to agree to this duel.

I hadn’t formed relations with any of the three surrounding nations. Jamille offered Scarlet as a bride, but that had yet to take any official shape, and we had no idea how the whole Izie incident would impact their stance. Parta sent Flora over, but the implications of that were hazy at best considering the

circumstances behind the move.

Now here was Sheila, having come with talks of an alliance.

I sized her up. She was quite the eccentric princess...but I didn't hate her. I got the feeling she wasn't a bad person at heart.

"All right. Let's do it."

"Oho ho ho! A commendable spirit!"

"Will we fight right here?"

"But of course. Then, I shall begin."

"Sure—"

Right as I nodded, Sheila disappeared! *I let my guard down!* I hurriedly put up eleven magic barriers and twelve physical barriers, a total of twenty-three. Just in time too—I heard a barrage rain down behind me and felt a shock wave as ten of my physical barriers were shattered.

"Not bad!" Sheila said in praise, but her voice did not come from behind.

To my left! I whipped my head around, but by then, I could only catch sight of her afterimage. I threw out another few physical barriers, a decision instantaneously rewarded. Another barrage of blows shattered the barriers behind me—in other words, to the right of where I was initially facing.

"A physical barrier, I see! Then how about this?"

Suddenly, waves of sharp, crackling heat assaulted my body.

"So you have an antimagic barrier too. Then allow me to try this next!"

I could never catch sight of her; all I could do was react to her voice. At this point, I finally understood that she was simply moving too fast for me to see.

"Dodge!" For once, Lardon yelled out a warning, which prompted me to move without even thinking. Using Teleport, I quickly jumped a short distance away.

An explosion gouged the ground where I just was. Once the cloud of dust cleared up, there stood Sheila with a red sword clutched in her hands, its blade still buried in the earth. The edges of the small crater it left behind were scorched red, as if melted.

“What’s...”

“That is a magic sword,” answered Lardon. *“A sword not purely tangible, nor entirely made of magic.”*

“That’s why you told me to dodge...” The attack she launched at me probably wasn’t something either of my barriers could defend against.

“Oho ho ho! How unfortunate, Liam Hamilton, for this next attack shall cement your loss!” The next moment, Sheila disappeared yet again—but in response, all I did was quietly close my eyes. “Have you given up?!”

Ignoring her taunt, I stretched my left hand out.

“Hngh?!” Sheila abruptly withdrew her attack, and I sensed her retreat. “Preposterous... How about this?!”

She charged in again, and this time, I raised the same hand upward. I heard her suck in a sharp breath and fall back once more. “You’re keeping up with my speed...?”

“No. It’s thanks to this.” Instantly, I was surrounded by a faint purple mist. She wasn’t my enemy, nor was this a duel to the death. We were just fighting to get to know one another, so I willingly revealed my trick.

“Oh! That’s...”

“It’s my mana,” I answered. “I can sense you if you step in here.” I came up with this on the fly, so I was relieved to see it working well.

Since my sight couldn’t catch up to Sheila’s speed, I spread my mana around me like a shroud of mist to sense whenever she stepped within range. My body wouldn’t be able to keep up even then, however, so I linked up my mana with my hand so it would be drawn to wherever I was lacking in defense.

It was a simple trick, really. It followed the same logic as draining a pool of water; the volume always flowed to where it was being drawn. My physical abilities couldn’t keep up with her, but I had magic to fill in the gaps for me, especially after I learned how to manipulate mana better through Lardon’s training.

Sheila chuckled, looking extremely pleased. “Intriguing. Oh, you are quite

intriguing indeed,” she said while sheathing her sword.

“Are we done?”

“Yes. I understand how strong you are now. Your mana, as well as how you control it... Why, I could even appoint you the head court magus in Quistador.”

Now she’s singing me praises...

“I would like to have a talk with you. May I?”

Finally, Sheila and I were on the same page.

I teleported Sheila and her entourage from the outskirts to the reception hall in an instant. They looked around in shock, unable to comprehend the sudden change in scenery.

“What is the meaning of this?” Sheila murmured, eyeing me with both wariness and curiosity. “An illusion?”

“Teleport,” I answered. “It’s Lardon’s spell.”

“The Dragon’s Diadem?”

“Hm?” I cocked my head at the unfamiliar title.

“Am I wrong?” Sheila asked.

“Well, uh...”

“She is not mistaken. That refers to me,” Lardon answered. She sounded somewhat disgruntled, which surprised me quite a bit, considering how unfazed she’d been about being called an evil dragon before. *I wonder what’s up.*

“Um... Seems you’re right.”

“I see. I’ve heard you wield many of that dragon’s spells. That appears to be the truth.”

“Right... Anyway, come on in.”

Half of Sheila’s subordinates stayed on the front lawn to watch over their dragons, while the remaining half came into the reception hall with us, where we were welcomed by the noncombatant elves I stationed here. Important guests would come and go in this building, so I found it best to have the clever and tactful elves work here.

After leaving the subordinates to them, I personally escorted Sheila to the most extravagant room in the building. The windows here were made of highest-quality glass and reached all the way to the three-story-tall ceiling. A soft carpet led us to two armchairs.

“After you.”

“Why, thank you.”

After letting Sheila get settled first, I took my seat and faced her. “So,” I began, “you mentioned an alliance, right?”

“Oho ho ho! I did indeed!”

“Any conditions?” I thought back to recent events. Both Jamille and Parta had come with some sort of marriage talks on hand, so I wondered if Quistador might be the same. *In fact, maybe this princess in front of me...*

“A military nonaggression pact,” Sheila answered.

I blinked, lost for words. “That’s all?”

“Yes.”

It sounded too good to be true. Military nonaggression went without saying when forming an alliance. I might not have been born a noble, but I still knew it was the barest of minimums, an obvious agreement that need not even be said. I couldn’t help my simmering suspicions when she said that was all she needed.

“My, your doubt is written all over your face. Do you not believe me?”

“Honestly, no.”

“In Quistador,” she began, “there is a warning that has been passed down to every generation: ‘Do not turn against the Dragon’s Diadem.’”

“Against Lardon?” I leaned forward. “What happened?”

“Our country was nearly annihilated by the dragon.”

“What?” I inwardly asked Lardon if that was true. “*Hmph*,” was all she replied, sounding just as disgruntled as earlier.

That’s practically a yes. So something did happen in the past. But anyway, just by the fact that Lardon acknowledged it as an incident at all, I could already imagine how traumatized Quistador must be. *Could this have something to do with the Tri-Draconic War?*

“That is one of the reasons why I, the leader of the Dragoons, was dispatched here,” Sheila continued. “If you truly did inherit the powers of the Dragon’s

Diadem, then our dragons would surely react in some way.”

“Oh...” I recalled how those so-called “lizards” acted around me.

“And the outcome was as we thought,” she finished. “Not once in the past century have our dragons ever defied their rider’s orders.”

“Wow. Really?”

“Indeed, for only the most thoroughly trained dragons are allowed into the Dragoons. Thus, I surmise you are undoubtedly related to the Dragon’s Diadem in some manner.”

“Ohhh...” With everything laid out, I was starting to understand why she was satisfied with a nonaggression pact.

“What say you?”

“Hmmm.” I looked inward for an answer. “Lardon, what do you think?”

“This is your country. Do as you please.”

“But this also involves you. Give me some advice, will you?”

Lardon sighed. *“Then you would do well to accept. The fewer enemies you have, the better. Even for militaristic nations, it is wise to face only one foe at a time.”*

“I see...” I nodded and faced Sheila again. “All right. I’ll accept your alliance.”

“Oho ho ho! A truly wise decision!” She brushed the back of her hand by her cheek and laughed out loud.

Her reaction is as extravagant as always, I thought—until I realized her temples were coated in sweat. Was she...nervous? Because she was negotiating with someone who can wield Lardon’s power? In that case, maybe she was putting up a brave front all along. I found that kind of cute.

At the same time, I got even more curious as to what exactly Lardon did, but it didn’t seem like the dragon in question was willing to answer. *Guess I’ll ask Scarlet later. She’d know about the Tri-Draconic War.*

“Well then...” Sheila stood and offered me her hand. After I shook it, reciprocating the gesture, she cocked her head. “By the by, I have a question for

you, one no amount of investigation could answer for me.”

“Hm?”

“What is the name of your country?”

“The name... Um...” *Now that she mentioned it, I never decided on one...did I?*

As I was racking my head over how to answer, my body began glowing. That glow parted from my figure, converged in the air of this three-story-tall hall, and took its own shape: that of a gigantic dragon.

“Lardon?! What’re you up to?”

Beside me, Sheila had frozen like a statue, her face now pale as a sheet. *No, seriously, what the heck did Lardon do to you all?*

“*This country’s name...is Liam-Lardon,*” declared the dragon. “*The nation ruled by the human to whom I grant full authority.*”

“Huh?” *She’s including my name in it? What’s going on all of a sudden?*

“L-Liam...” Sheila’s gaze shakily turned to me, and in it I could see both fear and, for some reason, respect.

“*This also involves me, no? So I did as I pleased.*”

“Oh...” *Is she getting back at me for earlier? Jeez, what a kid.*

As I was grumbling at the childish dragon, I failed to notice the implications of this entire matter. The fact that Lardon personally appeared and included me in the country’s name would boost my status and prestige by unprecedented levels, spreading the word throughout the world in no time at all.

But right now, I had yet to realize that.

After Lardon withdrew, I continued discussing a few things with a still frazzled Sheila about the alliance between Quistador and...L-Liam-Lardon. The finalization of the details and official signing of the documents would come at a later date, but I had a feeling it wouldn't stray too far from the general gist of a military nonaggression.

Throughout our talk, Sheila kept casting a few glances at thin air. Clearly, Lardon's sudden appearance earlier was still plaguing her mind. While the new name of our country was a bit embarrassing, Sheila's reaction told me it would serve as a great deterrent for war in the future.

By the time we finished our meeting, the sun outside the window was already setting. The sky gradually dimmed, welcoming the night.

"Let's stop here for today."

"Very well."

"I had your lodging prepared for you. Follow me." I got on my feet and headed for the door.

Sheila followed me through the corridors and out the reception hall. By then, the sun had completely sunk beyond the horizon. It was officially evening.

"Huh?"

"What's up?"

"It's bright..." From the reception hall's front gate, Sheila swept her stunned gaze across the townscape, where ten thousand residents were going about their lives amid the ongoing construction rush. This hall was built atop an elevated spot in the land, as per Scarlet's advice. From here, it was easy to overlook the town.

"It's bright?" I parroted.

"Light is seeping out of all the windows," she pointed out.

“Ohhh. That’s because of a magic spell called Light.”

“Magic?!” Sheila whipped her head around in shock.

“Yep. I used Ancient Memoria... Ah, well, I laid out this grimoire-equivalent material along the roads and branched it out into all the buildings. It’ll take them a while, but now, it lets everyone cast magic indoors.”

“Huh...?” Sheila stared blankly at me for a moment. “You made the buildings...like grimoires?”

“Essentially, yeah.”

She blinked a few times. “All of them?”

“All of them,” I said, nodding. I walked toward the house closest to the reception hall and stood by its window. Then, I faced Sheila and pointed inside.

“The room is bright even without a light source... Huh?! Did they just create water?”

“Those are also spells. I made it so all households can use illumination, water, and flame magic.”

Sheila’s jaw dropped. As her mind struggled to process what she’d just learned, the night slowly but surely set in. The residents began casting Light within their houses, painting an evening townscape that was bright enough to wash out the twinkling stars.

“It’s like a nightless city,” murmured Sheila.

“That sounds kind of cool.”

“How did you do this?”

“With a vein deposit of high mithril silver I found.”

“You even have high mithril silver?!” Sheila was shocked yet again, and understandably so. I’d gotten a thorough taste of just how precious the metal is, so I could relate to her reaction. “Then even your military strength should be...”

She mumbled something with a terribly somber look, but I wasn’t able to catch what she was saying. “Hm?”

“No, it’s nothing,” she said, smiling wryly. “More importantly, all these lights are forged with magic, yes?”

I nodded.

“You also mentioned water and fire. I take it your town uses magic in place of a water system?”

“Exactly. Everyone loves how convenient it is.” I was a little smug about how I managed to achieve all this with magic.

“If all the residents are casting this much magic on such a large scale, I can only imagine how much manastones you are producing.”

“Manastones? What’re those?”

“Are you not aware?”

“No.” I shook my head. This was the first I’d heard of it. “What is it?”

“Oho ho ho! Very well! Allow me to educate you myself.” Sheila laughed with her hand over her mouth, almost as if she wasn’t slack-jawed just moments ago. “Many metaphors can be used to explain manastones, but my favorite would have to be poop.”

“P-Poop? As in...?”

“Feces, yes.”

“O-Oh...” *Not the kind of word I was expecting to hear from a princess’s mouth...*

“I refer to it as such for its qualities as a fertilizer.”

“Fertilizer...” My expression smoothed over as I turned the word over in my head.

“Try casting a spell,” Sheila urged.

“All right.” I nodded and cast Light, a spell I could obviously cast since I made it myself. A soft glow floated above my palm like a lantern in the night.

“Huh?”

“What?” I turned to see Sheila stunned yet again. “What’s wrong?”

“That’s magic, correct?”

“Yeah?”

“You cast it with your mana?”

“Yes...” All her questions made me wonder if I’d done something wrong.

“What is the meaning of this...?” Sheila mumbled, gravely perplexed.

“Um, I think that’s *my* line. What’s wrong?”

She pursed her lips together for a moment. “Manastones are the accumulation of mana that leaks out whenever humans cast magic,” she finally explained. “It is akin to how excess wax will always remain after a candle burns out.”

“Oh, I get it.”

“Humans cannot use magic at a hundred percent efficiency. Any mana that failed to be applied to the spell would scatter into the air, flutter to the ground, and eventually coalesce into a manastone. However...”

“However...?”

“Did you truly cast magic just now? I failed to sense any excess mana.”

“Oh...” I nodded, finally understanding. “Lardon taught me to use my mana more efficiently. That must be why.”

“Indeed. I trained you until a hundred percent efficiency.”

“She said I can cast magic with a hundred percent efficiency,” I relayed.

“What? A hundred...percent?” Sheila blinked her eyes owlshly, disbelief painted all over her face.

After escorting the dumbfounded Sheila and her subordinates to their lodgings, I strolled through the evening streets by myself. Unlike other towns, ours was bright even at night. In the distance, I could hear some lively chatter and laughter.

“Is it *that* amazing to cast magic with zero excess?” I asked Lardon. It was something I managed to achieve thanks to her training, so I figured she’d have the answer.

I heard a chuckle in my mind. “*The boost to your abilities would not have been as astounding otherwise, no?*”

“Hm... So normally, humans leak quite a bit of mana when casting magic?”

“*Precisely. Perhaps it would be easier to understand once you see it for yourself.*”

“How?”

“*By doing the opposite.*”

“Opposite?” I stopped in my tracks and cocked my head.

“*Of what you have been doing,*” Lardon clarified. “*Cast a spell as inefficiently as you can.*”

“All right.” I didn’t know where this would lead, but Lardon never gave any meaningless instructions.

Um... As inefficiently as possible, right? In other words, I had to use a ton of mana but fail to cast the spell. I decided to give it a try using Magic Missile, the simplest spell there was. I mustered my mana, held my hand out, and chanted the spell. Nothing happened.

“*Oh? Not bad. With my simple instruction, you went from a hundred to zero percent efficiency at once.*”

“Huh? Isn’t that what you told me to do?”

“Normally, gradual downward adjustment is needed,” Lardon explained, chuckling pleasantly. *“I suppose it would be foolish of me to be impressed by your magic genius at this point.”*

Is she...complimenting me? I wasn't too sure, so I could only tilt my head in confusion.

“Oh.” Amid the beams leaking out of everyone's houses, my eyes captured a new source of light—specks that were floating leisurely over the ground like fireflies in the night.

“How poetic. To me, they look no more than dust visible beneath the sunlight.”

“I can't unsee it anymore when you put it that way...” I chuckled wryly.

“I daresay mine is the more accurate analogy. Those specks are excess mana suspended in the air. They are visible to you now for you've cast magic at zero efficiency.”

“I see... Oh, it's piling up.” I watched as the specks of mana gently settled on the ground.

“Well? It's dust, is it not?” Lardon chuckled. *“Manastones are the crystallizations of these specks. With all the magic in this town, one may have already formed.”*

“Really...?”

I looked around and focused all my senses on picking up on the mana around me. Soon, I sensed something similar to all these floating specks, just a tad denser. It was a vague presence and a bit far, so I tried to grasp its location the same way I'd squint my eyes to see farther.

“This way.”

I slowly walked onward, keeping my focus on the presence amid the sea of magical lights around me. Still, finding my way to it through town was a bit of a challenge, especially with how much the construction had progressed and how complex the streets had gotten. I could tell which general direction the presence was in, but I would constantly wind up in dead ends and forced

through detours along the way.

After navigating my way through the town's mazelike alleys, I finally arrived at a vacant plot of land yet to be constructed on or even paved with a road.

"It's down here..." I mumbled, confident in my judgment.

At the corner of the lot, I dug down several centimeters with my bare hands and found a colorful stone. I picked it up and studied it. Like puff pastry, it had multiple layers of varying colors, all coming together to form a beautiful gem. It was as big as a fist, but the faint mana within it barely amounted to anything. I would never have found it had I not gone out of my way to look.

"Is this it?" I asked.

"Indeed. That is a manastone."

"What can I do with this?"

"Nothing."

"Huh?"

"You've noticed, have you not? Its mana is gradually seeping out. Soon, it will turn into naught but an ordinary stone."

"So it's useless..." That was kind of disappointing. I was hoping it'd be useful for *something* when I heard it was made of mana. *What a letdown.*

"However," Lardon continued, "it is a precious stone. Humans cannot use much magic, so it is rare for a manastone to form at all. It is normally excavated from battlefields, where spells relentlessly fly back and forth. Thus, manastones are also called 'bloodsouls,' stones made from the blood spilled and souls taken in battle."

"Oh, wow..." I looked down at the manastone—the bloodsoul—in my hand. *That's a pretty intriguing backstory for—*

"This may vary per era, but due to its rarity, its value can inflate to several times that of a diamond of the same size."

"HUUUH?!" I whipped my head back to the stone with newfound astonishment. *This thing is—it's that much more expensive than diamonds?*

Hang on. Can't this be a great source of income for our country...?

Noon the next day, I was carefully excavating last night's manastone deposit when Bruno came over and knelt before me without hesitation. "I have come at your summons, Your Majesty."

"Oh, Bruno. That was quick." I had sent the wolfman messenger just this morning, and he was already here. I walked over and helped him up, but even then, he made sure to lower his head so he was the one looking up at me.

"But of course. I would cross rivers and mountains to respond to your summons."

"All right. Firstly... Thanks for dealing with the Izie incident. I heard it went well."

"You are too kind. I was merely working as your proxy."

"Still, thanks."

"It is my greatest honor." Bruno bowed deeply.

"More importantly, though, I have something to discuss with you."

"Whatever could it be?"

"Take a look." I led Bruno to the deposit I was digging up. "It's about this."

"Could these be..." He squinted. "Manastones?"

"Right. Actually, there's a high chance we can stably produce these."

"Huh..." His mild expression instantly flipped into one of shock and disbelief. "A stable production? Of manastones? I-Is such a thing possible?"

"It is," I affirmed.

I brought Bruno up to speed on our town's newest assets. I told him about how we found a deposit of high mithril silver, used that to improve the town's infrastructure, made everyone capable of casting magic for their day-to-day lives, and how it was slowly transforming this place into a magic city. Each of

these new developments I raised seemed to hit Bruno like a ton of bricks. By the time I was done, his jaw had practically dropped to the ground.

“Anyway, all that happened,” I finished. “I still have to look into the rate and volume of our manastone production, but there’s no doubt they’ll keep popping up from now on.”

“I-I see...”

“So now, I want to talk business.”

“C-Could you mean...with *me*?!”

“Yep.” I nodded. “From your reaction, I’m guessing these stones really do sell for a lot?”

“Certainly. They are both beautiful and rare. Moreover...” His expression turned serious. “No two manastones ever develop the same pattern. Therefore, the price for an individual stone can skyrocket depending on its pattern.”

“Ohhh.” These stones were made of layers of mana. The type of spell, the person who cast it, the timing, the order—any of those could affect the way it was layered. I could imagine it very well, given all my experience with magic.

“Thank you very much, Your Majesty! Should you leave this to me, I will put my utmost effort into bringing you the most profit from this venture.”

“No need to be so humble, Bruno. Here, take a look at the product.” I passed one of the manastones I carefully excavated to Bruno, who observed it closely. “How is it?”

“Hmm... As you said, it is a young manastone. There will be much demand for this among the newest generation of nobles and the nouveau riche.”

“It’s ‘young’?” I murmured. His phrasing was a bit odd. “Did I say that?”

“Ah, my apologies. I said it because you mentioned this stone just recently formed.”

“Okay... Is there a point in differentiating between young and old manastones?”

“Certainly.” He nodded firmly and held the manastone up. “Please take a

look. Each colored layer takes up this much space, does it not?”

“Well, I guess so.”

“These layers narrow as time passes. Even among manastones of the same size, those with thinner and more layers are more beautiful.”

“Ohhh.” I nodded. That made sense. Manastones were treated as gems; of course they’d sell for more if they looked prettier, especially if their beauty grew in proportion to their age. “How long does it take for the layers to narrow and increase?”

“Some say it takes three centuries.”

“All right. I can manage that.”

“Huh?” Bruno blinked, confused. He probably thought I was only asking out of curiosity.

“By the way, how much more expensive is a three-century-old manastone?”

“Due to its rarity, I would say... Perhaps five times more, at the very least,” he answered despite looking perplexed. “Um, Your Majesty? May I ask what you meant earlier...?”

“Right. Dust Box,” I chanted, summoning the magic box. “This spell lets me store things in this box and leave it there to age. One year passes every hour inside, so I’ve been using it to ferment wine.”

“I-Impressive as always. Such a wide variety of spells at your disposal...”

“For three hundred years, two weeks should be enough.”

“If what you say is true...” Bruno’s eyes sparkled in anticipation. “You could make a gem that is truly one of a kind in this world.”

“I’ll give it a try.”

Under my brother’s fascinated gaze, I stored the largest manastone I dug up into my dust box. Two weeks later, that manastone would shrink to less than half its size, transforming into a breathtaking three-century-old gem.

In the town's reception hall, I summoned my dust box while facing Bruno.

"It's finally time," he said.

I nodded, feeling a little nervous and excited at the same time, kind of like I was opening a gift box.

"Ohhh!" When I took the manastone out of the box, Bruno let out a somewhat exaggerated cheer.

"It got smaller..." I mumbled while looking at the stone.



The manastone I had stored in my dust box was about as big as an apple. Five hundred hours later—or five hundred years inside the box—it came out only as big as a knuckle but even more beautiful than before. The stone, originally composed of blurred and unordered rows of color, now displayed strikingly vivid layers.

“So this is how it looks after five hundred years,” I marveled.

“Indeed... But still, I find your magic more astounding, Your Majesty. You were able to make five hundred years pass by in a flash for this stone.”

“That’s what the spell does. Moving on...”

Bruno nodded and offered me a jewelry box, something I asked him to bring in order to make the manastone stand out even more.

“Wow... The stone *does* look even prettier inside this. What kind of magic is it?”

“I’m afraid this has no magic. The shape, color, and angular tilt of the box’s interior all work to make the manastone appear more beautiful. My apologies, but it is merely a meager trick merchants use to peddle their wares, nothing nearly as grand as your magic.”

“Not at all. I’m glad I asked you.”

“It is my greatest pleasure,” Bruno said with a bow.

I closed the lid and stored it in my item box. “With this, he’ll be able to take it out over there.”

“You refer to your clone?”

“Yep. My clone joined the delegation under disguise. He’ll be able to take out whatever I store from here.”

“I am truly speechless at the versatility of your magic.”

I just chuckled in response.

After settling our talks with Sheila, I decided to send our own delegation to Quistador as a sign of friendship. It was a simple visit and nothing more, so I figured we might as well bring them a few gifts, the grandest of which would be

a manastone. It was our local specialty and would soon be made into our national gemstone. Not to mention, thanks to my clone disguising himself as an elf, I could give Quistador a manastone that had “matured” in my dust box until the very last minute.

“I sure hope things go well this time.”

“This time?” Bruno cocked his head. “What do you mean, Your Majesty?”

“You remember the whole water fiasco I asked you for help with? Well, before that, Scarlet advised me to show off our power through the quality of our silver coins. But that alone would be too aggressive, which is why I decided to provide aid for the drought.”

Now I tried blending Scarlet’s advice and Lardon’s lesson on using both soft and hard approaches.

“This time around, I’m sending a friendly delegation with a gemstone as a gift. But,” I added, “that gem is also our local specialty, something I made with my own hands.”

“It is an indirect means of flaunting your power,” Bruno surmised, awed. “As expected of you, Your Majesty. Killing two birds with one stone, and so easily at that. I am beyond impressed.”

I laughed lightly. *Well, I sure hope it goes well...*

The next day, my clone teleported back to the middle of town with the entire elven delegation and several carriages. I immediately released my clone and approached Reina, who’d gone as their leader—something she requested herself to gain experience.

“Welcome back,” I greeted her. “How was it?”

“The queen of Quistador took a great liking to the manastone,” she reported. “Princess Sheila and the king were greatly shocked. They were assessing its authenticity until the very end.”

I raised a brow. “Assessed it?”

“They could not believe it was real,” Reina clarified. “Apparently, a manastone

of such quality is enough to purchase a large plantation.”

“Ohhh.” I nodded, even if it was a bit unexpected. “It’s *that* valuable?”

“That seems to be the case for gems of the highest tier. It came as a shock to me as well.” In a way, Reina knew even less about the world than me. Their race was long-lived, but they had just evolved from pixies to elves and knew little about human values and sensibilities. “As such, we received these gifts in return,” she finished, glancing at the carriages.

“I’m guessing we can take it as them agreeing to a cordial relationship?”

“Indeed. Princess Sheila will arrive at a later date to advise us on our relations with Parta and Jamille as well.”

“That’ll help a lot. I couldn’t ask for anything more if we can be at peace with the human nations.”

“Quistador said they wish to maintain good relations for as long as you are our king. You always bestow good fortune upon us, Lord Liam.”

I finally felt a weight off my shoulders. Ever since this sealed land had appeared out of nowhere, the three nations had kept it pinned under their vigilant gazes. With Quistador easing up, we were finally getting some room to breathe.

“*Milord? May I speak?*” I suddenly heard Gai’s somewhat tense voice via Telephone.

“Gai? What’s up?”

“*Several humans from the hunter guild are attacking us.*”

“What?!”

Out of the blue, an entirely new party jumped into the fray. I was shocked—but with the hunter guild on one hand and a nation full of monsters on the other, I honestly should’ve seen this coming.

“All right. I’m on my way.” I disconnected the spell after getting Gai’s location. I was about to teleport to the specified point until Bruno stopped me.

“Your Majesty, please take me with you,” he said.

“You? Why?”

“If the assailants are affiliated with the hunter guild, then I may be able to urge them to stand down.”

“Really?”

“Nobles oft have connections with their local hunter guilds.”

“Ohhh.” He might be right. Come to think of it, Albrevit commissioned the hunter guild back when he undid Lardon’s seal and tried to subjugate her, so Bruno could easily have his own connections with some of them. I mulled it over for a moment. “In that case, could I ask for your help?”

Bruno nodded. “Of course.”

I teleported both of us to the specified point, a paved road—hence why Gai could cast Telephone—where some giants, wolfmen, and three human hunters stood. Most of the giants and wolfmen were injured, while Gai and Chris were presently on the receiving end of the hunters’ ferocious attacks.

“Power Missile!” I launched twenty-nine power missiles without an aria, landing them right between the two forces.

Gai and Chris stayed in place, while the hunters fell back. With some distance now between us and the battle halted, I could finally take a good look at our assailants. There were two males: one a large and burly man, and the other young and boyish. The only woman in their group wore rather revealing clothes and sported a piercing gaze in her eyes.

“Hmph. Looks like their boss came out,” said the burly man.

The boyish one hummed. “I’ve never seen that spell before. Is it some

advanced version of Magic Missile?”

“More importantly,” the woman piped in, “that kid looks delicious.”

“Ha ha ha! Seta, looks like you got yourself some competition.”

“Huh? Oh, no, by all means. I don’t really care ’bout that.”

“Then maybe I’ll bring him back home and have my fun.”

They were fighting just moments ago, yet now they were exchanging lighthearted chatter as if they were just lazing around at home. It didn’t seem like they were going to continue their attack, so I decided to approach Gai.

“Are you all right?” I asked. “Heal.” I cast healing magic on Gai, Chris, and the other monsters too. With my multicasting on full capacity, I fixed them all up at once.

“M-My apologies, milord.”

“Don’t sweat it. More importantly, what’s going on? Are they too strong even for you two?”

Gai and Chris were the leaders of their respective races and the two strongest fighters among all the monsters under me. To top it off, their rivalry had them constantly seeking to beat the other, essentially pulling one another up. Or so I thought.

“Um, well...” Chris mumbled. “It’s because you...”

“Hm? Because I...?”

“Milord, you ordered us to avoid fighting humans.”

I blinked, taking a moment to recall what Gai meant. “Oh!” I snapped my fingers. After the incident with Flora, when Scarlet proposed we use silver coins to flaunt our national power to the three neighboring nations, I put the word out to not engage in any senseless fighting. “So that’s why you got all beaten up...”

Gai, Chris, the giants, and the wolfmen... Under my gaze, they all nodded meekly.

“Jeez, I’m sorry! I didn’t think it’d turn out like this. You see, I meant you

shouldn't go around picking fights, not let them give you a one-sided beating."

"Huh? Then, we can hit 'em back?" Chris asked, eyes wide.

"Of course. There's nothing wrong with putting out a fire on your clothes."

"Seriously?! You should've said so from the start, Master!"

"In that case, this is a simple matter."

The atmosphere around Gai and Chris changed. The two who were getting pummeled just moments ago looked livelier than ever.

"Easy there, meathead. You can just leave this to me. Go take a nap or something."

"Good grief. Milord has granted me permission to engage in battle. I have no intention of yielding to you, boar woman."

"Like I care. I'm gonna tear 'em to shreds and earn Master's praise."

"That is *my* task."

"Back off already!"

"How about you go ram into a tree like the boar that you are?"

They started squabbling again. *Why don't the both of you just go together?*

However, before I could speak up, Bruno asked, "Um... Could those two be arguing over who will fight the hunters alone?"

"Looks like it... Is there a problem?"

"Yes, a big one. I recognize those three. They are famous A-rank hunters."

"A-rank?!"

"The large man is Hawk, the young boy is Seta, and the woman is Tise. They are a battle-hungry party who only take on subjugation jobs."

"So they're strong..." I groaned. "Hey, you two—"

I tried to stop them from fighting again, but it was too late. They'd apparently settled their squabble with a game of rock-paper-scissors, from which Chris emerged the victor.

“I’ll support you, Hawk,” said the boy as he cast flame magic.

Beside him, the woman’s fingertips crackled with lightning. “We can beat those two, right?”

“Sure,” said the large man. “Just knock the small fry down so we can drag their leader outta here already!”

The large man flexed his muscles then moved to intercept Chris, but the second the wolfman threw herself into battle, she split into three and jabbed her fist into each of their stomachs. All three hunters bent like sticks and went flying, tumbling over the ground. Chris defeated them all in just one hit.

“Huh...” Bruno stared at the scene, wide-eyed in disbelief.

Chris looked at the collapsed trio. “At that level, you’re a hundred years too early to try fighting Master,” she said, declaring her victory with a smug puff of her chest.

“Welp, they’re out cold. Weren’t they pretty strong?”

“Y-Yeah... All three are well-known A-rankers, but they can even clear harder commissions as a team...” Bruno must be terribly baffled; he was back to speaking casually with me. It didn’t seem like he’d noticed, and I for one found it pretty amusing, so I felt no need to point it out.

“Are they the types we can talk with?”

“Huh? O-Oh, yeah. They’re pretty unhinged, but they can at least tell what’s good for them and what’s not...” Bruno caught himself. “O-Or so I have heard. Ahem.”

Now he was being all polite again. Personally, I wouldn’t mind if he stayed all casual, but I didn’t bother saying anything. Scarlet did say he was doing great as a noble and the head of his family. If he decided this was the best way for him to act, then it wasn’t my place to say otherwise.

Setting that aside, things should work out if these hunters could listen to reason. “Good job, Chris,” I said as I approached her.

“Thank you, Master! What’ll we do with these guys? Do we hang ’em upside down somewhere?”

“No, there’s no need to go that far.” Smiling wryly at the girl’s violent suggestion, I crouched by the three hunters and cast Heal on all of them.

“Huh? You’re healing them?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you sure? Won’t they attack us again once they’re better?”

“It’s fine. You already beat them. Plus, I’m here too.”

Always hearing her arguing with Gai made me think she wasn’t gonna back down, but I was proved wrong. Chris fell utterly silent. While still healing the three, I turned around to check if she was all right, only to be met with the sight

of Chris, Gai, as well as the rest of the wolfmen and giants looking at me with immense respect sparkling in their eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“Master, you’re so cool.”

“I concur. Milord, you truly never fail to inspire us. I am proud to serve you with my everything.”

“S-Sure.” I guess they were moved by something I said. I let them be and continued healing the hunters. The wounds Chris inflicted on them were deeper than I thought, so it was taking a while.

Soon, they began rousing one after the other.

“This is...” Seta murmured. “Did you heal us?”

“The hell’re you up to, kid?”

“What are you planning?” Tise demanded.

“Um, I wanted to have a talk with you three. Can I?”

Despite the wariness in their gazes, the three hunters only eyed me in silence. *Looks like they’re willing to hear me out, at least.*

“Why did you attack us? Was it a commission?”

The hunters all exchanged glances before the large man, Hawk, spoke up for them. “Yeah. We took on an A-rank commission from the guild. Gotta eliminate a horde of evolved monsters, they said.”

“A horde...?” I cocked my head. “Has the news not reached you yet? We’re building a country here.”

“Oh, we got the news, all right,” answered the boy, Seta. “But nobody would believe that monsters are making a country, yeah?”

“Ah, I see.” *Right, of course. Monsters building a country... Even I would’ve brushed it off as a joke.* “So we can’t really expect to convince them, huh...” I held my chin in thought. “We aren’t a bunch of wild beasts; we’re just out here trying to build a country to live in, so we’d really rather not get eliminated or anything. Is there any way around this?”

The three hunters looked at one another again. This time, the woman, Tise, spoke. “There *is* one.”

“What is it?” I quietly braced myself, reminded of all the convoluted things I’d done while dealing with the three surrounding nations.

However, Tise’s solution wasn’t quite what I was expecting. “The monsters here and you, their boss,” she began, “you just need to be too strong to be targets of elimination, and you’ll be left alone. There are a few precedents.”

“Oh, right.” Lardon was probably the prime example. “Basically, we need to increase our difficulty rank as targets... But how? Do you just need to report it for us? If so, I’ll gladly reward you.”

“You will?”

“Sure. Consider it a commission from me.” My finances were secured with our recent manastone venture. Providing personal remuneration was now well within my capabilities.

The hunters huddled together and whispered among themselves. Eventually, they wrapped it up and asked, “Which country did you come from?”

“Me? I came from Jamille.”

“Then we want ten Jamille golds.”

Ah, they were asking for the currency. “Sounds good. I’ll pay.”

“Then it’s a deal. Now, hit this,” Seta said, taking out a doll.

“What’s that?”

“An item that can measure the danger level of a monster,” he answered. “The approximate subjugation difficulty rank will pop up after it receives an attack.”

“Ohhh. So I hit it, and you guys’ll bring it back.”

“Exactly. We can cook up a good excuse if you can manage S-rank or—”

I took Guardian Lardon out of my item box and equipped it, chanted an aria, and made sure to circulate my mana efficiently. With this three-layered boost, I chanted, “Power Missile, sixty rounds!”

Seta told me that the stronger, the better, so I slammed my maximum power

into the doll and barraged it all over with mana bullets. The missiles found their mark with a thunderous roar. Once things settled down, the doll had become a shade of black.

“Will this do?” I turned to the trio. “Hm? What’s wrong?”

All three of them were staring at me agape.

“I-It’s black... You...” Hawk sputtered.

“There’s no mistake,” Seta murmured.

Tise nodded. “I’ve never seen it for myself, but it’s clear as day.”

“What is it? Is this bad?”

“No, well, it ain’t really bad...” Hawk scratched his head, baffled. “Looks like you’ll be designated an SSS-rank target, so you probably won’t need to worry ’bout any small fry from now on.”

“Huh? SSS-rank...?”

I heard Lardon chuckle. *“It appears you went a little overboard.”*

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I wanted to have a nice and comfortable conversation with these hunters, so I teleported us all back to town.

“Th-The hell’s this...?”

“Teleport,” I answered. “An advanced divine magic spell...I think it was.”

“An advanced spell...”

“Divine magic...?”

“You can use that sorta thing?” asked Hawk, stunned.

As shocked as they were that I could use advanced magic, something else soon caught their attention.

“Huh? Guys, look!” Seta pointed behind his two companions, who spun around to see a vampire filling a bucket with water magic. With the help of an aria, water manifested out of thin air and poured into the bucket. “That’s magic, isn’t it?”

I nodded. “Magic for day-to-day life is fused into this town’s infrastructure.”

“For day-to-day life...?”

“Uh-huh. Stuff like fire and water for cooking or light to use at night. The residents of this town can freely use it all.”

“B-But how?”

“I embedded this thing into the roads—it has the same effect as a grimoire. They just need to stand on the pavement to use it.”

The three hunters were speechless. They looked at me, then at the road underneath their feet, then at the townscape around them. Finally, they started whispering between themselves.

“Well?” Hawk began. “You two’re the mages in our party. What do you think?”

"It's hard to believe, but he's telling the truth," Seta said.

"He's right," Tise agreed. "I've been getting the same feeling as when I hold a grimoire. Now that he's explained it, I'm even more certain it's what it is."

"So it's true..."

"To begin with, this whole place is downright weird. How can monsters make such a prosperous town?" Seta mumbled. "Well, I guess there *are* nonmonsters like that guy over there."

"You're talking about the vampire?" I piped in. "They're monsters too, though."

Tise froze. "Huh? V-Vampire...?"

"You mean he's one of those bloodsuckers?" Hawk clicked his tongue. "No way. Those guys can't come out in the day."

"Normally, yeah. But..." I waved over one of the vampires I named. "Richter!"

The vampire, Richter, stopped filling his bucket for a moment and walked over to me. "Yes, Lord Liam?"

"Could you show them your fangs?"

"Of course." Richter responded without a moment's delay; he tugged his own mouth open with his finger and flashed his sharp fangs for us to see.

"Well, I get it's hard to believe when he looks so human," I said wryly. "But basically, they're able to walk under the sun after evolving with my magic."

"So..." Seta shakily pointed at a young man passing by. "Is *he* also a vampire?"

"Yep."

Once again, the three fell agape.

"Oh. Liam," called another passerby. "What are you doing over there?"

This smooth and gentle voice... There was only one person in this town of monsters it could belong to. She was one of the few human residents, Jodie.

I turned to greet her. "Some hunters came over, so I'm showing them around. What about you, Ms. Jodie?"

“Ms. Jodie?!” Tise and Seta gawked.

Meanwhile, Hawk mumbled under his breath, “Now that he mentioned it, she *does* look like the old hag, but...no. The hag’s a human, so she should be an even older hag by now...”

Surprisingly, all three of them seemed to recognize her. Jodie simply stared at their party for a while and tilted her head. “Oh. Oh my,” she finally said. “Could you be the Venomous Vipers?”

“Don’t use that name!” they shrieked all at once. Their expressions were grave as could be, contrasted only by the flush that took over their faces.

“You know them, Ms. Jodie?”

“Yes. I looked after them when they were kids.” Jodie smiled nostalgically. “They used to be a group of little rascals calling themselves the Venomous Vipers. I once heard about them running around causing mayhem back then, and... Well, things just developed from there.”

“Wow. Sounds like something you could make a play out of.”

“A three-act play, perhaps,” Jodie agreed. “The first would span from the moment they bit my hand, all the way until they finally opened up to me.”

I nodded to myself. “Then the second would be the climax, where they save you from a predicament?”

“Right. Finally, the third act would show them growing up and end with them leaving the nest.”

“Mm-hmm.” I turned to the hunters. “What a coincidence, huh?”

“A-Are you really Ms. Jodie...?” Seta asked, gulping.

“Don’t be fooled! The old hag can’t look that young!”

“Oh my, don’t say that now,” Jodie cooed. “Would you like me to feed you some spicy curry again?”

“Ack!” Hawk clamped his mouth shut in an instant.

“Spicy curry?” I asked.

“You see, despite how he looks and acts, this boy here can’t handle spicy

food. He only eats curry if it has some honey in—”

“Stop, stop! I’m sorry!” Hawk prostrated himself before Jodie in a flash.

Actually, now that I took a closer look, the other two weren’t faring much better. All the bravado they had when we first met was gone. Now they could barely lift their gazes from their feet. “Um... Ms. Jodie,” Seta called. “Why are you here...?”

“Me? Because I’m currently Liam’s servant.”

“*Familiar!*” I hurriedly corrected. “It’s a contract!”

“Same difference,” she dismissed. “After all, you can give me an order and I wouldn’t be able to refuse.”

“Well, you’re not wrong...” I scratched my head, glancing to the side to find the trio’s jaws had dropped again.

“F-Familiar?”

“Could that be why...?”

“It’s theoretically possible... But just what...?”

At that point, another person came by. “Lord Liam!”

“Hm? What’s up, Reina?”

“Um, are we safe now?” She looked between me and the three new faces.

“Oh, right. We *were* under attack for a while.”

“Yes, so I had a thousand of our residents prepare some magic for defense.” This town had a defense system in place which made use of the magic infrastructure. When worse came to worst, my familiars would all be able to use offensive magic.

I hummed. “No need for that now.”

“Understood. I will have them fire it off outside town.”

“Ah, wait. Just fire it toward me. We might need the land outside town someday, so we should avoid bombing it.”

“Understood!” Reina ran off.

“Ms. Jodie, stay back a bit.”

“Of course. You three come too.” Jodie pulled the hunters away from me.

Soon, a hail of fireballs came raining down on me, blanketing the sky in red. “Absolute Magic Shield!” I chanted, casting the maximum number I could manage.



Layers upon layers of barriers shattered with each fireball that landed, but every time, I would replace it with another. This spell boasted absolute defense against magical attacks, but only once per shield. In order to defend against all the spells our residents prepared, I cast it a thousand times until all the fireballs were gone.

The three hunters' jaws dropped at the sight.

"Th-This is way beyond SSS-class."

"He's an Untouchable..."

In the middle of town stood a building with a different kind of extravagance than the reception hall. Inside its main hall, the leaders of this town sat surrounding a round table: Reina the elf, Gai the giant, Chris the wolfman, Alucard the noble vampire, and Jodie, one of the few humans in town. Adding in Asuna, who just walked in, there were seven of us in total for this executive meeting, if you could call it that.

“I’m back,” Asuna crowed, beaming as she took one of the open seats around the table. I had asked her to drop by some of the hunter guilds and bring us back a status report. “It was better than I thought! Thanks to those hunters’ report, our country was designated as an Untouchable, even more dangerous than SSS-rank. It was the same for the guild we came from.”

“I would expect no less,” Gai said.

“This is Master’s country, after all!” Chris cheered.

These two were normally at each other’s throats, but as always, they were in perfect sync only when it came to singing my praises.

“Still...” I tapped my fingers on the table. “I know it’s higher than SSS-rank, but why’s it called ‘Untouchable’?”

“It’s used to label entities so dangerous, hunters shouldn’t even dare touch them,” Jodie explained. “Lardon was an Untouchable too.”

“Oh... Now that you mention it, I do recall the hunters struggling so much against the Lardon Juniors, they couldn’t even get to Lardon.”

“*My offspring are excellent,*” Lardon preened. She was different when it came to her kids, it seemed; she’d never shown this much interest toward humans.

“It essentially tells people not to lay a hand on them, but...” Jodie’s lips curled into a wry smile.

What’s with that look? I wondered. *Oh... Right. Albrevit.* She was probably

thinking about the eldest son of the Hamilton family who dared to lay his hand on an Untouchable.

“So this country won’t be targeted anymore, right?” Reina asked.

Asuna shrugged. “By hunters, at least.”

“Whatever the guild cannot handle, the state may take into their own hands,” Jodie remarked.

“So it all comes down to that...” Reina nodded to herself. At the end of the day, we still had to resolve the issues with our relations to the three surrounding nations.

“Well, just taking the hunter guild out of the picture is good enough this time around,” I told them. “Honestly, rather than some country declaring war on us, the hunter guild sending over hunter after hunter is way more troublesome.”

“True!” Asuna agreed. “Hunters are really agile, and there are lots of them to boot.”

Jodie nodded. “Like Hawk, Seta, and Tise.”

These two, who’d been hunters for much longer than me, seemed to share my sentiments, so I nodded in relief. “Then it’s all good.”

“Oh, one more thing,” Asuna added. “It’s about you, Chris. You became an S-rank target.”

“S-rank?” Chris blinked, clueless. Jodie beside her smiled with a hand on her cheek, looking pleasantly surprised.

“Yep. You beat up those three A-rankers, didn’t you? All on your own at that. So you were designated as an S-rank entity.”

“Is that impressive?” Chris wasn’t a human, much less a hunter, so she had no idea how to react to Asuna’s news.

“It sure is! S-rank monsters are calamity-class threats that can eradicate entire villages and towns on their own. You can literally walk up to some random village now and reveal who you are, and the entire place will surrender to you. That, or they’ll all run away in fear.”

“That’s right,” Jodie piped in. “The rewards for S-rank commissions can go up to... I’d say around a hundred Jamille golds.”

“By the way, your bounty was two hundred gold coins.”

“Ohhh.”

Does she get it or not? I had to wonder from how bland her reaction was.

“And since you’re so strong,” Asuna continued, “there are rumors going around that Liam must be even stronger.”

“Huh? Rumors about Master?”

“Yep. People are saying stuff like, *‘Just how strong does he have to be to subordinate an S-ranker?’* and so on.”

“Oh... I get it now.” Chris nodded. “So, the higher my rank gets, the higher Master’s gets too.”

“Um... Is that how it is?” I raised a brow at Asuna and Jodie.

“Of course,” Asuna said instantly.

“Naturally,” Jodie agreed.

“Wow, cool! Then I’ll raise my rank even more!”

“A-Asuna,” Gai called. “M-May I inquire about *my* rank?”

“Oh. Gai, yours was five silver coins. You’re D-ranked.”

“Huh...” Gai froze like a stone statue.

“They *did* beat you up,” Asuna reminded him.

“B-But I was merely abiding by milord’s orders...”

She smiled wryly. “Well, they don’t know that.”

Gai’s eyes bulged. He looked like he was receiving the shock of his life.

Chris stood from her seat, circled around behind him, and patted his shoulder a few times. “Heh... There, there,” she said, snickering.

The giant instantly snapped from his daze and seethed. “Do not get ahead of yourself, boar woman!”

“Ha ha ha! You lost in both rank and bounty! You really are just some meathead!”

“GRAAAH!”

The two began brawling on the spot. It was practically a daily occurrence at this point, so we all ignored them.

“Asuna, does Liam also have a bounty on him?” Jodie asked.

“You know your stuff, Ms. Jodie. He sure does.”

“Huh? But I’m a human...”

“Who’s also the king of the monsters,” Asuna appended.

“Urgh...” I hated to admit it, but it suddenly made sense when put that way.

“Yours is five hundred Jamille golds—around ten years’ worth an ordinary person’s salary. Oh, and you’re also wanted dead or alive, by the way.”

“Ohhh...” I could only chuckle bitterly at the huge bounty I’d apparently racked up.

On the outskirts of town, a party of hunters lay slumped over the road after being beaten to a pulp by Gai. Their party was composed of four men; one of the members we thought was a girl turned out to be an androgynous man.

“Very good,” Gai said with a satisfied huff. “With this, my bounty should soon rise.” He was in a really good mood. He’d been really riled up since he lost to Chris in terms of their bounty.

“You didn’t kill them, right?” I asked.

“Fret not, milord. As you ordered, I struck them all with the back of my blade.”

“What blade...?” I deadpanned, staring at his completely blunt club. *Which part of that would you even call the back?* Still, Gai always spoke like some olden warrior, so the line didn’t feel too out of place coming from him. *It’s weird, but whatever.*

“Hmph. They were truly pathetic foes. Four against one, yet they still failed to leave even the slightest scratch on my skin.”

“That is to be expected.”

“Oh? What do you mean, Lardon?”

“This country has been designated an Untouchable. You and your subordinates have even become high-value bounties,” she explained. *“However, it takes time for news and personal anecdotes to travel through the grapevine, hence why hunters still head this way. The stronger ones are sharp and know not to come. Thus leaving...”*

“The lot who’re lacking in info.”

“Small fry, basically.”

I nodded. I had done some research when I first registered as a hunter, and one of the things I learned: difficult and dangerous commissions just weren’t

worth it. High risk and high return jobs paid for as much as the risk they posed, but A-rank jobs and above were better described as “*super* high risk and high return.” They paid more than the average commission, sure, but the job was more often than not tougher to complete than the pay was ever worth.

If it were up to me, I’d choose two or three B-rank or C-rank jobs over a single A-rank one, even though I knew I’d be strong enough for the latter. I preferred the slow and steady way, through patient and diligent effort. Even if I did have to take on a dangerous job, I’d much rather go after ample preparation. My experience in fighting against an opponent as dangerous as Lardon only further reinforced it.

In that sense, I completely agreed those who were coming to us at this time were the more thoughtless bunch—or, in Lardon’s words, the small fry.

Gai snapped me out of my reverie. “Milord, may I torment these hunters for a while longer?” he asked, his eyes sparkling like those of a young boy asking his parents for presents.

“What do you mean?”

“I wish to instill fear in them—fear they will carry back with them, in order to increase my bounty.”

Competing with Chris again? “Hmmm... Nah, leave them be. I don’t think it’ll bring your bounty up.”

Gai groaned. “Is that so...? How unfortunate.” His shoulders sagged in clear disappointment. “In that case, I shall expel them from our land.”

“Sure.” I nodded, watching as Gai walked over to the four hunters. They came here to hunt some monsters down, but from our perspective, they were essentially illegal immigrants. Deporting them was a matter of course.

Suddenly, Gai stopped walking.

“Gai?” I called.

No response.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

“Butterfly...”

“Huh?”

“A flying...butterfly...”

“Ummm...?”

“Aha ha ha...” He started skipping out of nowhere. Seeing a guy as big as him prancing about with his hands on his waist was kinda creepy—I mean, um, weird.

“Gai?! What’s gotten into you?”

“It’s mental magic,” said Lardon. *“It seems that one cast it.”*

I whipped my head toward the hunters and found the androgynous one, still collapsed on the ground, clearly glaring daggers my way. “Did you do that to Gai?”

“You’re...next,” he rasped and began mustering his mana. He was planning on casting the spell on me too.

I raised my hand and prepared to counterattack with Power Missile. From what I could sense of his mana, I knew I could cast mine faster—but I paused.

“What’s wrong? He hasn’t cast his spell yet.”

“That magic...” I mumbled. “I wanna learn it.”

“Wait... What are you planning?”

I didn’t reply and instead lowered my hand, dispersing the spell forming at my fingertips. I just stood in place and waited. A few seconds later, like a hammer had come down right on the crown of my head, the hunter’s spell slammed into me. The scene before me shifted instantaneously.

Books, books, and more books. Books over here, books over there—books *everywhere*. I was surrounded by thousands of books—no, not just books. *Grimoires!*

“Woow! Grimoires! Yaaay!” I frolicked like a child, jumping in joy at the fact I could learn all the thousands of spells all around me. The bliss washed over me for a moment—then disappeared like a *snap*.

I was back on the road. Gai was still where I last saw him, still dancing. The

mountains of grimoires were gone, the hunters nowhere in sight. "I see..."

"Care to explain?"

"Right," I said sheepishly. "I thought it'd be better for me to get hit with the spell. After all, personal experience always trumps just conjuring up a mental image."

Lardon chuckled. *"Your mind works in interesting ways, as usual."*

I nodded, then immediately got to work on crafting a new spell. Soon enough...

"Mind Illusion," I chanted, casting the spell I was just hit with. This first time took me an hour, and by multicasting more than twenty instances of the spell after that, I mastered it in an instant. "Good."

My mastery of Mind Illusion marked my first time learning a spell not through a grimoire but by getting hit with it directly.

Gai was still dancing, so I cast a spell named Sleep, which I learned from the hundreds of spells in the magicpedia my teacher gave me. All it did was put the target to sleep—not very useful. Sure, it rendered the target completely defenseless, but they woke up pretty easily too. Human sleep could be surprisingly light. No matter how deeply asleep someone appeared to be, they could wake with the softest touch or the slightest sound.

But since Gai was currently under an illusion, putting him to sleep was my best choice. The giant collapsed to the ground with a thud, even curling up and snoring with a cute little snot bubble. Contrary to his large build, his sleeping habits were reminiscent of a small animal. I looked at him and nodded, satisfied.

Through this little incident, I'd acquired a new way to learn magic. Until now, I only had two main methods: learning through practice with grimoires and Ancient Memoria, and creating an original spell by referencing an existing one. Now, I had a third method: getting hit by the spell itself.

Lardon chuckled. *"You truly are fascinating,"* she said again. *"You should have known that spell was dangerous."* She sounded really pleased, as she always did whenever I came up with something new.

"I mean, sure..."

"But?"

"But there was a possibility of learning a new spell that way."

"Your desire for new magic triumphed, hm?"

"Yeah." I nodded. I'd always adored magic ever since my previous life. Even now, I still had no clue as to why I entered the body of Liam Hamilton, the fifth son of a noble family, but I did know I had developed great talent for magic ever since. I decided to experience the spell myself because I was practically certain I'd be able to learn it that way. The moment I realized I could learn more magic,

I just couldn't help myself and ended up taking the hit.

Again, Lardon chuckled. *"Truly an interesting human."*

"Am I?"

"You are mad to just the right extent," she mused, *"and not in a haphazardly twisted way, but rather with single-minded devotion."*

"It sounds like you're dissing me..."

"What do you mean? It was a compliment."

"Really?" *Well, it sure didn't sound like one...* Calling anyone mad would probably put them in the mood to throw an all-out war.

"Dost thou seek strength?"

"Strength? Well, sure, I guess."

"Ha ha..."

"What? Was that so funny? Also, why did you just talk like that?" I asked. Lardon spoke a bit fancier than usual just now.

"Humans often pounce onto my words when I speak flamboyantly like this."

"Okay..."

"Then I shall change the question. Do you want to learn more magic?"

"Yes," I answered in a heartbeat. I didn't really get what Lardon meant by "power" earlier, but if she was referring to more spells, then there was only one answer.

Lardon chuckled and came out of my body, once again in the form of a young girl.

"What're you up to?"

"I ask you again," she said. "Do you want to learn more magic?"

"Sure, I— Huh?"

I barely even finished answering when Lardon *vanished*. In a blink, the girl standing before me was simply gone. *Did she go back inside me?* I wondered for a moment, but that didn't seem to be the case. There was this empty sensation

lingering in my chest, so it didn't feel like Lardon had returned. *Then where—*

"I am here."

"Whoa!" I jumped at the sudden voice behind me. I whirled around and saw Lardon standing there with a breezy look on her face. "Wh-What in the world?"

"Have you already forgotten? Tsk, tsk."

"Forgotten...? Oh... Are you saying you used magic just now?"

"Indeed."

"What kind of— Ah!"

She disappeared again.

Learning from experience, I spun around and found her at my back. "What kind of magic is that? It can't be Teleport if you're going out of your way to demonstrate it like this."

Smiling, Lardon kept mum and disappeared a third time.

I whipped my head around, trying to keep up, then froze. My gaze landed on a specific point. "There's a lapse...in my consciousness?"

"In time, to be precise," Lardon answered from behind me as she slowly stepped up to my side. "You noticed sooner than I thought you would. How come?"

"That." I pointed in front of me—at the sleeping Gai. "Gai's position changed after you disappeared, but I didn't see him move. It was like the scene snapped from 'before' to 'after' in my eyes."

Lardon gave me a look of approval.

"So this is...?"

"Time Freeze," she answered. "A spell that can stop the time of the target. Try it."

"Okay." I nodded. Having experienced it myself, I gave replicating it a shot. I guess it wasn't right to say I'd "experienced" it since my time literally froze, but I also fed *that*—my experience of *not* experiencing it—into the image forming in my mind. In a sense, it was an experience like no other, and that contrast

served me well.

“Time Freeze.” After an hour or so, I finally cast the spell—on Lardon, who was now frozen with a smirk. I approached her and pinched her cheek.



Then, I stepped back to my original position and released her time.

“Oh? You succeeded.”

“You can tell?”

“I utilized a similar method as yours—memorizing the surrounding scenery. Although, I *was* expecting you to circle around behind me.”

Lardon didn't notice I had poked her cheek. *Looks like it was a success.*

I spent the rest of the day letting Lardon hit me with spells. By the time her figure was bathed in the morning sun and I had ten newly copied spells added to my repertoire, she finally declared, “That is all.”

“Was that everything?”

Lardon chuckled. “That is all you are able to take in as you are now.”

“Oh, okay. I get it.”

“You accepted that rather easily.”

“You meant I only have enough mana to learn this much now, right?”

“Indeed.”

“Then I just need to keep training until it increases again. It’s all good.”

“Not rushing, I see,” Lardon mumbled, a look of satisfaction on her face before returning to my body.

After a nice, long stretch, I took the still sleeping Gai and teleported us back to his house in town. I set him down inside and walked back out, just in time to receive contact through Telephone.

“Liam, where are you now?”

“Asuna? I’m in front of Gai’s house. What’s up?”

“Really?! Then I’ll head right over!”

“No, I can go to you. Are you in town?”

“Yep. In front of the reception hall.”

I nodded and teleported right to the building’s front yard. Sure enough, Asuna was there—and behind her was a dragon, lying down with its head on the ground like a dog. “That’s...”

“It’s Princess Sheila’s dragon,” she answered.

“Sheila’s?”

Sheila Austrom, the nineteenth princess of Quistador and the first head of the Austrom house. She’d come to visit us last time with the Dragoons. Speaking of which... “Are the Dragoons here too?”

“Nope, just the princess and her dragon.”

That sounds like trouble. Well, I would’ve said the same had their entire unit come, but still, *something* must be going on for her to come here alone. “Did she say what she was here for?”

Asuna shrugged. “Nope.”

“All right. I’ll go see her.”

As soon as I entered the reception hall, a few elven maids bowed their heads and guided me to the same large room we used before. Sheila was inside, seated on an expensive armchair.

“Sorry for the wait,” I said as I walked in.

“Not at all...” Sheila blinked. “Oh my.”

“What is it?”

“I see you’ve gotten stronger yet again.”

“Huh?”

Sheila stood up, approached me, and peered at my face from up close. “Yes, there is no mistake. Have you perchance learned some new spells?”

“You can tell?”

“Indeed. You look more dashing than ever.”

“Me? Dashing?” I patted my cheeks, perplexed.

“My, what a lady-killer you’ve become.”

“Stop teasing me...” I groused with a strained smile. As I took a seat, an elven maid came and poured me some tea. “So? Do you have some business with me?”

Sheila didn’t answer right away. She just stared at my face for a few seconds,

then at the elven maid, and finally said, “I come bearing a personal request.”

“A personal request?”

“Yes. Do you know of bobbles?”

“Bobbles...?”

“A *type of monster*,” Lardon supplied. “*They look like this.*”

The next second, light leaked out from my body and took shape between me and Sheila. *That’s...a ball of fluff?* It looked about as big as a watermelon, with beady eyes and tiny limbs—a cute little critter.

“Yes, that is a bobble,” Sheila affirmed. “There is a group of them in my territory. The hunter guild has issued a D-rank commission to capture them, so I would like you to take them under your wing.”

“Capture them? What for?”

“To turn them into pets.”

“Oh...” I could see why. The floating replica Lardon made looked so cute even I found myself wanting to reach out and pet it. “It *does* look all soft and fluffy.”

“Indeed. On top of that, their offensive capabilities are practically nonexistent. Thus, they are quite popular as pets.”

“I bet they are.”

“However...” Sheila’s expression sank darkly. “Bobbles are extremely weak to stress—especially to being touched and petted by humans.”

I frowned. “How weak?”

“At worst, they may die from it.”

“Die...” I parroted blankly, feeling the weight of the matter on my tongue.

“Ironically, they live longer the less their owner cares for them,” Sheila continued. “I concluded it may be best for them to live here, under your protection, in this nation of monsters.”

“All right. I accept,” I said immediately.

“*Are you certain?*”

“Is there a problem?”

Lardon chuckled. *“No, there is none.”*

“Let’s strike while the iron’s hot, then. Where are those little guys?”

“In Seam Forest, located in the southwestern area of the Austrom house’s territory.”

“Which direction is that from here?”

“Huh? Um...” Sheila mulled it over for a moment before pointing behind me. “That way.”

“Okay. By the way, I’m guessing your involvement in this is better kept a secret, yeah? Seeing as you came here by yourself.”

“Precisely. So—”

“Then you’d better leave your dragon here,” I suggested. Sheila cocked her head, but before she could ask why, I stood up and cast one of the spells I learned from Lardon earlier. “Transform.”

In short order, a pair of wings sprouted from my back. I looked them over for a moment before taking Sheila’s hand, urging her to her feet, and circling my arm under her knees to scoop her up into a princess carry.

“Eek!”

“Hold on tight.”

“H-Huh?”

With a puzzled Sheila now in my arms, I kicked open a window and launched us up with a flap of my wings into the vast, blue sky. After gaining some altitude, I headed off in the direction Sheila had pointed out.

“Y-You can fly? Even though you’re a human?”

“Yep. I learned this spell earlier.”

“My... You truly are impressive,” Sheila marveled as we cruised through the clouds.

Something came to mind as I was flying with Sheila in my arms. “You said those bobbles are in your territory?”

“Correct.”

“So that means... They’re in Quistador, right?” I recalled Sheila’s self-introduction, when she proclaimed herself the nineteenth princess of Quistador and the first head of the Austrom house. Although they were both princesses, she was quite different from Scarlet, so I wondered if things worked differently there.

Sheila promptly nodded. “Yes.”

“So it won’t do for me to just boldly waltz in, huh?”

“Oh, there’s no—”

“Transform,” I cast on myself, making my body morph a second time. I watched as my arms and legs—the limbs of a twelve-year-old boy—stretch and grow into ones that would fit a young man. “Good.” I couldn’t see my own face, but I was sure my entire body had become an adult’s.

I was probably pretty famous now. Spies from various nations were continuously sneaking into our country (although we chased them out whenever we found them), and the hunter guild had even placed a bounty on me. It was safe to assume my physical traits were now publicly known—which, in this instance, worked to my advantage. No matter how my appearance was described, the “twelve-year-old boy” part couldn’t have been forgone. I wouldn’t be busted so long as I looked like an adult.

“Right. I should also make *you* look younger, Sheila.”

Sheila should also be pretty famous. It wouldn’t do for her to be spotted while she was taking covert action; I might get outed by correlation. So, I figured she’d best be disguised too... *Hm?*

“Sheila?” I looked down at the girl in my arms. “What’s wrong? Is there something on my face?”

“Huh...?” Sheila caught herself and turned her face away, ears flushed red.
“N-No, not at all.”



So she said, though I noticed her frequently throwing glances my way. *What's up with her?*

Lardon held back a laugh. *"It seems you are blessed with good lineage. You are quite the handsome young man now."*

"Ohhh. So that's why she's blushing."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"I'd be happier if good looks meant more magical talent too."

"Ha ha. You never change. Well, I suppose I also have little interest in this form of yours. All it means to me is that your vessel is now as big as your soul."

I never change? I could say the same about her.

"Um..." Sheila cleared her throat. "What was it you were saying?"

"I said we can hide your involvement if I turn you into a kid."

"Ah, that is true. Could I ask this of you?"

"Sure." I nodded and cast Transform on her.

Sheila, with her adult figure and proportions, turned into a girl even smaller than Lardon. "A-Astounding as always," she breathed out in awe, marveling at my magic. She couldn't see her own face either, but she knew her limbs had shrunk.

The flush soon faded from her face, and Sheila started giving me directions as I flew. We arrived an hour later at Seam Forest, a relatively vast woodland far from any human settlements. Instead of entering through a path from the outer perimeter, we landed right in the inner depths of the forest from above.

"Where are the bobbles?" I asked.

"Look there." Sheila pointed at a small clearing and to what looked like a rabbit or fox's burrow. "That is their nest."

"I see... Oh."

Something peeked out of the hole—a furball only about as big as the burrow's opening. A round body with a cute face and tiny limbs.

“And *that* is a bobble.”

“Ohhh. It sure is adorable.” I wasn’t particularly a fan of cute things, but even I could see its allure. It was several times cuter than puppies or kittens.

“Oh! There it is!” A thicket behind the burrow parted, revealing a man dressed as a hunter, a stuffed burlap sack over his shoulder. His gaze was drawn to the bobbles’ nest.

“That sack...”

“Correct.” Sheila nodded grimly. The sack looked like it was filled with small, round things—clearly bobbles the hunter had already captured.

“Hm?” The man turned our way. “Who’re you two?”

“Sorry, but I’m gonna need you to leave those little guys here.”

“Hah? The hell are you on about?”

“Exactly what I said. Leave those bobbles here.” I came here intending to take the bobbles under my protection, but after seeing that sack—how it was stuffed to the brim and how roughly the guy lugged it around—my perspective changed. Now I was dead set on saving them instead.

As they said, if you’ve seen it once, you’ve seen it all. I could tell how the bobbles were going to be treated from just this one picture.

The man scoffed. “You tryin’ to snatch my goods? Is that it?”

I silently glared at him.

“You’re looking down on me? Cocky brat!” He tossed the sack aside and pulled out a dagger sheathed behind his waist.

Sheila gasped. The sack flew in the air, imminently falling to the ground—until it abruptly stopped, briefly hovered, and gently landed. I’d summoned a Sylph, a low-rank wind spirit, just in time and made it weave the air to cushion the sack’s fall.

The man was enraged to see my attention was on the bobbles over him. “Don’t ignore me!” he bellowed, charging in with his dagger in hand.

I raised my hand to fire a power missile but stopped at the last second.

“Sylph,” I called with a huff. I borrowed the spirit’s power to swiftly circle around him and knock him out with a chop to his nape. The man groaned in pain and collapsed to the ground, his eyes rolled back.

Without missing a beat, Sheila rushed to the sack and opened it up, revealing the bobbles who appeared weary but alive. *Sheila did say they were popular as pets. He wouldn’t handle them so roughly that they’d die.*

“*Why did you not use magic?*” Lardon asked.

“Hm? Oh, to hide my identity. It might be obvious that it’s me if I reveal I can use a variety of magic. It was better to make him think I can only summon a Sylph.”

“*Oho. Not bad.*” Lardon hummed, satisfied by my quick thinking.

After defeating the man, I turned to the bobbles, who were now hiding in the shadows and peeking my way. I couldn't really discern their expressions since they were literal balls of fluff, but even so, I *could* understand how they were feeling. They were clearly still wary of me, but at least not to the point of fleeing.

"So... What now?"

"It is said that bobbles can understand human language," Sheila noted.

I looked at her in shock. "Seriously?"

She didn't seem to be joking. "That is yet another reason they are favored as pets. They are easy to discipline because they can understand us."

"I see... Their biological traits worked against them." Though, right now, that meant it worked for us. I asked the bobbles, "Can you understand me? I don't mean any harm; I just want to talk."

The hidden bobbles began whispering among themselves. I was close enough to hear them, but only cute little squeaks and chirps registered in my ears. Still, I could tell they understood what I said and were now discussing something, possibly debating whether to accept my request.

"This one-sided communication is kinda inconvenient, though."

"Indeed. It is unfortunate that only fellow monsters can understand them."

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

My head snapped to Sheila, as did hers to me.

"Wh-What is it?" she asked.

"Other monsters can understand them?"

"C-Certainly. Perhaps not the more humanlike ones, but... Hmmm... This may

be a crude way to say it, but the more ‘beastly’ types should be able to understand them.”

“I see... Give me a second.” I teleported back to town. Within moments, I found what I was looking for. “Sli, Lime!”

“Lord Liam!”

“Let’s play!”

The two slimes greeted me with their childish accents. As per usual, they bobbed toward and around me happily.

“Sorry, but I have a favor to ask of you two. Is that okay?”

“Need help?”

“With your work?”

I nearly corrected them to say it wasn’t exactly “work” but decided against it to save time. “Right. I need your help for my work.”

“Okay!”

“We’re super helpers!”

Sli and Lime’s squiggling ramped up even more in their excitement. I took the two blobs with me back to Seam Forest.

“I’m back.”

“Where did you—” Sheila paused when she saw Sli and Lime. “Ah, I see,” she said, instantly understanding what I meant to do.

I nodded with a smile, then turned to the slimes. “I want to talk with those bobbles over there. Could you interpret—I mean, tell me what they’re saying?”

“Okay!”

“Let’s go!”

Sli and Lime bounced over to the bobbles. The little furballs instinctively flinched, but they showed no hostility after determining they were slimes.

“Lord Liam wants to talk!”

“Tell us what you’re saying!”

The bobbles responded with tiny squeaks and chirps, which Sli and Lime translated for me.

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“They said, *‘What does that human seek by currying our favor?’*” Lime parroted the complex words. The childish lilt in his voice made me feel like I was listening to a three-year-old read out a script meant for an adult.

“Then tell them— Oh, right. They can understand me.” I nearly asked Sli and Lime to relay my answer, but I recalled there was no need for that and raised my voice for the bobbles to hear. “I’m not scheming anything. I just want to safeguard you.”

The bobbles began squeaking in response.

“What did they say?”

“*‘We cannot trust you,’*” Sli said.

“*‘We will never again be deceived by human ca-jewelry,’*” Lime recited awkwardly.

“Ca-jewelry...? Oh... You mean *cajolery*?”

“Goodness... I didn’t know they used such profound speech,” Sheila marveled.

I replied, “I’m telling the truth. Look at Sli and Lime here. They live with me in a country we’re all building together, and there’re tons of other monsters with us. I want to take you guys there.”

“*‘A nation of monsters?’*”

“*‘What bolder-dash!’*”

I continued trying to convince the bobbles through Sli and Lime. At first, they refused to believe me, but in time they gave me the benefit of the doubt.

“*‘But the slimes are fond of him.’*”

“*‘Does he truly mean no harm?’*”

As I conversed with the bobbles, I was doing something else simultaneously. Seeing Sli and Lime’s interpretation firsthand gave me the image I needed to craft a new spell. Ironically, what gave me the time to make this spell was the

intensity of the bobbles' wariness toward humans.

“Shall we try trusting a human just once more?”

In the time it took to convince them, I completed this new interpretation spell of mine.

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“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“Did we help? Did we? Did we?”

Sli and Lime started bouncing around me again, like children seeking their parent’s praise after doing well on an errand. They were so cute that, although I’d created a spell for interpretation, I decided to keep it mum for now and let the two continue interpreting for me, at least on the surface.

I turned to the bobbles. “How about it?”

“You are not an enemy to us monsters,” said a shaggy looking bobble. “That much is clear from the behavior of these slimes.” Now that I could directly understand what they were saying, it was much easier for me to tell them apart. This shaggy bobble who looked like a long-bearded village elder had taken up the role of negotiating with me, although it—or he?—still looked as cute as the rest while doing so.

“So you trust me now?”

“We would like to, but...”

“But?” I urged.

“We cannot stray from here.”

“Why’s that?”

“For we are born of this land.”

“Born of this land...?”

“A *spawn hole*,” Lardon suddenly said. “*Monsters propagate in many ways. One of those is by—at least, from how it looks to humans—suddenly appearing or manifesting. The location they ‘spawn’ from is called a spawn hole. Think of it as a tree which cannot be removed from its roots.*”

“Ohhh... I think I get it.” I could see why they couldn’t move. “Is there no way

around it?”

“You simply need to transfer it, roots and all.”

“Ah. I can do that?”

“I would need naught but the tip of my pinky.” Lardon was as oblique as ever, but I was getting the hang of understanding her too. Basically, she wasn’t saying it was impossible for me; it wouldn’t be easy, but it could be done.

Good enough for me. I nodded and looked at the bobbles. “The place you’re born from—your spawn hole, right? I’ll move the whole thing to our country.”

“I-Is that possible?”

“Sure.” I nodded firmly, meeting their eyes.

“Very well. We will guide you.” The bobbles turned and began walking.

I followed behind them with Sli, Lime, and Sheila in tow. Just then, I heard Lardon chuckle. “What is it?” I asked.

“You may have talent as a swindler.”

“Huh?” *Now where’s this coming from?*

“The way you claim something uncertain as possible with such confidence and earn another’s trust... Any swindler would envy such skill.”

“I guess so... But it’s not only useful for swindling, is it?” I smiled wryly. *A swindler, of all things. Really?*

“Should we just keep following?” asked Sheila, who’d remained silent throughout the negotiations.

“Huh? Oh, come to think of it... I’d have thought they’d be leading us into that burrow of theirs instead.”

“Indeed. Is this okay?”

The shaggy bobble cut into our conversation without turning around. “We always build multiple nests in order to protect ourselves from predators.”

“Like rabbits,” Sheila murmured.

“They *do* look the part,” I said.

We followed the bobbles through the forest for long enough that it started feeling as if we'd been going in circles. Finally, we arrived at a burrow inconspicuously hidden between shrubs. We went into the opening that was just big enough for one person to fit through and climbed down a spiral stairway while illuminated by my Light spell. At last, we reached the very bottom.

"This is it."

"I see..." I nodded. On the surface, it looked no more than an ordinary pit. But with my eyes that could perceive mana, I knew otherwise. "Yeah. There are 'roots' here, all right."

"Roots?" Sheila asked.

"Kinda like a tree," I answered, relaying Lardon's explanation to her. "Imagine a magical tree that produces bobbles rooted in this space."

"I see... So, you plan to transport the tree, correct?"

"Right." I turned to the bobbles. "Can I?"

They paused, hesitant. They were reluctant even at this late stage, not that I couldn't understand why. Deciding I wasn't an enemy and bringing me here didn't weigh as heavily as letting me touch their spawn hole.

"Leave it to Lord Liam!"

"It'll be okay!"

At Sli and Lime's pure and innocent encouragement, the bobbles finally made their resolve. "Please go ahead."

"You have two very charming guarantors," Sheila mused, smiling fondly. I had to agree.

I bent down and put my hand against the ground. "How do I move it?"

"Dig it out without damaging a single root while removing all other impurities."

"Without damaging a single root? Literally?"

"Yes."

It sounded like a figure of speech, but that was just how tricky this undertaking was going to be. I first scanned the spawn hole; the roots extended to about ten meters below, twisting and zigzagging horizontally across a diameter of about a hundred meters. Quite the grand scale, but this *was* where bobbles were born from.

I began “digging” out the spawn hole’s roots with great care, taking only the mana that comprised the spawn hole and excluding the soil, rocks, and all else buried with it.

“A-Are you okay?” Sheila gazed at me with furrowed brows. “You’re sweating quite a bit...”

“Yeah. I’ve got it now,” I murmured. “I might’ve damaged a real tree’s roots by now, but these are essentially *mana*.” So I could do it—I was sure of it. All the knowledge and experience I’d gained in handling mana until now founded my confidence—no, certainty—in my success.

After completely parting the mana roots from the earth, I chanted, “Teleport!” and took everyone along with me. We appeared on the outskirts of town, in an empty plot of land with no buildings.

“Th-This is...”

“A town... So many monsters...”

While the bobbles were dumbstruck, I “replanted” the undamaged mana roots. They burrowed into the ground in no time at all, settling into their new land.

“Ah...”

“He... He truly transplanted it.”

“Goodness...”

The bobbles sensed the moment their home had safely taken root and gazed at me in admiration and gratitude.

After that, I returned to Seam Forest and teleported all the bobbles left behind back to town with me. With their spawn hole having been transported, there was no reason for them to stay there further. Thanks to the explanation of their fellow bobbles, the others willingly came along with me.

Now I had a whole crowd of bobbles all gathered up in front of me. “Is this everyone?”

“I believe so,” the bobbles beside me replied.

“All right. Next, I’ll form contracts with you all. I’ll give you names too.” I swept my gaze over the bobbles, who numbered roughly over a hundred in total. Just casting Familia would only take three rounds of my max mana capacity, but I also wanted to name them while I was at it.

Excluding a few exceptions, monsters didn’t have names; it just wasn’t a custom for them. *Well, I guess humans aren’t that different.* Depending on the country or region, people could have middle names or no surnames at all. It wasn’t quite the same thing, but villages were sometimes referred to as “the village beyond the mountain” or “the village on the western bank of the river” and so on.

Giving them a name was optional, but it’d be convenient for me if they had one, so I decided to name my familiars whenever I could.

“Names?”

“Yeah. If I name you while forming the contract... See that over there?” I gestured to the town. “Light, fire, and water... You’ll be able to use all sorts of useful spells.”

“Truly?” The bobble gaped at me. This was the one speaking to me from the start and seemed to be their leader of sorts. I was starting to learn how to discern the expressions of this ball of fluff.

“You’ll know once you try it out.”

After a pause, the bobble nodded. "Very well."

I cast Familia on him. "You'll be...Fluffy," I said, naming him according to my gut feel. The contract's light enveloped the bobble and flashed brightly before subsiding.

"This is..."

"How is it? Try casting Light."

Fluffy the bobble tried casting the spell. A few minutes later, a faint light floated in the air. "I-It's really magic!"

"That's right. You'll know what spells you can use as long as you're in town. There are no repercussions, so use it as much as you want."

"O-Okay..." Fluffy nodded in a daze, still staring at me in disbelief.

I continued casting Familia and naming the rest of the bobbles. They were all so fuzzy and soft, I just couldn't help but name them along those lines like I did with Fluffy.

As I kept that up, I realized something. "Wait... They're not evolving?" Unlike all the other monsters until now, the bobbles didn't evolve after forming a contract with me.

I mulled over why. It wasn't as if they *needed* to evolve, but it was definitely preferable. I thought about guiding their evolution with High Familia, to no avail; no clear image came to mind. Back when I first made the spell, visualizing it had been simple because I had the dracula, a superior vampire mutant, to use as reference.

There was no such thing for these bobbles. I saw no "problem" with this furball-like appearance of theirs, which is why I couldn't conjure up an image of what they could possibly "improve."

Oh, well. Whatever. I gave up on their evolution for now and continued forming their contracts.

In that time, the bobbles who had already gotten their names went on to try out the town's spells. They formed orbs of light, summoned fireballs, and talked to one another via Telephone, marveling at the magic in this town.

Then, just as I finished naming the last one, something happened—the ground started glowing at flashing intervals like a beating heart.

“Wh-What is it?”

“What’s going on?”

“Is this...mana?” Amid the bobbles’ growing confusion, I read the flickering mana with my well-honed senses and immediately identified that it belonged to the bobbles. Like pouring water, all their mana was converging into one point: their spawn hole.

I heard Lardon chuckle.

“Do you know what’s going on?”

“Try reading the mana a bit more.”

I focused harder on the mana flowing into the spawn hole. By now, the flowing mana was coming not only from the bobbles but also everyone else in town. The elves, wolfmen, giants, noble vampires... The bobbles’ mana mixed in with theirs and coalesced into one.

Before long, a single bobble emerged from their spawn hole. It didn’t look any less cute or fluffy than the rest, but it held immense presence. “I am the king,” he declared in a cute voice.

The bobbles all began flocking toward him with lively cheers.

“Ah, our king!”

“Our king is finally born!”

“All hail the king!”

I could only stare, bewildered. “What in the...”

“For monsters born from spawn holes,” Lardon explained, “a king is born once every few decades to centuries from the flow of power in the earth. It seems you hastened the process.”

“Oh... Because of this town’s mana?”

“Precisely.”

As I nodded at Lardon's explanation, the bobbles around the bobble king all began to glow. Encased in light, their bodies underwent a transformation.

"Fairy floss," Lardon murmured.

"Huh?"

"That is what bobbles evolve into. Their king spurs on their evolution."

"Ohhh..." I wonder if all spawn hole monsters evolve this way?

Just as I was wondering, the bobble king approached and knelt before me.

"Tis my greatest honor to be in your esteemed presence, O High King."

After him, all the bobbles turned fairy flosses followed suit at once.

“They can fly now?” I asked, gesturing vaguely at the newly evolved fairy flosses hovering lazily all around me. It seemed like an ability that came with their evolution.

“So long as they remain under my dominion,” answered the bobble king. His voice was low and gruff, a stark contrast to his cute appearance.

“That means everyone around here is under you?”

“Indeed.”

“How close do they have to be?”

“The distance is irrelevant. No matter where, they are mine the moment we are connected.”

“So there’s no set range, huh? It’s like Familia.”

“Or, *perhaps*,” Lardon suddenly opined, “*it is the other way around.*”

“The other way?” I tried to puzzle out her words, but not for long. “Oh, you mean the people of the past might’ve created Familia after seeing this? I see...” I returned my attention to the bobble king. “So they can fly now that they’re under you. Nothing else to it?”

“Nay. I can also do this.” Instantly, another furball appeared right in front of the bobble king and gleefully fluttered around him. It was almost as if it teleported.

“What was that?”

“I can summon those under my dominion to my side,” the king explained. “Moreover, we can communicate even from a distance.”

“Kinda like Telephone, huh? This is looking more and more like Familia.” Or, as Lardon said, it was highly likely Familia was inspired by these features instead. It’d mean any spell I created thus far was essentially a copy of a copy.

“We are weak as a species, but our numbers will surely serve you well.”

“I see.” I nodded. “In that case... Ah. But first, I have to name you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

The bobble king chuckled. “Can I truly receive the honor of a name from our High King?”

“It helps me too. I’m a human, after all.” I’d always been one, both now and before I became the fifth son of a noble house. While being nameless might not bother monsters, as a human, not having a name to call others by was really inconvenient.

“Ah, what a blessing...” The bobble king trembled, the fur over his body bristling in waves. Unlike the others, he was still kneeling before me.

As I looked down at him, a different kind of name came to mind, one unlike what I’d given the other bobbles. “You’ll be Kaiser,” I said as I cast Familia.

The bobble king, Kaiser, began to glow like the bobbles did. By the time the light subsided, his body had grown larger and fluffier than before, and he started drifting in the air like the rest.

“Ah... I am now capable of flight,” said the now fairy floss king. Despite looking fluffier and cuter than ever, Kaiser spoke with just as much grandeur as was suited to his name.



As the fairy flosses gathered around Kaiser and formed a mass of floating fluffballs, Sheila quietly went up behind me. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“No problem. I’ll take care of them. Will this do?”

“Of course. I’m very grateful,” she said again. “I might have to ask you for help again in the future...”

“All right. Feel free.” Since she was bringing it up now, it could only be about taking in more monsters into our nation. The only other humans here were Asuna, Jodie, Flora, and—although she wasn’t here now—Scarlet. Bruno came by from time to time, but ninety-nine percent of our population were monsters.

“I truly appreciate it.”

Suddenly, a new voice called out to me. “*Master.*”

“Hm? This voice... Scarlet?”

“*Indeed,*” Scarlet replied, speaking to me via Telephone. She was currently out of the country, but I made sure she always had an Ancient Memoria on her so we could communicate through this spell as needed. As she was now, she’d need an hour to cast it, but it was still much faster than writing and delivering a letter.

“What’s up?”

“*I have a report for you. If possible, I would like to give it in person.*”

“Ah, okay. Where are you—” Before the word “now” left my lips, I froze. My gaze lingered on the sea of floating fluff balls before me.

I decided against teleporting to her location and instead closely observed all the fairy flosses and their king. I thought back to their similarities with Familia, or more precisely, the likelihood they were the origin point of the spell in the first place.

“*Master?*”

“Hold on for a bit,” I told Scarlet. “Kaiser.”

“You called, High King?”

“Could you show me what you did earlier? That thing where you summoned a

fairy floss.”

“Right away.” Kaiser did as told and summoned another fairy floss. “Is this acceptable?”

“Yeah. Perfect.” That gave me a grasp for the mana flow, which I then began to replicate with my own mana. I visualized doing the same thing, just with Familia, a spell that carried similar effects—and Scarlet, without warning, appeared right before me.

“Huh?” Scarlet couldn’t hide her surprise, her eyes wide as saucers at the sudden and unexpected change of scenery.

It worked!

“Wh-Where...” Scarlet looked around, shock seeping into her expression when she realized she’d come to town in an instant. “Oh. Was this perhaps your doing, Master?”

“Yeah. I summoned you,” I explained. “I think I can call any of my familiars this way, no matter how far they are from me.” I teleported to the outskirts of this country, the promised land, and summoned Scarlet again.

“Ah! Th-This place is...”

“Does it look familiar?”

“Yes. This is where we teleported to the first time.”

I nodded and returned us to town, back to where Sheila and the crowd of fluff balls were. “Anyway, that’s that.”

“A-Amazing as always, Master.” Scarlet finally understood what was going on and bowed her head in respect.

“So? What did you wanna talk to me about?”

“Um...” She cast a glance at Sheila. “May we speak in private?”

I raised a brow. “Do you know her?”

“Yes, well... I know her face.”

“Ohhh.” Scarlet and Sheila were both princesses, so it was no surprise they’d previously met, probably for diplomatic matters or the sort. “All right. Kaiser, Sheila, I’ve got some business to attend to, so I’ll be going now.”

With that, I once again teleported with Scarlet, this time to her mansion in town, which was barely seeing any use. I entered the large-windowed room for the third time in recent days.

“So?” I prompted.

Scarlet nodded and cleared her throat. “Much as it pains me to say this... Um,

you see, Jamille has...”

“Yeah?” Even when I urged her on, Scarlet seemed increasingly reluctant to finish her sentence. *Does she have some big news for me?*

“Jamille has...decided to issue you a declaration of war.”

“What? They’re waging war?”

Her head hung low. “Yes...”

“But why? After they’ve even offered you as a bride... Didn’t it look like they wanted a cordial relationship with us?”

“Indeed, that was the plan at the time. However, from a certain point onward, their opinion began to shift, and it all snowballed from there...”

“Why?”

Scarlet had no words. She gritted her teeth in frustration, but she recovered shortly, took a deep breath, and lifted her face, revealing a fiery expression. “Firstly, allow me to explain their pretext,” she began. “They have identified you as a sham and have decided to view the divine dragon as a wicked monster, or even a fake.”

“Seriously...?” *That’s totally a false accusation... Wait.* “Lardon?”

“Yes?”

“Are you okay with that?”

“Hm?” Lardon was silent for a good ten seconds. *“Ah... I do not care in particular. I have long lost any expectations I had for humans.”*

“Okay...” I suddenly recalled what she’d told me back when we first met, which wasn’t too far off from her current sentiment.

“You, however, are amusing to watch.”

“R-Right...” I blushed, feeling a bit awkward. I cleared my throat and brushed it off before turning back to Scarlet. “So, why all of a sudden?”

“I suppose you could say...they are blinded by greed.”

“Greed? How so?”

“The bloodsouls, magic infrastructure, and the high mithril silver deposit... They seek to get their hands on our riches and assets through war. They must have judged they can annihilate an army of at most ten thousand monsters.”

I sighed. *They’d wage war for such a foolish reason?* “Is that for sure?”

“Yes. Even the neutral nobles have been absorbed into the pro-war faction. At this stage, I believe war is unavoidable.”

“I see...” I held my chin. “What do you think, Lardon?” I couldn’t figure this kinda thing out on my own. It’d be a different story if it was about magic, but for this, seeking advice was my best option.

“If you wish to stand as a sovereign nation,” Lardon declared, *“then you must remain resolute in the face of invasion.”*

“Which means...?”

“You must annihilate any invaders.”

“Is that the best way?”

“Yes.”

“All right.” I turned back to Scarlet. “I’m sorry, Scarlet, but it looks like we’ll be warring with Jamille.”

“Are you certain, Master?” she asked.

“Yeah. Though, now that I think about it, this decision will affect everyone following me.” I could imagine what would happen to everyone under me if we lost this war. From Jamille’s perspective, they were just eradicating monsters as usual, and they needn’t show monsters any mercy or guilt. In which case, it was better to face them head-on.

“What’ll *you* do?” I asked Scarlet.

“Of course I will follow you, Master. I am loath to side with a nation that dares to sully the divine dragon’s name.”

“Okay.” That sounded very much like her. “Then first, let’s— Whoa!” As I thought to begin our preparations, I noticed two figures outside the window: Gai and Chris. Their faces were smooshed against the glass; clearly, they’d been

listening in on us. "You two..."

Now that they were busted, the duo flung the window open.

"Milord, are we departing for war?"

"Yep," I answered. "We're going up against Jamille."

"How far can we go?" asked Chris.

"Let me think... Hm..." I decided to follow Lardon's advice. "Annihilate them if they step into our territory. Otherwise, ignore them."

The pair seemed incredibly riled up at my simple orders.

"Understood! I shall perform more splendidly than this boar woman can ever hope to."

"You? Psh, dream on. I'll totally beat way more of 'em than you, meathead."

"I foresee you recklessly charging in and getting surrounded by enemies."

"Oh yeah? That's already better than some meathead who'll definitely fall for some trap like a loser."

The two began bickering like always as they went off to prepare for battle.

A war with Jamille, huh...

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I sat facing Scarlet inside her mansion when Gai contacted me via Telephone.
"Milord, I have a report."

"How'd it go?"

"I have expelled the lurkers in the western forest."

"Did it all go well?"

"They resisted, so I first broke their limbs."

"Okay." I nodded. I was actually asking to see if he didn't get hurt, though judging from his response, it seemed like it was an easy win.

"Hee hee! I knew you were no good, meathead!" Chris joined in through another Telephone line. Like this, three-way communication was possible between me and my familiars.

"What are you saying?" Gai demanded.

Chris snickered. *"Here's my report, Master! I chased out the guys hiding in the eastern mountain—unharmd!"* She emphasized the last part of her report for a more personal reason, namely to rub it in Gai's face.

"What?!"

"Unlike a certain hopeless meathead, I was able to get rid of Master's enemies easy-peasy, no biggie!"

"Hrgggh..."

Telephone only conveyed voices, but I could easily imagine what the two looked like now. Gai was probably gnashing his teeth together, while Chris was likely puffing her chest up with a smug smirk. *Her personality really changes when she's competing with him... Well, I guess the same can be said for Gai.*

"I am terribly ashamed, milord... For those in the north, I will make sure they are expelled unharmd before they even realize what befell them."

“Tsk, tsk. This is why you’re just a meathead. Just watch me, Master! I’ll chase out the next one unharmed and traumatized for life!”

“GAAAH!”

After swearing to one-up the other as usual, Gai and Chris cut their squabble and headed for their next locations. Previously, we’d taken the approach of letting any foreign spies in our land be. Not entirely, of course; we always made sure to keep tabs on where they were and what they were doing. But from now on, we shifted to kicking all the spies out since we couldn’t afford to give our enemy any information.

“Jeez, those two... Can’t they get along a bit better?”

“As I see it, they seem to be getting along splendidly,” said Scarlet, who’d been listening quietly the whole time.

“You think so? They keep fighting, though.”

“They do say arguments are a sign of closeness.”

“Well, I get that, but...” I thought back to the two. *Yeah, no... I honestly can’t see that as getting along.* “Anyway, Scarlet.”

Sensing I was moving on to the next topic, Scarlet looked at me with a serious expression. “Yes, Master?”

“How many men will Jamille send in?”

“Twenty thousand, for now.”

“Is that final? Or just an estimate?”

“It is based on the intelligence I have acquired. However...” She faltered, but I urged her on. “It is now fairly known I serve you, so they may have intentionally fed me false information.”

“Right... I guess they *can* do that.”

“Humans never change,” Lardon murmured, neither exasperated nor impressed.

Scarlet drooped. “My sincerest apologies...”

“No, it’s fine. There’s not much we can do about it. For now...” I decided to

change my line of questioning. What kind of information did I need *and* could get directly from Scarlet? I started with, “Is Jamille serious about this?”

She immediately nodded. “Undoubtedly.”

“How long will this war take?”

“Broadly speaking...” Scarlet took a moment. “They are aiming for the manastones and high mithril silver deposit—in other words, our resources. Therefore, if they realize that they will incur greater losses from this war than it is worth...”

“I see. So we have to beat them thoroughly from the get-go.”

“It is as you say.”

“Hm, okay...”

“It would be best for you to leave them some breathing room.”

“Breathing room? What do you mean, Lardon?”

“Have you ever gambled?”

“Huh? No, never.”

Lardon chuckled. *“I would suppose not. Had you been the type to, you would never have studied magic so diligently.”*

Was that a compliment, or...?

“The more gamblers lose,” Lardon went on, *“the more they continue to bet, for they seek to regain all their losses in one fell swoop.”*

“Ohhh.” I saw what she was saying. I couldn’t relate, but I’d seen plenty of the sort.

“The same can be said for war. As you accumulate losses, it may become difficult to gauge when to pull back.”

“Hmmm. So, it’s also not good for us to beat them too badly, you mean?”

“Perhaps.”

I mulled it over. *If going too overboard isn’t good...*

“It would be a different story if you bestow upon them overwhelming fear.”

“Fear... Oh.” I just got an idea. I organized my thoughts for a moment before deciding to give it a try.

To start with, I cast Telephone once more. “Hello? Can you hear me, Chris?”

Outside the promised land, a man woke up within a vast wasteland. “Wh-Where... Argh!” He looked around, stunned, and soon crumpled under a sharp wave of pain.

“Urgh...”

“Haah... Haah...”

The two people grunting beside him were his colleagues who’d infiltrated the nation of monsters with him. One was sprawled over the ground, drenched in his own blood, while the other was sporting two broken legs.

The man himself soon coughed up blood from internal injury. “Are you guys all right? What happened?”

“I-I’m not sure.”

“I... I don’t remember. I just opened my eyes, and I was here...”

The man’s eyes grew wide. He also couldn’t remember a thing. His last memory was him hiding in the shadows while nibbling on some jerky. Before he knew it, he was already here, wounded and hurt. He couldn’t remember what had happened, nor had any idea what was done to him. Why wasn’t he killed? Why was he spared?

He knew nothing—*nothing at all*.

A shiver ran down the man’s spine. The gap in his memories loomed over his mind like a deep, dark shadow. He was not only skilled but also clever; the fact that he recalled nothing meant *anything* could have been done to him while he was unconscious.

Despite that, he was alive. He was clueless. *He was scared.*

“Wh-Why...”

“Ugh...”

His two colleagues shuddered, also burdened by the pain...and the much heavier fear crushing their minds.

I watched the three spies from hundreds of meters away. "Looks like it worked."

"Indeed. Their hearts are thoroughly ruled by fear... Hah. This was quite the clever plan."

"I got the hint from Gai and Chris's squabbling." *And...my own experience.* "It's surprisingly terrifying, not knowing anything." I didn't know what would've become of me until now without magic.

Lardon chuckled. *"I see. So you plan to use that spell on the enemy forces you repel, hm?"*

"Yeah. Rather than killing them, isn't it better to send them running in fear?"

"Not bad." Thus, with Lardon's approval, our war strategy was finalized.

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I came to our national border with Scarlet. For some reason, she was gazing at the scenery before her fondly.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Ah, excuse me. I was reminiscing. This is where I first stepped into the promised land with you, Master.”

“Was this where we broke the seal?”

“Yes. Beyond this—” Scarlet took a few steps forward then spun back around. “—was what used to be Gallar Valley.”

“Right.”

This land, once a valley from the outside when it had been sealed, was untouched by its three surrounding nations and protected by Lardon’s power for the longest time. Since none of them had laid claim to it, we’d taken ownership of the land instead.

“What did you come here to do, Master?”

“I’m... Huh? Why do you look so excited?”

Scarlet’s eyes were clearly ablaze with passion and anticipation. “M-My apologies. The thought of witnessing yet another miracle born of your power was just...” She ducked her head, cheeks flushed.

“I’m just doing something normal this time. No miracles here.”

“O-Of course. My apologies.”

“Why not? Go ahead and show her a miracle.”

“Not you too...” I smiled wryly. “What miracle? I’m just a mage.”

Contrary to what Scarlet said, I had no recollection whatsoever of making any miracles. It was all magic, and magic was real. Burning wood and consuming mana could both light a fire. Whichever the method, either kindling or mana

was needed to trigger the desired phenomenon. It was all reality, no miracles at play.

“Not at all! Master, your very existence is a miracle. You are fit to be praised as the greatest mage of all time!”

“Really?” Now *that* actually made me feel good. I’d always adored magic, even before I entered Liam’s body, so I could always appreciate a compliment from that front. In fact, it made me *really* happy.

“Anyway...” I set that all aside and took a look at the spot between me and Scarlet where the barrier which concealed this land once stood. I recognized it because I was the one who undid the seal, as could Scarlet since she was present for it. In anyone else’s eyes, however, this spot would be nothing more than an unassuming portion of the vast flatland.

“What will you do?”

“Put up a barrier.”

“A barrier? Aha! One that will prevent enemy entry, yes?”

“Nope. Nothing of the sort.”

“Huh?” Scarlet blinked, perplexed.

“I don’t wanna isolate our country. I’d really like to get along with Jamille, and all the other human nations too. That won’t be possible if I put up a barrier to keep them out.”

“Is that so...?”

“So I’m gonna put up the weakest barrier.”

“The weakest?”

“That’s right. A barrier so weak it won’t even block anything. *That* weak.”

Scarlet’s sharp and elegant features slackened in confusion. “Wh-Why would you do such a...?”

As they said, seeing is believing. I decided to show her before explaining.

“Item Box.” I called forth the magical box that could hold as much as the caster’s mana allowed, then took out Guardian Lardon from within and

equipped it. This enchanted armor that once belonged to Lardon could nearly double my mana capacity. I could only use it for a limited time since it took a lot out of me, but that was fine—it was precisely what I needed now.

“Amelia Emilia Claudia.”

Then, I chanted an aria to maximize my mana output. I’d be able to fire fifty-nine power missiles at once with this much, but instead, I poured it all into a *single* spell—one so simple, one in two people could probably cast it.

“Mosquito Net!”

The next moment, the spell activated and formed a huge wall of light. It expanded sideward and circled our land, standing at about twenty meters tall and emitting a red glow.

“W-Wow...” Scarlet marveled. “Ah! Could it be? Does this wall span the entire promised land?!”



“Yeah. It’s a wall of light circling the whole promised land—our national territory.”

“Goodness... With this, we can defend against enemy troops!”

“No, not at all,” I said, stopping Scarlet short again. “I told you that earlier, remember?”

“Oh, that’s right... Then why...?”

“It’s just a demarcation of our territory. Isn’t it better for it to be clearly marked? But also,” I added, “it serves as a *warning*. By making it red, we can warn them that we won’t show any mercy once they breach this point.”

“Oh...”

“This spell is essentially a declaration: if you’re not an enemy, then it’s all good. Otherwise, no mercy.”

After hearing my explanation, Scarlet went from stunned, to nodding in understanding, and finally, back to looking at me in awe. “A proper and just declaration. As expected of you, Master!” she crowed, gazing at me with the eyes of a devout believer.

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The silent night was dark under the moonless sky. From atop a small hill in the grasslands, I peered through the ring formed with my thumb and index finger. Telescope, a spell for viewing distant scenery, was one among the hundreds of spells in the magicpedia I got from my teacher. This hill provided a vantage point from where I could easily observe a military encampment bordered by a provisional wall.

“Judging from the number of tents... I’d say there are roughly ten thousand men out there.”

“That appears to be the case.”

“They really just barged in without any hesitation, huh?” I sighed.

Beyond the encampment was the red barrier I set up to mark our national border. Of course, this meant Jamille’s army was *inside* our territory. They had come to invade us, just as Scarlet reported.

“Of course they would not be stopped by that.”

“I heard the color red triggers a sense of alertness and caution, though...”

“Current military formations entail marching forward with all forces. They believe there is nothing to fear so long as they all cross together,” Lardon explained. *“Surely you never expected them to stop there? As you are now, you should have been able to put up a more fascinating barrier had you put your mind to it.”*

“I mean, I guess so...”

At the end of the day, the barrier’s only purpose was to make a statement. As Lardon said, I didn’t think it would stop them, and I definitely could’ve done more with it if I wanted. The barrier could’ve been made to block any invasions or even inflict them with a status abnormality the moment they passed it, but I did none of that and just made it a colored film of light. It wasn’t something an enemy with a clear goal would hesitate to cross the moment they realized it

was harmless.

“Oh, well.”

“So, what now?”

“We launch a surprise attack—throw them into chaos without hurting them.”

“Oh?” Lardon hummed, anticipation bubbling in her voice. *“How?”*

I cast the communication magic spell, Telephone. “Gai, Chris. Can you hear me?”

“Yes, milord,” answered Gai.

“Loud and clear!” Chris followed.

“As planned, you’ll both charge in on your own—Gai from the east and Chris from the west.”

“As you wish.”

“Leave it to me! I’ll do better than that meathead.”

“I am not one to lose to a mere boar woman.”

“Don’t get too worked up, you two. Take it easy.”

“But milord...”

“We might as well eradicate them, right?”

The two went from bickering just a moment ago to seeking my permission together. *Maybe they do get along after all?*

“No need. No eradication allowed.”

“Boo... That’s no fun.”

“Understood. I shall faithfully fulfill your orders down to the last letter, milord.”

“Jeez, it’s not like I... Wait! Do I hear you charging in already?! Dumb meathead!”

Squabbling till the very end, Chris followed after Gai and began her assault as well. Through Telescope, I saw chaos unfolding from either end of the

encampment. The night ambush triggered panic throughout the camp, and the lights began going out one after the other—a sign that Gai and Chris were properly fulfilling my orders even as they wreaked havoc.

“Why make them do such a thing?”

“So they won’t realize there are only two of them.”

Lardon hummed. *“You are trying to instigate friendly fire,”* she surmised. When I failed to respond immediately, she chuckled. *“What is it? Is it so surprising that I read your plan?”*

“No, that’s not...”

“An elite few charging into the enemy camp on a moonless night to cause chaos amid the enemy’s ranks. A common strategy.”

“Is it?”

“Do not look so glum. Common is not necessarily bad. Since you have the pawns to fill the role of the elite few, then you ought to make good use of them.”

I nodded with a strained smile. I came up with the idea and figured it might work, but I just didn’t have as much confidence in this department as I did with magic. Lardon’s approval gave me some relief.

Even as we spoke, the chaos in the enemy encampment spread out along with the growing darkness.

“It’s almost time.”

“Hm? Is there more?”

“Yeah.”

“You did not dispense any more orders... Are you planning to do something yourself?”

“It’s nothing big—just getting the two of them to withdraw,” I explained. *“Gai, Chris. Fall back.”*

“Understood.”

“Got it!”

After hearing their responses, I summoned the two through their contracts.

“Oh, Master!”

“Milord? Where is this?”

“Good work, you two,” I said while checking on the encampment via Telescope. “Yep.” Chaos continued to unfold, even with Gai and Chris gone. I turned to the duo. “Were the soldiers attacking one another?”

“They were,” answered Gai.

“Nah,” said Chris.

I looked at Chris in shock. “They weren’t?”

“Nope! I mean, isn’t it such a waste? They’re your enemies, so I beat them all up before they could start hitting one another!”

“Oh, that’s what you meant...” I smiled wryly.

Gai scoffed. “Truly a boar woman through and through.”

“What?!”

Aaand they’re fighting again. Setting the two aside, I cast Telescope once more. On both the east and west, the soldiers were still fighting among themselves.

“I see. An elite few charged in, and once the time was ripe, you instantly withdrew them with your magic.” Lardon chuckled. *“Interesting. A truly lethal strategy.”*

Hearing her generous praise washed all my anxiety away, only leaving me with unbridled joy.

Come morning, Jamille's army vacated their encampment and proceeded with their march.

According to the information their scout had brought back, two hundred elves were stationed a kilometer ahead with likely just as many monsters lurking in the woods on the flanks. Jamille's commanding officer sneered at the crude ambush, but as an experienced military leader, he simply thanked the scout for his work and ordered him to continue scanning the area for enemy troops.

They marched on, and soon, their army encountered the elven soldiers. The commander ordered his men to prepare for an ambush from their flanks while also signaling for a frontal charge.

It was the two hundred elves, however, who kicked off the battle with a single spell. Instantly, despite the early morning sun, darkness curtained their surroundings. The sudden abyss they found themselves in put even a solar eclipse to shame and brought chaos upon Jamille's army. Even the experienced commander could not calm his soldiers' agitation at such a radical change.

In the midst of the chaos, more magic rained down from above; the monsters lurking in the forest on their sides were sparing them no room to breathe.

When fighting in large numbers, especially in war, bombardment was typically done with fireballs. After all, greater numbers served a greater advantage, and flame magic users were far more numerous than frost magic users, given the lower threshold for talent.

However, what Jamille's army found themselves barraged with were spears of *ice*.

This unexpected move, coupled with the disorienting darkness, immobilized them. All they could do was let the enemy paint the battlefield with their own screams and shrieks. By the time light shone on them again, the army had lost any semblance of a formation. The surviving soldiers were left scattered across

the field, intermingled with the corpses of their allies.

Needless to say, the commander was the first to regain his bearings. He sent detached forces to face the ambushers on their flanks, once forgotten amid the chaos. However, once the troops parted from the main army, their advance halted, their formation scattered, and their panic flared anew—but it was quickly smothered, for better or for worse.

From within their ranks, soldiers started dropping like flies. One after another they went until, in no time at all, only one figure remained standing on each flank. One was a club-wielding giant, the other a female wolfman.

It was then the commander realized—those two had slipped into his detached forces during the shroud. Once his forces had gotten too far for reinforcements to reach in time, the two revealed themselves and annihilated the troops.

Besides those infiltrators, the enemy might have plotted something else amid the confusion. They couldn't properly march forward or even engage in battle in such a situation. So, after much deliberation, the commander ordered a retreat.

Just like that, Jamille's army lost two thousand soldiers.

I watched Jamille's army retreat from afar using Telescope.

"Alucard speaking. I have slipped in among the soldiers around the commander."

"How does he look?"

"Vexed, but still calm."

"Okay. Keep it up and prioritize staying hidden."

"Understood."

I cut my conversation with the noble vampire Alucard. I had ordered him to infiltrate the enemy forces, making good use of his kind's visual similarity to humans.

"When did you make such a spell?" Lardon asked.

“What spell?”

“That darkness earlier.”

“Oh, Dark? Around the same time as Light,” I answered. “One lights up the surroundings, the other dims it.”

“I’m surprised you even thought to make such a spell.”

“It’s thanks to the many all-nighters I’ve pulled,” I explained. “There were times I was so exhausted but still couldn’t fall asleep because it was too bright in the morning.”

“I see. An idea that came to you because you are human.” Lardon chuckled, praising my spell. *“In any case, you did quite well.”*

“With my spell?”

“With Gai and Chris.”

“Oh...” To deal with our hidden troops, Jamille’s army had sent a detached force, which Gai and Chris slipped into in the dark. Maneuvering on the battlefield like this was starting to become their thing, not to mention their burning sense of rivalry—my orders had gotten them real fired up.

“Jamille fell for it rather easily, hm?”

“Humans can only think of one thing at a time, especially when they panic—or concentrate, I guess,” I explained. “That’s why most people can only use one spell at a time. I just took advantage of that.” I called to mind today’s sequence of events. “They were conscious of the ambushers at first, but forgot about them when it turned dark. Then, when the ambushers bombarded them, the fact we could’ve done something in that darkness wouldn’t even have crossed their minds. Each step tends to push older events farther back in their minds.”

“I see. Humans are such inconvenient beings.”

“This *and* last night’s ambush probably have them on their toes,” I continued, “but that just means they’ll be jumping at the slightest shadows all day. I plan to capitalize on that by making noises using magic to keep them restless.”

“Not bad.” Lardon chuckled. *“At this point, I almost feel bad for the enemy.”*

I was actually a bit worried since this wasn't about magic, so receiving Lardon's stamp of approval came as a relief.

Under the starry sky, I observed Jamille's encampment from a distance. All the nightly ambushes thus far have left them so terribly disordered even after the day's battles had ended. It was so bad, I could tell from all the way here.

"Your Majesty," a young man called softly through Telephone. I couldn't recognize his voice, but given the time, he could only be a noble vampire.

"How's it going?"

"As per your orders, we left bloodsucking marks on the soldiers who collapsed during the ambush."

"Good work. Come back to town and have a rest."

"Understood."

The magic cut off, returning silence to the night.

"Why have them do such a thing?" asked Lardon.

"To support Alucard," I answered. "Jamille's soldiers don't know about noble vampires—that they can move about under the sun. I'm reaffirming their impression that vampires only move at night."

Right now, only Gai and Chris had reached infamy due to their bounties. The noble vampires were still an unknown force to Jamille, so the two bite marks on their necks should make them think only of ordinary vampires.

"Now they're gonna be even warier at night. Remember when I told you how humans can only keep one thing in mind at a time? Well, now they won't think to look out for vampires during the day too, which'll help Alucard move around more. We can reveal our 'daytime vampires' if we ever need to throw them even further into disarray."

"You've thought quite far ahead. I'm impressed."

Huh. That earned me a compliment... I cleared my throat. "Well, I just hope they'll finally retreat with this."

“That certainly would be ideal.”

I wilted. “You don’t think so?” Lardon liked talking in a roundabout fashion. Based on past experiences and her tone, I could tell there was a hidden meaning behind her response: certainty that they *wouldn’t* retreat after this.

“I do applaud your devious moves. I could never conceive such tactics myself. However...” she continued. *“Those on the receiving end of such conniving will surely think you are only doing so because you have no confidence in your own army’s strength.”*

“I see...”

“You recall we talked about gambling?”

I had to process that for a bit. “Ah. About how gamblers aim for a turnaround after a series of losses?”

“Precisely.” Lardon chuckled. *“Jamille is likely of the mind that they will attain that turnaround the moment they manage a direct battle. They will no longer retreat at anything short of fatal losses. In a sense, your actions have been counterproductive.”*

“Really...?”

“Do not look so glum. Shall I put it another way?” Lardon huffed, enjoying herself as always. *“There are no issues with the ingredients you prepared and your method of cooking. You are simply lacking in seasoning.”*

Urgh. That does make for a pretty bland dish. “What’s the seasoning, then?”

Lardon chuckled once more. Wasn’t she enjoying herself a little too much? She hadn’t even answered my question yet.

“What’s up with you?” I asked instead.

“Ah, I was simply thinking that you truly are an interesting human. You are able to contrive many ingenious ideas, yet never hesitate to ask what you do not know. Now that I think of it, I have never felt excessive pride from you.”

“Does pride have anything to do with asking about things I don’t know?”

“Ha ha. You are fine as you are.” Lardon seemed to be in a really good mood.

Still, she went back to the main topic right away. *“You see, it is simple...”*

The next morning, I stood on the path of Jamille’s march—on a road that stretched through the endless and open plains. Their army halted once only a few hundred meters remained between us, their wariness clear to my eyes even from where I stood.

“The fruit of your efforts,” Lardon remarked, as if praising a promising pupil. *“It should have plenty of effect as they are now. It is time to wrap things up.”*

I nodded firmly and raised my right hand overhead. *“Amelia Emilia Claudia,”* I chanted, amplifying my mana. A magic circle one meter in diameter expanded atop my hand, and above it, another circle two meters wide. Four meters, eight... Circles kept reaching toward the sky, forming a cone-shaped stack of magic circles.

Jamille’s army trembled at the sight.

I learned this spell from Lardon’s underground altar, mastered in one night after simultaneously casting it fifty-nine times. Finally, I unleashed it.

“Eternal Blaze!”

The magic circles flashed, enveloping Jamille’s army in jet-black flames. Eternal Blaze was a large-scale divine magic spell which created flames that couldn’t be put out through ordinary means. The war-class spell devoured the enemy forces, leaving them with losses of unprecedented scale.

“Th-This spell sure is something...”

“As are you, who learned it in one night. You would likely be the first and last human to ever attain such a feat.” Lardon chuckled, immensely satisfied after I learned her spell overnight and immediately put it to good use.

In the capital of Jamille, three men faced one another with grim and somber expressions.

The broad-shouldered man dressed as a civil official was the Minister of Defense, Hampton Durant. Across from him sat a man draped in heavy armor with a large scar on his cheek and the ferocious countenance of a warrior, Captain of the Royal Guard, Wells Ware. Lastly, clad in simpler armor covered in dirt was the young commanding officer, Harleigh East.

While Hampton and Wells were seated facing one another, Harleigh lay prostrated before them. "My sincerest apologies," Harleigh began. "The loss of soldiers was entirely my fault. I will accept any punishment given to me."

"Huh. Never expected you to come back lookin' so shabby. How many did you lose?" asked Wells.

"Including the deserters, we have lost eighty percent."

"And the enemy?"

Harleigh couldn't answer. All he could do was bite his lips and scrape his nails against the floor in frustration. Hampton and Wells exchanged glances, silently agreeing not to press further. It was already clear that he had suffered a terrible defeat.

"More importantly, please proceed with your detailed report," urged Hampton.

Harleigh winced. "A detailed report..."

"We must understand the reason for our loss in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes."

"He's right," Wells piped in. "That's your duty as the commander of the losing army. Gotta do your job, yeah?"

Harleigh sucked in a breath and lifted his head, moved by Wells's implicit

consideration. He freed his bleeding lips, took a deep breath to calm his mind, and began fleshing out the battles that unfolded between his army and Liam Lardon's. His quick change of demeanor and the preciseness of his report showed his earnest disposition as a commanding officer.

This detailed report of the one-sided war, which lasted a mere several days, took two hours to conclude. Wells listened silently throughout, whereas Hampton prodded for further details now and then.

Once it came to an end, Wells faced Hampton with a simple question: "What do you think?"

The minister's lips were pursed and brows furrowed. "I think...there are two."

"Two what?"

"Two people," he answered, "working as strategists."

"Ohhh. Yeah, I can see that." Wells bobbed his head. "Those little tricks in the start, then the huge attack in the end. They were clearly planned by two people with different dispositions."

"Indeed. Both are troublesome...but we must be wary of the one who planned the tricks."

"Agreed. And no matter how ya slice it, that Liam guy's magic was used in all their ploys."

"Huh?" Harleigh blinked owlishly. Wells had picked up on something he himself had yet to notice, despite only hearing of the details from a report.

Hampton nodded. "Their strategies made the most of their king's outstanding magical talent. Truly troublesome opponents."

"What if the guy himself is one of 'em?"

"I would sincerely hope not." Hampton shook his head and sighed.

"Why? 'Cause that'd mean he's got the wits to match his talent?"

"Tell me, how would you describe our court magus?"

"Hah? Why the sudden question?" Wells frowned but answered anyway. "Selfish?"

“The prime minister?”

“A hard-headed geezer.”

“The general?”

“Can’t even have a drink with ‘im.”

The people Hampton brought up were all officials of high rank and difficult personalities. “At the end,” Hampton continued, “Liam unleashed large-scale magic himself.”

“Yep.” Wells nodded.

“He also pulled a few tricks.”

“Sure did.”

“If either one of those was his idea, that would mean he is capable of accepting an opinion which greatly differs from his own, even though he himself is the one to execute the plan.”

For the first time, the look on Wells’s face turned grim. “Dang.”

“Can you imagine anyone who, given the authority of a king and the ability to wield war-class magic, would so willingly accept an opinion vastly contrasting their own?”

“Among the bigwigs of Jamille? No way.”

“That was your cue to name yourself,” Hampton chastised.

“Hell naw. My head’s the hardest of ‘em all.” Wells snickered.

The furrows between Hampton’s brows loosened as he chuckled along, but their expressions soon hardened again, as did Harleigh’s.

“Looks like we gotta reassess that nation,” Wells concluded.

“May I ask you to counsel His Majesty accordingly?”

“Sure thing. That *is* my job.” Wells sighed. “Guess I gotta go pick a fight.”

“Please avoid pushing too hard. We would be putting the cart before the horse should anything happen to you because of this.”

“Heh. Maybe the hardest head around belongs to our king all along?”

Chuckling together, Hampton and Wells ended the meeting.

Harleigh, who had brought home a crushing defeat, was to be put under house arrest until his punishment was decided, by order of Hampton. Of course, neither he nor Wells planned on giving the young officer a heavy punishment given the circumstances. On the contrary, they planned to stand up for him should the king insist on it.

That was just how wary the two had become of Liam and his nation of monsters from this whole ordeal.

In light of our whopping victory against Jamille's army, a large party was being thrown in the town square tonight. The town remained bright under countless Light spells and was filled with enough fiery fervor to rival a midsummer afternoon. Repelling twenty thousand soldiers without any losses on our side had everyone all fired up.

As for me, I had settled onto a special seat with a perfect view of the gigantic campfire in the middle of the square.

"Liam, could you pull me over?" I heard Asuna ask over Telephone. I did as she asked and summoned her with magic. "I'm back... Whoa! Everyone's partying up, huh?"

"How did the guild look?" I had sent her over to check the hunter guild's reaction to the nation of monsters' victory against Jamille.

"They're also having a blast over there."

"A blast? Not a bad time?" I wasn't quite expecting that. I thought they'd be more apprehensive at the news of monsters fending off human soldiers.

"They're hunters, after all," Asuna said, shrugging. "They're actually mocking Jamille for getting pushed out after breaking past the wall you made."

"Mocking them...?"

"Mm-hmm. 'Cause they poked the beehive."

"Oh..." A beehive. That wasn't a bad analogy, and it *was* what I was going for this time. Bees were scary but harmless, until you prodded their hive. Even if you came looking for honey, you should still know what you were walking into. I never made an explicit announcement of my stance, so it was a relief to see the guys in the hunter guild had picked up on it nonetheless.

"You see, hunters don't go looking for monsters to hunt without a commission. So for them, it's a great help that you're taking the stance that you

are. It's why they don't see it as their problem now."

"So the chances of the hunter guild becoming our enemy..."

"None, nada, zilch. Well, for now, at least. We'd be in a pickle if Jamille offered them huge bucks, though."

"We really would, wouldn't we?" A commission would give the hunters a reason to get involved, and we wouldn't be able to jump in and stop them until then.

"Oh, but something *did* change."

"What is it?"

"Gai! Chris!" Asuna raised her voice, calling the two over.

Gai was having a drinking contest with the giants, while Chris was dancing around the campfire with some other female monsters. They promptly approached Asuna.

"What is it, Lady Asuna?"

"You're back! Come dance with us!"

"Maybe later. More importantly, you two—your bounties have increased." Under the duo's intense gazes, Asuna took out two sheets of paper—their wanted posters. "Here's yours, Gai."

"Ohhh! It has certainly gone up...to a hundred gold coins!"

"Yep. Now you're an A-rank bounty. Congrats."

"Hmph! This is but a matter of course."

"Ooh, what about mine? Where's mine?"

"This one's yours, Chris. Two hundred and ten gold coins. Your rank hasn't changed."

"Ohhh..."

"Gah ha ha ha! A meager increase, I see. At this rate, I see myself surpassing you soon, boar woman."

"Hrghhh... Ah!" Chris gnashed her teeth at Gai's provocation, but her

expression smoothened into a sneer when she caught sight of something on the poster.

Gai faltered at her smug look. “Wh-What is it?”

“Lookie here.” She shoved the poster in his face.

“What else is there to see but your foolish countenance on the— Mngh?!” Gai froze, finally noticing what she was pointing out.

“Heh. You see it? My name!”

“Your name?” I echoed. Curious, I took a peek at the poster from the side. Beside the search target’s name was an unfamiliar title. “The Silver Wolf... They gave you a moniker?”

“Yeah! It probably came from how I look!”

“I see... Yeah, ‘Silver Wolf’ sounds pretty cool,” I said, voicing my honest thoughts.

Chris whipped her head to Gai. “What about you? Did they give *you* anything? Oh, let me guess! It says ‘Meatbrained Gai,’ doesn’t it? Ha ha ha!”

“Hrghhh...” Gai clenched the poster in his hands. His face turned so red, I feared he might start blowing steam from the top of his head.

Well, it’s just another day here. I’ll leave them be.

“Lord Liam...”

“Hm?” I turned to find a flushed elf gazing at me with a bottle in her hands. “Oh, thank you.” I realized she wanted to pour me a drink, so I offered her my cup.

She filled it right up. “Um... Lord Liam, you were very cool.”

“Hm?”

“When you cast that spell.”

“Oh, the large-scale spell?”

“Yes! You were so very cool... It was a truly unforgettable sight.”

“You’re exaggerating. You’re talking about this one, right?” I raised my hand

toward the sky, spreading magic circles out into a cone-shaped formation without completing the spell.

“Oh...” The elf stared at me, enthralled.

Does she like it that much?

“Oh, Lord Liam...”

“He looks so cool...”

“How sublime...”

Just then, the partying monsters stopped in their tracks and stared my way. Some even pressed their hands together as if in worship.

“You look like a god or an angel when you do that,” Asuna mused, her lips stretched into a wide grin.

I was seated inside the reception hall, along with a young man in his thirties dressed like a civil official. He was bowing his head before me.

“It is a great honor to make your acquaintance, Your Majesty King Liam. My name is Nick North. I come as a proxy of Robby Ruland, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jamille Kingdom.”

“Um... Nice to meet you. Have a seat.”

“Thank you very much.” The man named Nick carefully sat across from me, his posture humble even as he met my gaze.

“So, what brings you here? Since you came as a proxy, I’m guessing you’re here to deliver a message...?”

“Indeed.” Nick nodded. “We would like to ask for your magnanimous permission to search the battlefield.”

I cocked my head. “Search the battlefield?” *He’s talking about where we fought the war, right? What’s there to search?*

“They want to retrieve the corpses,” Lardon answered. “I cannot understand the sentiment, but humans value corpses—or ‘remains,’ as they prefer to call them.”

Oh... Basically, they want to bring their soldiers’ remains home.

“Correct. This often happens in war. So long as it is not a war so ruthless that both sides seek the other’s total annihilation, such requests tend to be permitted. If even the remains do not find their way home, the state may receive strong backlash from its own citizens. They certainly would not want karma catching up to them later on.”

I see. I get it now. I faced Nick again. He never interrupted me while I was speaking with Lardon, probably assuming I was mulling it over by myself. “All right. I’ll allow it,” I said with a nod.

“Thank you very much.”

“Then let’s head right over.”

“Huh? Will you go yourself, Your Majesty?”

“I mean, I can’t give you free rein, just like that. I need to...make some *adjustments*.”

“Th-This is...”

“In an instant...?”

“So this is divine magic...”

I teleported the delegation led by Nick to the outskirts, where we last fought off Jamille’s army and I unleashed my large-scale magic. The ground was scorched, littered with so much debris it was evident even at a distance. But even more than the scenery before him, Nick and the delegation were shocked by Teleport.

Perfect. I’ll do it while they’re still stunned. I took a step forward and cast Mosquito Net, the spell I used to make the red barrier that was faintly visible even all the way here. This time, I made it blue and laid it out from the road leading to our border with Jamille all the way to this former battlefield. Basically, I opened up a hole in the red barrier and ran a blue path through it, then surrounded that path with red walls.

There was no way this delegation would collect the remains themselves. They would probably relay back home that I’d given my permission, then officially send in troops later.

Lardon chuckled, amused as always. *“It is your first time encountering such a scenario, but I suppose this much is apparent.”* Recently, she’d been somewhat of a teacher to me, proudly pointing out whenever I did something right.

“I-Is this...” Nick approached me, stunned. “Did you just do that, Your Majesty?”

“Yeah. You can freely pass through this blue path. If you cross the red wall without permission...”

“W-We will not! I swear!” he insisted in a flurry, afraid I’d change my mind.

Hm... From the looks of it, I don’t think it’ll be necessary... But I should still ask the elves, no, the giants to observe them from afar. Just to be safe.

“Unnecessary. I shall help you.”

“Huh? You will?” *What a surprise.* Lardon rarely volunteered like this. At most, there were those times I’d already formulated a plan and simply asked for her cooperation. This was the first time she took the initiative to step up.

“Show them that display of yours during the party.”

“What display?”

“The magic circles that were just for show.”

“Oh, that... All right.” I held my hand up to the sky and formed layers of magic circles in a cone shape. It was a grand sight, large enough to be seen kilometers away.

The delegation craned their necks up, mouths agape. “Y-Your Majesty?” Nick gulped. “What are you...”

“Enough. Dispel them.”

I nodded and put the magic circles away. The next second, a blinding light flashed and subsided a moment later—and Lardon appeared! Not as a young girl as she usually did these days, but as the humongous dragon she’d been when we first met in the forest.

“Th-That’s...”

“Could it be...the evil dragon?!”

“He summoned it?!”

As the delegation grew more baffled by the minute, Lardon opened her mouth. A dignified and majestic voice resounded heavily in everyone’s ears. “Very well. I shall keep watch for you.”

The delegation’s jaws dropped and eyes widened; their shock had clearly reached its peak with those words.

Meanwhile, I heard a familiar chuckle in my head. *“It is surprisingly fun to*

exacerbate their fear of you.”

As she said, the delegation was now staring at me, eyes wide in fear and some even trembling like newborn deer.

"Hello, Asuna here. I'm at the eastern end of town."

"Jodie speaking. I've come to the western side, as told."

I was at the town's center in the meantime, connected to Asuna and Jodie via Telephone. "Can you two hear me?"

"Loud and clear."

"What should we do next?"

Now that I was sure we could converse, I told them, "I'm going to cast a spell now."

"What kind?"

"I won't say yet, but once you think the spell's taken effect, I want you to come back."

"All right."

"I'm ready."

"Okay, here I go." I took a deep breath. "Magic Celler." This was one of the spells from the magicpedia I got from my teacher that I hadn't used since its mastery. Its effect was simple: to cancel magic. With it, I neutralized Telephone.

All of a sudden, I could no longer hear their voices nor sense the spell. *Did that work?*

"Liam!" Asuna came running in like the wind from the east.

"How was it?"

"I couldn't hear you anymore, so I came back!" she said. "What was that just now?"

"I'll explain once Ms. Jodie's back too. But first, tie your shoelaces."

"Ugh, again? It's always going loose or snapping off when I run full speed."

Asuna smiled wryly. She'd gained incredible speed after becoming my familiar, but I guess her shoes couldn't keep up.

Should I help somehow...? I wondered while waiting for Jodie.

She came strolling over a while later, having taken much longer to get here than Asuna. "I'm back, Liam."

"Good work out there."

"You counteracted your spell, yes?"

"Yep." I nodded.

"What does that mean?" asked Asuna.

"There are spells or barriers made to cancel any activated magic," I explained. "I used one of them to forcefully shut down Telephone."

"Wow. But why?"

"Well, this town might come under siege for as long as the war is on, and we might end up hunkering down here a while. I thought it'd be no big deal at first—I *could* manage with Teleport. But if I were to plan a siege against someone who could teleport, I'd start with thinking up a countermeasure."

Jodie nodded. "That's true. There's no point in only *physically* trapping that kind of enemy."

"Exactly. Hence this test. Teleport and Telephone are similar spells at their core. If Telephone can be stopped, then there's a high chance Teleport can too."

Asuna pursed her lips. "Aren't you overthinking it?"

I shook my head. "Like I said, I'd do the same thing. Anybody familiar with magic would too."

"Couldn't they possibly fail to overcome your mana?" Jodie proposed.

"I need to think on the assumption that I'll lose. Anyone on par with Lardon would definitely be able to stop me."

The dragon, who was still busy keeping an eye on Jamille's officials, was why this idea came to me to begin with. Lardon had joined me in watching over the

promised land—a region deeply involved in the Tri-Draconic War—meaning she was siding with me, a human. It wouldn't be strange for there to be other dragons or similarly powerful beings siding with other humans too. As long as the possibility existed, I needed to take precautions.

"I see..." Asuna hummed. "If your Teleport gets sealed, we won't be able to call for reinforcements."

"That's one thing, but there's also another," I warned her.

"What is it?" Jodie asked.

"If we're to hole up under a siege, we need food. I thought I could just store years' worth of food in my item box, but then what if *that* gets sealed too?"

"Oh, that's certainly true..." Jodie muttered, then giggled.

I cocked my head. "What is it?"

"I was just impressed," she answered. "With your item box, you could have enough rations to survive a siege for a decade or two, couldn't you?"

"Well, yeah. I'd need to prepare it all first, but I can."

"I've never heard of a decade-long siege, though."

Ohhh. Neither have I. It was technically possible for me, but people normally wouldn't even consider it.

"So, Liam," Asuna piped in. "What are you planning to do?"

"If magic stops being an option, then we should make a huge warehouse where we can store our food."

"Nice and simple."

"Yep."

"In that case, let's find a good spot and prepare supplies while we can," Jodie suggested. "We don't know when Jamille will come invading again."

"You're right. I wonder where would be good?" I mumbled and looked around, considering the best place to put a food storehouse.

"Asuna, your shoelaces are untied," Jodie suddenly pointed out.

“Huh? Oh, you’re right. It just never stays tied after it’s come loose once...”
She bent down to retie her shoelaces, then frowned. “Oh no! It snapped.”

I gasped. “That’s it!”

“Huh? What’s it?”

I summoned my item box, took a cloth bag from inside, and sealed it with mana.

Asuna cocked her head in confusion, but Jodie seemed to understand. “I see what you’re thinking. That’s amazing, Liam.”

“Huh? What’s amazing, Ms. Jodie?”

“He’s thinking the other way around—a storage that *closes* with magic.”

“Oh! So if magic gets sealed...”

“It will open on its own,” Jodie finished for her.

Asuna finally caught on. They both turned to me, eyes wide in admiration.

My house inside Another World now looked small and compact relative to how vast the whole space had gotten. Asuna, Jodie, and I sat inside the small living room together. Two piles lay on the table: fresh fruits and dried mushrooms. The fruits looked juicy and scrumptious, while the mushrooms were raw and quite inedible.

I was staring at the dried mushrooms and forming a vivid image in my mind. Visualization was important when it came to crafting new spells. It wasn't impossible to make one from scratch, but having something to reference made it a whole lot easier.

"Is he done yet?"

"Let's be patient, Asuna."

"Hngh... I'm so bored. Liam's so focused, he's not even answering me."

"Don't disturb him now. He's doing something important."

"Okaaay."

Asuna and Jodie seemed to be saying something, but it all went in one ear and out the other as I kept my focus squarely at the mushrooms and my new mental image.

A few hours later, I completed the spell. As I cast it, the fruits on the table gradually shrank, going from a pile of fruits I'd have to hold with both hands into a box about as small as a ring box.

"All right. It's done."

"Ohhh, cool! It got smaller!"

"Is it similar to your item box?"

"Yeah, it has the same effect. Nothing inside will rot or move. Unlike Item Box though, this is single-use."

“Single-use?”

“I mean it won’t turn back into a box once it’s opened.”

“Ohhh.” Asuna picked up the small box. She stared at it from all angles, shook it around, and gave it a few knocks. “How sturdy is this?”

“You can test it out for yourself. Hit it as hard as you like.”

“Okay!” Setting the box down on the table, she unsheathed one of her blades and pointed it down. Then, with all her might, she thrust her blade right at the box, only to have it repelled with a dull clang. “Ohhh! Not a single dent. I stabbed it pretty hard too.”

“That’s impressive,” Jodie remarked. “Is it unbreakable?”

“I wouldn’t go that far, but it’s definitely tough enough to carry an elephant. To open it, you just need to cut off the box’s mana. I made it just as we brainstormed earlier.”

“I see... But this might not be good as is.”

“Why’s that?” I was quite confident in the spell, but Jodie didn’t look very satisfied.

“This is for emergencies, no? As it is now, it can easily be found and raided beforehand.”

“What?” Asuna drawled. “They’re not gonna realize this puny thing’s so important, though.”

Although I appreciated Asuna’s defense, I shook my head. “It’s as Ms. Jodie says. Raiding this would be easy. Besides, we might not even notice something so small going missing. It’s not like we’ll be keeping a constant eye on it.”

“True,” Jodie agreed. “At that point, you’re better off making it excessively big instead.”

“All right. I’ll fix it up.” I didn’t need any additional reference—or rather, I already had one. Staring hard at that new reference and at the box, I formed another mental image. The slight revisions only took twenty minutes. When I cast this new spell, the box disappeared.

Asuna gasped. "It's gone!"

"Where did you send it?" Jodie asked.

"Nowhere. It's right here." I laid my hand over the table, where the now intangible box was. It reappeared once I dispelled it. "Just like air, it's always there, but we never notice nor touch it. We'll never lose it either." The reference I used for the revisions was *air*.

"Like air? Wow!"

"I see. With this, we'll no longer have any fear of theft."

"Yeah. Now I just have to scatter these all over the place. Then, when an emergency arises..." I dispelled the box itself, and this time, the pile of fruits reappeared on the table. I raised my head, but the look on Jodie's face still wasn't promising. "What's wrong?"

"You intend to place these all around town, right?"

"Yeah, that's the plan."

"And they will automatically be released during an emergency?"

"Yep."

"That might be dangerous. A huge pile of fruits suddenly appearing out of thin air could lead to accidents and injuries."

I hummed. "Right." What she said made sense. I stared at her mutely.

"What is it, Liam?"

"I want to revise the spell..." I muttered. "You're my next reference, Ms. Jodie."

"Me?"

"Yeah. Give me a sec." I continued staring at her as I visualized the new spell.

"Hm? Ms. Jodie, your face is red. You embarrassed by Liam's staring?"

"Wh-What do you mean?"

"Don't play dumb. Besides, I doubt he can even hear us right now."

"Y-You're mistaken..."

“Tch. Almost had her.”

The pair seemed to be making a fuss, but my mind wasn't there. This time, I finished revising the spell in five minutes. Jodie's face had turned red at some point, which was a huge help for my visualization. I cast the completed spell on the fruits, and they disappeared once again.

“There. Done.”

Asuna cocked her head. “It's the same as earlier?”

“What did you do this time?” asked Jodie.

“Ms. Jodie, you've been giving me advice throughout our discussion, haven't you?”

“Yes.”

“Your face is pretty red too.”

“R-Right...”

“I incorporated those into the spell,” I explained. “Take a look. When you remove the mana...”

Red light flickered warningly in the air, along with a voice: “*Rations will be released. Rations will be released.*” Ten seconds later, the fruits reappeared.

“Wow! Nobody'll get hurt if they're alerted beforehand. Right, Ms. Jodie?”

“Y-Yes... That's true.” For some reason, her face was still red.

“Will this do?” I asked.

Jodie stared at me and cleared her throat. “I-It should,” she said, keeping her expression cool despite her warming cheeks. “Impressive as always, Liam.”

With Jodie's stamp of approval, I had managed to complete yet another magic spell.

Tonight, I was lounging in my house in Another World while casting spell after spell to practice my magic when, all of a sudden, I heard Lardon's voice.

"Can you hear me?"

"Lardon?" I straightened up and focused on her voice. "What's up?"

"Open up. I cannot get in."

"Oh, sure." I stepped out of the house and into the empty space outside, now already more than twenty times bigger than the house itself. There, I opened up a door leading into this space.

Lardon, in her dragon form, hopped right in, but she shrunk her figure back to its usual form of a young girl as she reached my side. "Hm? You were practicing magic again, I see," she said, looking around and sniffing at the air like a dog.

Whoops. She definitely won't like that analogy. I hurriedly shook the thought off. In any case, she was spot on, so I nodded. "Yep."

"You truly are fond of magic."

"I've always liked it. A lot."

Lardon chuckled. "I see."

Is it just me, or does she look kinda happy? "Actually, why're you back? Did something happen?"

"Their business is over."

"Really?"

"Indeed. Jamille has left. The human in charge said he would return later to give his regards."

"Wait, already? There should be around ten thousand bodies in that place."

Lardon scoffed. "I am sure you, a human, would know better than I, but money is everything in human society."

“Well, I definitely understand that...” I wasn’t actually a kid, after all. Before entering this body, I was an ordinary adult with my fair share of experience in the world, so I mostly agreed with the sentiment.

“It applies to retrieving the dead as well. They recovered only the well-dressed, such as those in commanding positions and the like.”

“But that’s just...”

“Poor foot soldiers are fated to rot under the elements,” Lardon remarked snidely. “I am almost relieved at how little humans change.”

I see what she means. Makes sense. Those corpses were entire human bodies, though they *could* weigh less depending on their condition. Carrying something so big, heavy, and more often than not malformed and grisly must take a lot of physical and mental strength—and money. Probably even more than ordinary transportation costs.

“More importantly,” Lardon continued, “did you craft another spell?”

“Yeah. You can tell?”

“Of course. What does the spell do?” she asked. With her curiosity stirred, I explained my new spell. “Oh? Interesting.”

“Has there ever been a similar spell before?”

“There has, though I doubt it has ever been used that way. Your ideas are always most fascinating.” Lardon chuckled, the corner of her lips mischievously curling up. “But is that enough?”

“Huh?”

“I am asking you if using your spell for that purpose is enough for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I will explain later. Answer my question first.”

“Okay...” *If you say so...*

I gave it some thought. I was going to use this spell to set up several invisible food storehouses. They would only become accessible when this town, which was on its way to becoming a magic city, was placed under a magic seal.

“‘Is that enough?’” Lardon had asked. *But what does she mean when she says “that”?*

First, I tried thinking up other ways to use it. “We can hide weapons too... Yeah. I’ll hide some tomorrow.”

“Is that enough?”

“Huh? Oh, um...” That didn’t seem to be right, so I thought a bit more. *What else can we hide?* “Oh, right! Enchanted armor! It can’t transform if magic’s sealed. We should store some that are already in armor form.”

“Is that enough?” Lardon asked for the third time.

I felt like she was just messing with me, but Lardon never did anything meaningless. I racked my head even more. *Is that enough? What else can be done?*

Suddenly, it hit me. “I’m going out!”

“Take me with you.”

“Okay.”

I nodded and teleported us by the sea. The dark waves swayed beneath the starry night sky, playing a steady tune with its unique, almost magical allure. I turned my eyes away from the sight and summoned a Salamander and a Gnome.

“Gnome, segregate some transparent sand grains for me. Salamander, I need you to melt them.”

The two spirits obeyed. The earth spirit easily extracted from the beach what I had specified: transparent grains which could be used to make glass. Normally, picking out and gathering them was difficult, but for an earth spirit, extracting only one kind of sand from the rest was easy as pie.

The Salamander melted it, forming it into material for glass, which I shaped into blocks and used to make a wall. Essentially a cube of stacked glass blocks five meters wide all around, this wall was a structure far larger than me.

Lardon hummed. “What will you do with this?”

“I’ll set these up along the town’s perimeter—and keep them untouchable, of course. When an emergency arises, we’re going to have a wall five meters tall and thick surrounding our town, turning it into a fortress.”

“Oh? I see. It’d be good to see the outside.” Lardon nodded, satisfied.

“Thanks, Lardon. I wouldn’t have come up with this without you.”

“Now I shall explain why I questioned you,” she said. “Though, perhaps there is no longer any need for that?”

I nodded. “I’d appreciate it if you could anyway.”

“Very well.” Lardon chuckled. “It was but a small trick, those questions. I would have asked them no matter what you proposed next. Humans are strange beings; their ideas tend to start with many flaws.”

I nodded in agreement. It wasn’t too long ago that I crafted the spell through a process of trial and error while heeding Jodie’s advice.

“With this trick, brilliant ideas tend to emerge after the fifth or sixth try. Of course...” Lardon smirked. “Most humans tend to get mad at the one who led them on. You, on the other hand, are a very interesting man,” she said, her eyes glinting in praise.

Bruno entered the reception hall and knelt before me, his movements as smooth as flowing water. “Thank you very much for agreeing to meet me, Your Majesty.”

“Take a seat,” I urged. “You said you wanted to talk to me about something?”

“Yes. Thank you.” Bruno got to his feet and settled on the couch. Every little motion of his looked noble and elegant, properly polite yet never excessively humble.

My brother was worlds ahead of me in this aspect. It had barely been a year since I entered this body or reincarnated—or whatever else it could be called—whereas Bruno had been a noble from birth. It felt like all these little actions were engraved into his very being.

“First, I would like to extend my congratulations for your victory in the war,” he began. “Your exceptional command of the battlefield, as well as your power to annihilate the enemy with one spell, have reached my ears. The bards have been eagerly singing your exploits.”

Bards were an important source of entertainment for commoners. Their job was to go around singing heroic tales of the royalty and nobility, sharing with the masses a glimpse of the lives of the upper-class.

“There are stories about me?”

“But of course. There are as many as three, as far as I am aware.”

“Three...”

“Yes. The king of monsters who subordinated even the evil dragon; the tamer who overcame differences in race and calmed the wild monsters with his gentle heart; and, quite simply, a great and powerful mage. Those are the three ways in which you have been depicted, broadly speaking.”

“That second one sounds intriguing.”

In the past, I enjoyed listening to bards sing of epic tales with a glass of cheap but strong alcohol in hand. Romantic and idealistic stories like the second one were particularly popular with us tavern goers. I never expected to be the center of such a tale, however. The awkwardness of it was winning over the happiness, so I decided to change the topic.

“More importantly, what did you want to talk about?”

Bruno smoothed over his expression and nodded. “I would like to ask how far you plan on taking this war.”

“How far?”

“The upper echelons of Jamille are aware of our blood relations and are looking into the possibility of unofficially using me for mediation.”

“Mediation... You mean...”

Bruno nodded. “It seems the kingdom does not wish for further war.”

“I see.” I nodded with a wry smile.

“Humans never change,” Lardon growled, voice tinged with disdain. *“They waged war for their greed of our resources and changed their tune when the tides turned against them.”*

That reminds me... “What’ll they do about the whole manastone thing?” That was where all this fighting began: the mass production of manastones which was made possible with this magic city’s unique infrastructure.

“If needed, they plan to throw their own to the wolves,” Bruno answered. When I raised a brow, he elaborated, “They will insist some acted on their own out of greed.”

As I fell speechless, Lardon scoffed, more incensed than ever. *“Truly hopeless,”* she spat out, to which I actually found myself agreeing.

I pushed these boiling emotions down and turned to Bruno. “All right. We never wanted to fight from the start. I’ll welcome a truce.”

“Ohhh...!”

“But!”

Bruno froze. He probably wasn't expecting this from me.

"But," I repeated grimly, "only if they stop with that whole 'throwing to the wolves' nonsense."

Sensing my displeasure, Bruno deeply bowed his head. "Understood."

"If they so much as *think* about sacrificing others just to cut their losses... At that time, I'll show them an even worse hell than they've already seen."

"Even worse...?"

"Yeah. How long will it take for you to pass that message on?"

"It will reach the ears of the related officials within tomorrow."

"Good. I'll leave it to you."

"Right away."

The following evening, I teleported to Jamille's capital. It wasn't hard since I'd come with Scarlet a few times already.

"What do you intend to do here?" asked Lardon.

"What do you think?"

"Will you take their capital down? That will surely add to your heroic tales," she teased me.

"I won't do such a thing. This is just a warning."

"A warning?"

"Yeah. My message must've reached them by now."

"Indeed. Your brother did say as much."

"So... *Amelia Emilia Claudia*." I chanted an aria—composed of the names of my three favorite songstresses, words which resonated with my soul—amplifying my mana for my spell.

Then, I cast Light, an exceedingly simple spell that did nothing but brighten the surroundings. I spread it out over dozens of buildings—some important government buildings, others the mansions of the wealthy upper-class. A bright glow instantly draped the large structures, causing an uproar among the citizens

of the capital.

“This is my warning—that I can come to the capital whenever I want.”

Lardon chuckled. *“Hence the simple spell. I see. You always think of interesting things.”*

“Should I not have?”

“No, it is a fascinating idea. I would expect no less from one who seeks to master magic.” Lardon, who had been extremely displeased by Jamille’s ridiculous behavior, praised me with just as much vigor.

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The morning after I returned from Jamille's capital, I decided to take a stroll along the town's perimeter. From there, I witnessed the town spring to life, its residents rising with the morning sun and going about their day, filling the place with a lively bustle.

"Lord Liam!"

"Love you!"

At some point, I came across Sli and Lime. The two inseparable little blobs came bouncing right to me from town like puppies excited to see their owner.

"You two're as full of energy as always."

"We're happy to see you!"

"Lord Liam, how are you?"

"I'm doing great."

I continued on, this time with the slime duo tagging along. All throughout, the two kept nuzzling against my leg, bouncing away and around me, then come nuzzling back. They were as restless as puppies out on a walk.

After them, we ran into Scarlet. "Good morning, Master."

"Oh, Scarlet. Morning."

Even this early in the day, she didn't look any less graceful and dignified. Scarlet fell into step beside me, joining our walk. "I've heard you paid the royal capital a visit last night."

"Yeah, just for a bit... Oh, right. There's something I wanted your opinion on." I shared with her the details of my visit—how I'd teleported in and bathed the mansions of the wealthy upper-class in light. "It was a harmless threat, letting them know I could come anytime I wanted."

"As expected of you, Master. I've no doubt the sharper ones spent the night

trembling in bed.”

“You think so?”

“Yes. Only you would be capable of such a feat. They’ve surely grown ever more fearful of your power.”

I let out a sigh of relief at Scarlet’s approval. “So, what do you think? How’ll they react now?”

“React...?”

“Yeah. Honestly, I have no clue at this point. At first, they offered you as a bride, then they delayed the ceremony, and then they sent in over ten thousand soldiers to invade us... I just can’t even begin to guess how they’re gonna move next.”

“If only it were a matter of magic, hm? Then you would know,” Lardon teased.

As I smiled wryly at that, Scarlet’s expression turned solemn. “I suspect they may retaliate.”

“Retaliate?”

“The statesmen of Jamille are quite prideful,” she explained. “Although you have instilled fear in them, they will soon calm down and realize they have not actually been harmed. Then, feeling insulted and shamed, they will likely lash back rather strongly.”

“For their pride, huh...” *This really isn’t my area of expertise...* “Does that mean they’ll plot something else?”

“Likely so.”

“I see...”

Scarlet quietly observed me for a moment. “You do not seem too bothered by the possibility,” she noted.

“Well, yeah.” I nodded solemnly. “After what I did yesterday, I’ve already realized anyone could do what I did.”

“There is no such thing!” Scarlet vehemently shook her head. “Your divine magic and original spells are too profound to be imitated by just anybody!”

“Not the spell. I meant the act itself.”

Scarlet cocked her head. “What do you—”

Her question was cut off by a crisp glasslike sound that came from the opposite end of town. We looked up at the sky—it was fractured, as if something had shattered.

“Wh-What is that?”

“Let’s go.”

I teleported with Scarlet, Sli, and Lime, crossing the town of over ten thousand monsters and reappearing on the other side. There, we came face-to-face with a stunned middle-aged man.

The man clicked his tongue. “I-Invisible!” A magic circle glowed in the air, and his figure faded and disappeared.

“So that’s how it’s gonna be, huh? Splash!” Forgoing the aria, I cast eleven spells and summoned a downpour a hundred meters all around us. All the spell actually did was scatter some water, but activating eleven instances of it in the sky essentially recreated heavy rain.

The downpour revealed the man’s invisible body. He stood stock-still, perplexed by what seemed a sudden change in weather.

“There you are! Power Missile!” Now that I knew where to aim, I unleashed a volley of power missiles and sent him flying a few meters back, effectively knocking him out.

“What in the world...?” Scarlet murmured.

“I made a few revisions to Absolute Magic Shield,” I explained to her. “This version will shatter if anyone tries to enter town with any magic spell activated. I’ve been setting them up around town all morning.”

“I see! This is what you meant when you said someone could do the same!”

“Yeah. Anyone can infiltrate our town too. I wasn’t expecting them so soon, though.”

Scarlet’s eyes shone brighter than ever in admiration. “Truly astounding!”

The man remained knocked out even as the magic-induced downpour stopped. As I kept an eye on him, I wondered, “What now? Are they gonna keep trying?”

“I believe this may happen a few more times. They will not realize how vain their struggles are without seeing your overwhelming power in person.”

“Right. Guess I’ll play along a while longer, then.”

At Scarlet’s advice, I restored the Absolute Magic Shield here and brought the man we apprehended back into town.

“Alucard speaking. I’ve discovered a group of humans southwest of town.”

At the heart of this town we’ve yet to name was a building which served the same purpose as a lord’s estate or a royal palace. This was also where we’d once gathered for a roundtable meeting, after we were attacked by the Venomous Vipers.

Currently, I was sitting in a different office from back then and communicating with Alucard through Telephone. “What are they like?”

“They appear to be the main unit of the smaller group caught earlier. They are talking about pulling back for now... Oh.”

“What is it?”

“It seems they will act as if they are pulling back but will actually try digging a tunnel and infiltrate underground.”

“I’m impressed you can hear that much,” I mused.

After capturing that first intruder, I ordered my subordinates to patrol the town. Among them, Chris managed to chase someone away, while Gai was still wandering with none to his name. Alucard, meanwhile, was feeding me back some really good intel.

“I am hiding in one of their shadows,” he explained.

“In their shadow? What do you mean?”

“I have assimilated into their shadow and am moving with them.”

“Wow...” I tried imagining going about my day, utterly clueless that a monster was hidden in my shadow all along. Nobody ever took notice of their own shadow, so it was the best ability a spy could ever have. “Since when could you do that?”

“I awakened to this skill when I evolved.”

“Ohhh.”

Monsters I formed contracts with through Familia or High Familia evolved into superior species, and many of them also awakened to unique skills. This was especially the case for those like Gai, Chris, and Reina, who were the leaders of their race. It seemed Alucard, the leader of the noble vampires, had awakened to a rather intriguing skill.

“A moment, please... One of the humans appears to be afraid. ‘At this rate, Captain Wells is gonna kill us,’ he said.”

“Got it. Keep up your work. Can you suppress that group if needed?”

“Easily.”

“Good. I’ll contact you again.” I ended our communication and connected to Scarlet next. This spell I’d made, Telephone, allowed me to speak with my familiars no matter the distance. A really useful spell, if I do say so myself.

“Hello? Scarlet?”

“Yes, Master?”

“Do you know someone named Wells? He should be high up enough to give orders to an infiltration unit.”

“Ah. That must be Wells Ware,” she said. “He is Captain of the Royal Guard, as well as His Majesty’s cousin.”

“How likely is it that he’s the one who gave orders to get back at us this time around?”

“Very likely,” Scarlet said with certainty. “I suppose you could say he is quite the violent person. His motto is, ‘Gotta punch ’em to know ’em.’”

“Ah... Okay.” *Well, that explains things.* From Alucard’s report, it seemed the soldiers were afraid of getting beaten up. There was almost no doubt this Wells Ware person sent them. “Looks like he’s the guy who ordered the infiltration. How do you think we should handle this?”

“On the assumption that your defenses remain impenetrable,” Scarlet prefaced, so confidently that even I felt a bit embarrassed, *“you should let them do as they please before chasing them away. Captain Wells is a man who can*

make wise decisions after he has 'punched them' once."

"I guess he's not just some muscle-brained ruffian."

"Indeed."

"Okay, got it. Thanks." I ended the communication and, again, connected to Alucard. "Can you hear me, Alucard?"

"Yes."

"Can you obstruct the unit you're tailing?"

"How so?"

"Make them think we can see right through them."

"A simple task."

"All right. Oh, and make sure they get away when you're done. How you actually do it is all up to you."

"Understood."

After disconnecting from Alucard, I contacted Gai and Chris too, ordering them to show overwhelming strength to any intruders before letting them go alive.

"L-Let them go alive?" Gai parroted.

"Oh my, what's this? Can't you even do that, meathead? It's no sweat for me, though."

"Aaargh! 'Tis but child's play to me as well!"

As always, the two showed as much enthusiasm and a strong spirit of rivalry.

I knew I could count on them. Although Gai looked as much a meathead as Chris often taunted him to be, he was also capable of precise work, especially when it gave him the chance to one-up Chris. Bicker and brawl as they may, the two rivals always brought one another to new heights.

"I just hope they'll give up and call a truce after all this..." I mumbled alone in the office.

"That may take a while," Lardon said.

I thought so too, but the absolute conviction in her voice caught my attention.
“Why?”

“Because they cannot grasp what kind of person you are with just this,” she explained. “You are a genius mage yet became the king of monsters, of great talents yet leave what you can to your subjects. The magnanimity of your actions will brew fear and disbelief, delaying their judgment.”

“Is that how it is?”

“It is how humans are,” Lardon affirmed. “Next time, that man named Wells or someone of equal or higher standing will likely come to see you for themselves.”

“Ohhh...”

Lardon was spot on. Two weeks later, Wells Ware came in person.

A company of over a hundred soldiers marched right into our town. Not a single one deviated even half a step from their strict formation—even the stern and dauntless expressions on their faces were uniform. They were clearly far better trained—far more *elite*—than the twenty thousand soldiers who invaded before.

They had contacted us beforehand that they wished to come not for war but for negotiations, so we peacefully let them in. Of course, we couldn't let our guards down considering everything that had happened recently, so I welcomed them myself, along with Gai, Chris, and Reina.

The soldiers were led by a single man on a horse—their commander, most likely. He hopped off his saddle and approached me. “Wells Ware,” he said. “Are you Liam?”

“I’m Liam Hamilton. Um... It’s nice to meet you?” I returned the greeting a little awkwardly and offered him my hand.

“Sure.” Wells nodded and shook it. I could feel the rough and calloused hand of a warrior firmly gripping mine. “So *you’re* the king of this place?”

“I guess so, yeah.”

“Huh. But wow... Really? A kid like you? I mean, I’ve heard the reports, and you’re right in front of me now, but it’s still hard to—”

Wells failed to speak past that, as two figures came charging at him from both sides—Gai and Chris, both gnashing their teeth in anger.

“You are being far too rude to milord.”

“Who do you think you are, mister?”

Two soldiers stepped up from behind Wells to repel their attacks but were blown back from the impact. Gai and Chris used the opening to close in on Wells himself.

“Stop it, you two.”

They froze, their hands right in front of Wells’s eyes. Slowly, their heads turned to me.

“Milord, why did you stop us?”

“Yeah! There’s no need to welcome such a rude guy here!”

“It’s fine. Just step back.”

The two wilted.

“Very well...”

“Fine...”

Reluctantly, they both complied, though their wild glares remained pinned on Wells even then.

I turned to our visitor. “They attacked you out of the blue. Sorry about that.”

“Nah, I’m sorry too,” Wells said with a hearty laugh. “This is just how I talk. I don’t mean anythin’ rude by it.”

Yeah, I can tell. Before entering Liam’s body, I’d definitely seen more than just a handful of guys like him in my go-to tavern. They didn’t mean anything bad; it was simply how they were. In a way, I was far more accustomed to dealing with his type than the kinds of people I’d been meeting since becoming Liam.

“I’m sorry to them as well.” I glanced at his two soldiers. “I’ll heal them if they’re hurt.”

“Nah, they’re all good. Right?”

“Yes, sir!” The two soldiers got back on their feet. Their faces were swollen, but fortunately not too badly. Somehow, despite being sent flying by Gai and Chris, they came out of it perfectly fine.

It seemed the soldiers of the Captain of the Royal Guard really were a cut above. Wells himself didn’t so much as flinch even when Gai and Chris closed in on him. His guts were impressive, to say the least.

I can’t let my guard down. I silently braced myself as we proceeded into town.

I escorted Wells to the reception hall and sent his soldiers to other rooms to rest.

“Your tea, sir,” offered an elven maid.

“Ooh, a pretty lady!” Wells grinned, completely smitten.

Caught off guard by the remark, the elven maid fled the room while covering her face.

“She was an elf, wasn’t she? Man, they’re really as stunning as they say. Could ya introduce one to me later?”

“Introduce? As a woman, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re that much into women?” I shot him a dubious look. *Aren’t you working right now?*

“Hell yeah. Fights, women, alcohol—what more do you need in life?”

I smiled wryly. He really was the type I was familiar with. “I won’t introduce you, but you’re free to talk to them. I won’t say anything as long as you don’t force anyone against their will.”

“Oh yeah? Then I’ll give it a go later.”

“So...” I smoothed over my expression. “What did you come here for?”

“Well... A truce, I guess?”

“A truce...?”

“Yeah. Basically, we don’t wanna duke it out with you anymore. We’ll officialize it too—get a witness from the church and everything.”

The church... While you could never refer to any one specific country by just saying “the kingdom,” over the past century, only one organization could be called “the church.” It held far more influence than any nation, with sixty percent of the world’s population as believers. Even a king could become an enemy of the world so long as the church declared him a heretic—that was just how powerful they were. If Jamille wanted to sign a truce with the church as

witness, then it was safe to say they had no intention of breaking the agreement.

But...this is too good to be true. Why would they propose a truce with such good conditions this late into the game? Did I scare them that badly? Or do they have some other hidden agenda?

I couldn't figure it out by myself so I thought to ask Lardon for advice, but Wells spoke up again. "Of course, we're not asking this for free. We know you're head over heels for magic, so we brought ya this." He placed a book on the table. "This is the rarest grimoire Jamille owns."

"A grimoire!" I took the book and opened it up—it was the real deal. I flipped through the pages and cast the spell with multicasting on full capacity, mastering it in nearly an instant.

The table between us turned to stone. It was a petrification spell.

"Wha—?!" Wells's breezy expression crumbled for the first time as he stared at the stone table in shock. "You learned it? Instantly?"

"Yep."

"No way... That's not how magic's supposed to work..." he muttered, astonished and at a loss for words.

I set the grimoire back down on the table. The grimoire went without saying, but I was especially thankful for the truce. Everything had gone well for us until now, but nothing beat having no war at all. *Well, Gai and Chris might beg to differ...*

“Um... About the truce,” I said, clearing my throat and getting back on track.

“Ah, right. How 'bout it?”

“No objections here. We never needed to fight from the start. There's nothing better than putting a stop to the war.”

“Nice. Then let's keep the ball rollin', shall we?”

“Sure... Oh, right! A truce is nice and all, but—”

“*Stop.*”

I flinched and swallowed my words. Even for Lardon, that sounded a bit forceful. Urgent, even. I couldn't ask her to elaborate with Wells right in front of me, but thankfully, she went ahead and explained.

“Just sit there and listen. You were about to ask for cordial relations or perhaps nonaggression, no?”

She was right. I figured I might as well propose it while we were on the topic, but I hadn't even clearly formed the thought in my head yet. Despite that, Lardon had picked up on my intentions. It caught me by surprise—as did her sudden interjection. *What's wrong?*

“Do not sell yourself for cheap.”

What?

“Do not offer it from your end. Wait for him to bring it up.”

Ummm... I didn't really get why, but if Lardon said so, then it must be right. I was pretty sure I was good enough to debate with her when it came to magic,

but for anything else, it was undeniably better to heed her advice. Lardon had far more knowledge and experience than me in other fields, and since she never gave me advice lightly, her insistence now must mean this was crucial. I decided to listen to her again.

“Hm? A truce is nice, but...? But what?” Wells cocked his head, urging me on.

“Oh, well... Um...” I racked my head for a change of topic. “Right! About Scarlet... Uh, how’s her position in Jamille?”

“Oh, no worries there,” Wells said, smirking. “She’s still the first princess, so she’s, ah...got her uses. Heh. Pardon the wording. Anyway, they aren’t makin’ any official statement on her to avoid limiting their choices.”

“I see.”

“And speakin’ of,” he continued, “we wanna offer her as your bride to establish cordial relations—for real this time.”

There it was—the topic I’d intended to open earlier, Wells brought up himself. Seeing as this waiting was Lardon’s idea, I took a moment to check with her before I responded to the captain with a nod.

“Oh, and by the way,” Wells added, “we just need that whole bridal thing on paper. So we won’t be askin’ you to send her back for a bit or anything.”

“That helps.” I sighed in relief. If they demanded to have the bride back to prepare her or whatnot... Well, that sounded just like a trigger for all sorts of issues along the way, so I was just glad we could forgo it.

“Welp, that settles that. My work’s all done! Whew!” Wells melted over the couch, all tension visibly leaving his shoulders.

It was actually easier to talk to him than Bruno since I didn’t need to pay special attention when speaking (aside from that one bit of advice from Lardon). I felt more at ease having to deal with him.

For these types... “Dust Box.” I took out a bottle of wine I’d been fermenting in my dust box and handed it to Wells.

“What’s this?”

“Wine I fermented. You mentioned you like alcohol.”

“Ohhh...” He took a whiff of the cork and froze. “Wait, what?”

“Is anything wrong?”

“This scent, and the condition of this cork... This ain’t some ordinary thirty-year-old wine, is it?”

“Wow, you could tell?” I stored that bottle a few days ago. After doing some mental math, I told him, “It’s exactly fifty-five years old.”

“Yeah, that sounds ’bout right... You said you made this?”

“Yep.”

“Naw, that’s weird. A kid like you couldn’t make this. Alcohol ain’t about good or bad, it’s about how aged it is.”

“I used magic.”

“Hah?”

“Simply put, I have a spell that conjures up a space where time passes by quicker.”

“I...see.” Wells blinked, agape. “Huh. Didn’t know that was possible.”

“So anyway, have as much as you’d like. I can make as many of those as I want, after all.”

“All right. Thanks, man.” Wells grinned, seemingly pleased with the gift.

After returning to the royal capital, Wells made a beeline for the Durant manor for a secret meeting with the manor’s lord, Hampton Durant. As they sat alone in a room bereft of servants and attendants, Hampton’s brows crumpled at the sight of Wells’s grave expression.

“How did it go?” he asked.

Wells pursed his lips. “Not good.”

“That’s too vague. Explain it more clearly for me.”

“That guy... He ain’t human.”

“You’re talking about Liam Hamilton, yes?” It couldn’t possibly be anyone else

given where Wells had just come back from, but Hampton found himself asking anyway, what with how grave Wells looked right now. He'd never seen the man wear such an expression in the decades they'd known each other.

"I'm tellin' ya, he's a *monster*—a monster dressed in human skin. No, he's probably way worse than just that."

"Just what did you see? Start from the beginning."

Wells composed himself and nodded. First, he talked about the grimoire—how Liam just flipped through it and mastered the spell in an instant. Then, he talked about the wine—how Liam fermented it using a spell that could manipulate time.

As Wells spoke, the wrinkles between Hampton's brows deepened. "That's quite hard to believe. Did he really learn it in an instant?"

"Magic cast with and without a grimoire feel different."

"So I've heard. Of course, I wouldn't know."

"It's something I got a feel for after going out into the battlefield a lot. At the time, he used *both* kinds. So yeah, he learned it in an instant."

Hampton hung his head and sighed. "I see... And the wine? Could he not have just brought in aged wine from somewhere?"

"There's no aged wine out there I can't recognize," Wells said with great certainty. "Besides, nobody would waste their money and space on storing such ordinary wine for more than half a century."

"It was ordinary?"

"Yeah. It had a deep taste, but the fermentation process was as ordinary as it gets. Guess he's not as talented at wine-making, huh?" Wells chuckled dryly.

Hampton couldn't even crack a smile. He stroked his chin, deep in thought. "So, he can even use space-time magic..."

"Yeah. Get it now? He's bad news, see?"

"What would it take to subjugate him?"

"You outta your mind?"

“Having an estimate wouldn’t hurt, whether it be for sending a subjugation force...or *dissuading* one.”

“Ah, I see...” Wells nodded. “A hundred thousand.”

“A hundred thousand...?” Hampton parroted blankly, face slack from shock. “You mean we need to prepare for such huge losses? It’d hardly be worth it.”

“Right? That’s why I said he’s bad news.”

“We need to get that through to those who’ve yet to give up.”

Wells raised a brow. “What, there’s still opposition?”

“From the fools claiming that ‘exterminating monsters is but child’s play.’”

“Oh, *those* guys? Yeesh. Guess I gotta give ’em a piece of my mind.”

“That would have the opposite effect. Please leave it to me.”

“A’ight, sure. It’s all yours. Anyway... Point is, the kid’s bad news. We gotta keep our hands off.”

“Understood.” Hampton hefted out a sigh. “We cannot put the entire nation at risk by prodding a beehive we may not even get honey from.”

“Oh, one more thing.” Wells snapped his fingers. “That guy’s got an adviser.”

“Did you meet them?”

“Nope. But they’re there for sure. Seemed to me he was gonna propose cordial relations after the truce, but then it looked like someone suddenly stopped him.”

“Someone? Who?”

“I dunno. But I’m sure there was someone.”

“I see... It fits with our previous hypothesis.”

“Sure does.” Wells nodded.

“A calamity-class mage and a wise adviser...” Hampton murmured.

“To make things worse, the calamity can listen to reason,” Wells added.

“Simply frightful.”

“Make sure ya stop ‘em, all right? Or we’ll be the ones keeling over.”

“I know.” Hampton quietly nodded, expression grave.

Starting from these two, the brains of Jamille slowly but surely came to know just how frightful Liam was.

After Wells left, I returned to my house in Another World and stored my new grimoire into my item box. Then, my hand froze. For a fraction of a second, something whizzed past my mind, like sand slipping between my fingers. I frowned, trying hard to pinpoint the transient thought.

"What is it?" asked Lardon.

"I just had an idea...but I can't remember."

"Ah, truly unchanging, you humans. Ever the inconvenient little creatures."

"Really?"

"Indeed. At times like these, one can usually recall their thoughts if they retrace their steps."

"That works?"

"Try it."

"Okay." *Nothing to lose.* I went ahead and reenacted everything I did up until the thought came to me. I stepped out of Another World, opened it up again, entered my house, summoned my item box, put my book in—

"Oh, you're right! I remember now!"

"So, what was it?"

"See this book here? I store it inside..." I put my item box away, walked a few steps, and summoned it again. *"But I can take it out from a different spot,"* I finished, taking the grimoire back out.

"Hm... You are merely describing how the spell works. You have used it many times until now."

"I've also used it to send letters with my clone."

"Indeed."

"And books are essentially bundles of information."

Lardon hummed. *“Do you mean to say you want to make a new spell...for storing and extracting information?”*

“Yep.” I nodded. Talking about it with Lardon helped my thoughts take a more concrete shape. “How should I put it... A bookless library? Or a bulletin board... No, something *between* those two...” I muttered under my breath as the image began to take form in my mind. “Right. I guess I also thought of this because I just spoke with Wells about an alliance.”

“Hm?”

“I mean, doesn’t the state normally announce those sorts of things?”

I recalled my life before becoming Liam. Stuff like tax increases and war conscriptions were usually announced to the people by putting up signboards in areas with the most foot traffic.

I needed something similar for everyone here in town, hence the idea for this new spell. I wanted everyone to have free access to information—maybe as letters, books, or notices—the same way my clone and I do through our item box. Of course, I’d install this spell into the town’s magic infrastructure—that is, the high mithril silver I paved all around town—so the residents, all my familiars, could freely use it.

I tried to visualize it. “A shared item box for all my familiars,” I mumbled. “Will this do?” Considering my familiarity with Dust Box, I thought it would be surprisingly easy to craft this spell. I just needed to make a single item box my familiars could open and close as they pleased. *What about the capacity? I guess I’ll base it off of mine.*

As I was crafting the spell, a young girl with the air of a wise elder appeared before me. With that strange and incongruent charm about her, Lardon took form, the light of her manifestation pulling me from my sea of thoughts.

“What are you up to all of a sudden?” I asked.

“Look at this.” Lardon stretched out her petite hand. A magic circle expanded from the tip of her index and middle fingers, producing letters that floated in the air.

“That’s...a notice?”

“Correct. I composed a notice for the monsters, telling of your alliance with Jamille.”

“Oh, wow. You made floating text with mana? I didn’t know you could do that... It feels like it’ll dissipate after some time, though.”

Lardon chuckled. “Sharp as always when it comes to magic.”

“Thanks.” I grinned. Being complimented for magic always made me happiest.

“Would it not be better to make it this way?” she proposed.

“What do you mean?”

“You were thinking of placing books into a shared item box, no?”

“I was.”

“Then only one resident could view it at a time. Similar to human libraries, I suppose.”

“Uh-huh.” I nodded. I recalled the times I visited the Hamilton manor’s archive room and saw spaces between the books whenever father took some out to read.

“However, imagine *this*.” Lardon stretched her hand out again. A ball of light floated in the air. When she touched it, the light dispersed into floating strings of letters.

I gasped. “I get it!” Books were just bundles of *information*, so this spell didn’t necessarily have to store just *tangible* books. The revised image swiftly pieced together in my head—a spell that anybody could use to store and view information from anywhere at any time.

“Ha ha... You are most charming when even my voice fails to breach your focus.”

The spell took shape in no time at all.

Somewhere within town was a nondescript shack which, from the outside, was no more than bare walls and plain windows. It was an ordinary building—except for the noticeable lack of flooring inside, exposing the dirt and the high mithril silver beneath our paved roads. This place was connected to all the high mithril silver embedded around town—the core of our magic infrastructure, or Infracore for short.

I was currently standing there, working on some adjustments. “Network,” I chanted, manifesting a huge, semitransparent bookshelf before me. My eyes landed on two books.

> From Chris

> For the boar woman

I could already tell what the contents were just from their titles, but I took the first one in hand and flipped it open anyway. The book was see-through just like the shelf it had come from, and glowing letters emerged from its pages.

Done patrolling the west. Nothing strange here. Did I do this right?

Chris’s “letter” clearly conveyed her confusion at this new spell. “Looks like it’s working,” I muttered to myself. This was Network, implemented as I imagined it to be—a new way of sending letters.

For communication, we currently had the very useful Telephone which conveyed voices across a distance. However, there were times when the other party wasn’t free to talk. We’d usually just cast the spell again later, but matching the timing was a hassle and left us casting the spell more than we needed to.

Letters didn’t pose such a problem. After all, that was how they worked—you

receive a message and read it later. As quick as Telephone and as convenient as letters, Network essentially took the pros of each method and combined them into a new form.

“Oh!” A new book was just added to the bookshelf.

> Shut up, meathead!

Once again, I had no need to open it up to know—this was definitely a response to *For the boar woman*. It was clearly just Gai and Chris’s usual antics, so much so that I didn’t bother checking the contents.

“Oh, that’s right.” Their bickering actually made me realize—I could tell it was them this time, but it’d be best to see the sender’s name right off the bat on the off chance it was something like an SOS message.

Yeah, that’s essential. I gently laid my hand on the exposed Infracore and revised the magic installed into the Ancient Memoria. Just as I’d done many times in the past, I weaved a vivid mental image of the changes I wanted to make and amended the spell.

“All right. How’s this?”

A while later, new books appeared.

> Lord Liam, Lord Liam! / **Sli**

> Where are you? / **Lime**

Well, these were just two more books whose senders I would’ve been able to deduce from the titles alone... Still, now the sender’s name would appear below the title. This spell was starting to shape up pretty nicely.

> Nobody else read this, please. / **Flora**

Another book appeared, from Flora this time. Network was accessible to everyone in town—to all my familiars who lived here—and I’d spread around

that it was available for use while I was working out its kinks. It seemed Flora had caught wind of it.

Nobody else, she says. Who's she writing it for, then? Then, I chuckled. "Oh... Of course." I based this on letters, yet I hadn't thought to specify recipients at all, though I *did* visualize this as books on a bookshelf.

In any case, it wouldn't do to just add the recipient's name like I did the sender's. After all, having a specific recipient must mean the sender didn't write it for others to see. *Ah, right... In cases like love letters, the sender might not even want anyone to know they sent a letter at all.* I sighed as I recalled two very bitter memories of my youth.

Anyway, I revised the spell again so the sender could now choose between sending it to everyone or to the individual of their choice. Seeing as Flora was already here, I took out an empty book, wrote, "*Send your letter again,*" and specified Flora as the recipient for her to test it.

Almost instantly, a new book appeared on my shelf.

> Nobody else read this, please. / **Flora**

Another one? I guess this was meant for me all along. I took the book out and opened it, revealing the glowing letters.

I like you, Lord Liam.

"Wait... A *love letter*?!" I sputtered, caught totally off guard. I never would've expected to *actually* receive a love letter—and right after I just added the feature too!

> Hey, no fair! / **Chris**

> Me too. / **Reina**

> I adore you, Master. / **Scarlet**

> Love ya!!! / **Asuna**

> Oh dear. Hee hee. / **Jodie**

New books began surging in like a wave, leaving me no time to regain my wits. I was utterly overwhelmed by the onslaught of affectionate messages.



Once again, I felt like I already knew what was written in those books just from the titles—and what can I say? It wasn't a bad feeling at all. While being on the receiving end of a passionate flood of love letters, I steadily worked on improving Network.

Asuna and Jodie's Girl Talk

Magic City Liam was the capital and sole city of Liam-Lardon, the nation of monsters. That even the city had taken on the name of their king was proof of the citizens' great love for their ruler.

In this land of monsters, humans were few and far between. Falling into such a minority were Asuna and Jodie, the two girls who had become Liam's familiars sooner than anybody else back when he took his first steps on his path of magic. They were presently having an early afternoon tea party in Asuna's house, within its simple and minimalistic living room with an evident lack of feminine touch—a perfect display of its owner's candid personality.

At first glance, it looked no different from an ordinary room, but on the table between the two girls was something unique to this city and this city alone: a *video*, a moving picture—a product of Liam's magic. The video floating above the table depicted Liam's figure. His boyish face sported a mature expression as he cast a spell that would put most adults to shame.

"Wow..." Asuna murmured. "He's really something else."

"Indeed," Jodie agreed. "He was no more than a talented young boy when I first met him. I looked away for a second, and suddenly he'd grown by leaps and bounds."

As the video came to an end, the two let out identical sighs.

"Yep. He's gotten stronger for sure."

"And cooler," Jodie added. "My heart almost skipped a beat."

"Huh?" Asuna froze, *her* heart skipping a beat for a different reason at Jodie's nonchalant remark. "Ms. Jodie, what do you—"

"Oh my," Jodie said, cutting her off. "There's a new clip."

"Huh?"

The two were currently using Network, one of the spells embedded in the

town's magic infrastructure. Recently, there'd been a boom of clips of Liam, taken in secret mostly by the elves. They were the most populous race in this country and greatly adored Liam, to the point of competing on who could "capture Lord Liam's awesomeness" the best. This flood of videos was growing even as they spoke.

Before Asuna could snap out of her daze, Jodie opened up the newest video. Liam, Gai, and Chris popped up on the screen. The three of them were fighting out in the wilderness.

Asuna blinked. "What's...going on here?"

"Judging from Liam's expression, I'd say he's sparring with the other two."

"But Gai and Chris look really serious," Asuna pointed out.

"They do. But not *dead* serious. Otherwise, we'd be sensing their bloodlust even through this screen."

"Really?"

"Why not give it a try? Stand in front of them and call Liam a cocky brat or say he's flimsier than wet tissue."

"You might as well tell me to jump off a cliff!" Asuna shrieked.

Gai and Chris were, in a way, Liam's most faithful devotees. To top it off, one was a powerful giant while the other was a swift wolfman; their fists and claws were as strong and unrelenting as their loyalty to Liam. Whoever spouted such insults before them would end up minced meat in less than a second.

"See?" Jodie giggled.

"Y-Yeah, you're right. They're definitely not deadly serious just yet." Asuna nodded, turning her attention back to the video.

In this country, Gai held the most power and Chris the most speed, but Liam repelled the duo's onslaught of attacks with his diverse repertoire of spells. Anybody well-versed in combat could see at a glance just how wide the gap in strength was between both sides.

"He's so strong..." Asuna sighed.

“And cool,” Jodie added again.

“M-Ms. Jodie?!” The girl whipped her head around, her eyes wide and pinned on the woman.

“Hm? Do you disagree, Asuna?”

“N-No, that’s not it...”

“But you’re stuttering. Could it be that...you hate Liam now?”

“Huh?!”

“If so, just tell him directly. I’m certain he’d understand and cancel your familiar contract for you.”

“Th-That’s not it! I don’t hate him at all!”

“Really?” Jodie tilted her head. “So, you like him?”

“Y-Yeah... Maybe...?”

“Oh dear. It sure doesn’t sound that way. Perhaps you keep stuttering because your feelings are wavering.”

“O-Of course not!” Asuna yelled, louder than she’d ever spoken until now—and then, she gasped. Jodie’s gaze was warm and fond, like that of a mother watching over her child. “You tricked me,” she grumbled, glaring.

“Whatever do you mean?”

“Ugh...” Asuna huffed. Having admitted it once already, she resigned to her fate and acknowledged it. “Yes, I do like Liam. He’s cool, earnest, and hardworking. I can’t even begin to describe how awesome he is.”

“Then why were you so reluctant to admit it?”

“Because...” Asuna mumbled. “I have so many rivals now...”

“Rivals?”

“There’s gotta be at least a hundred others genuinely in love with Liam by now. Way too many!”

“Hmmm...” Jodie tilted her head, her finger on her cheek. Then, she slowly parted her lips. “What about it?”

“What do you mean? I have a ton of rivals now. How am I supposed to win?”

“Win?”

“Yes, win.”

“Oh... I see now.” Jodie’s gentle gaze washed over the young adolescent girl. “I’m sorry, dear. I hadn’t realized. Monopolizing him never crossed my mind.”

Asuna froze. “Huh?”

“I may have been the same way once, but that was so long ago already.”

“Huh? Uh... HUUUH?!” Asuna slammed her hands on the table, eyes wide and nearly bloodshot as she stared at Jodie. “D-D-D-Do you mean—?!”

Jodie simply responded with a soft and pleasant smile.

Asuna and Jodie were two very different girls who also loved in different ways. The same could be said for many others in this nation—but in the end, all that love was directed toward just a single boy.

Beneath the Moon

The nightless city.

That was the second name given to Magic City Liam. An apt name for its cityscape; viewed from afar, the citizens' houses were notably brightly lit, standing out even among all the streetlights that dotted the roads and alleys.

These streetlights—called “Liam lamps”—were three times brighter than those in ordinary cities and did not even need to be recharged. They were one of this city's proud assets, boasting of cutting-edge technology at least three eras ahead of their time. Thanks to them, Magic City Liam was always bright and filled with life.

Tonight, however, an unexpected meeting was taking place on the very outskirts of town, beyond the reach of those lights. There, two girls stood under the dark of night.

“Ah... Divine Dragon...”

“Hm? Ah, it's you. Scarlet.”

One was Lardon, the aged dragon incarnated into a young girl. The other was Scarlet, the princess who'd moved into this city out of her loyalty to Liam.

“I was not aware you would be here,” said the princess. “I sincerely apologize for intruding.”

“Hm? You're being terribly humble... Ah, right. You've known about me from the start.” Lardon's wisdom, befitting her age, instantly drew her the answer to her own question.

“Y-Yes! I have read many records of your astounding feats during the Tri-Draconic War!”

“I see.” Lardon simply nodded and said no more. A dragon had no interest in human stories, no matter if they were about her. Only humans praised and romanticized victory in war. She, on the other hand, had no mind to pay to any

sort of history drenched in the victor's bias. Whether she was to be the divine dragon or the evil dragon was of little difference to her.

Scarlet was perplexed by Lardon's reaction. Unlike her, Liam would have been unfazed, possibly because of all the time he and Lardon had spent together, or perhaps because he himself was another kind of unique character—one who only had eyes for magic. Either way, Scarlet rarely interacted with the dragon and so was puzzled by the dragon's aloofness.

The princess could only assume she'd soiled the dragon's mood and thus sought to change the topic. "O Divine Dragon..." She cleared her throat, catching Lardon's attention. "May I ask why you have parted yourself from Master?"

Incidentally, she was genuinely curious about this and simply took the chance to ask. Lardon was always dwelling within Liam, only showing herself for important matters. Scarlet tensed, wondering what could have happened.

"I'm on a walk."

However, she had braced herself for nothing. The dragon's response was so ordinary and anticlimactic that Scarlet turned slack-jawed. "A...walk," she parroted, bewildered.

"That's quite the face you're making." Lardon chuckled, her lips curling up mischievously. "Is it so strange for me to go on one?"

"N-No, not at all!"

"Calm down. I merely jest. I am on a walk—that is all there is to it. The moon is beautiful tonight, after all."

"The moon..." Scarlet looked up. The moon was high in the heavens, like a white plate glowing amid the stars.

"It is far too bright in town. Hence, I came all the way here."

"Ah... I see. The moon is certainly beautiful..." Although she agreed, Scarlet remained perplexed.

"The moon never changes," Lardon continued. It sounded like she was speaking to herself, but Scarlet felt as if the dragon had seen through her

confusion and deigned her with an answer. “Humans, nature, and even common sense change through time. Only the moon remains the same, forever unchanging.”

Although that hadn’t answered her question, Scarlet listened intently and nodded in sincere agreement. “Bards also sing about the moon,” she recalled, “especially in their songs about nostalgia and homesickness.”

Lardon chuckled. “I suppose I am not so different from humans in the end,” she said, looking more amused than her self-deprecating remark made her sound.

That expression she wore gave Scarlet some needed encouragement. “Did the moon also look like this during the Tri-Draconic War?”

This time, Lardon was the one caught off guard. Until now, this human lass could not bring herself to broach this topic despite her evident curiosity. She believed it to be a taboo to not be crossed—yet here she was, crossing it. Lardon was stunned, but also amused. She was not fond of the girl’s insensitive question, but the courage she had mustered to ask it was rather likable.

“Indeed. Even then, the moon was like this.”

“I see...”

“Look,” Lardon prompted. “On the bottom right of the moon’s surface. A mark that looks like an upturned turtle. Do you see it?”

“Yes... In my country, it is described as a cup with its contents tipping over.”

“Hm. So the mark is recognized differently in each region.” Lardon chuckled. “I made that mark.”

“Huh...?”

“During what you now call the Tri-Draconic War, I unleashed an attack with all my might, but it was repelled, you see. It strayed to the moon and left that crater there.”

“I-Is that true...?!”

“Yes. The moon is rather brittle. The attack had left nary a scratch on Dyphon but such a large crater on the moon.”

Scarlet was stunned. *Very* stunned. She felt like a child listening to the stories of her grandparents who'd fought in war. Wonder, awe, respect—all these emotions swelled and swirled within her into something grand and unnameable, all because of this centuries-old story that had changed the very moon as all humans saw it today. Surely few others in this world have felt as much emotion as Scarlet had in this moment.

"Someday, he will also reach this realm."

"He?"

"Your master."

"My master... Lord Liam?"

Lardon nodded, lowering her gaze from the moon and back to Scarlet with a smirk. "He is a true monster—even more so than me," she told her. "He has naught but magic in his mind. Learning magic, crafting magic, and mastering magic—that is all that fills his head. He also houses immense talent within him, with a soul far larger than his puny body." She chuckled. "When it comes to magic, he will surely surpass me one day."

"S-Surpass you...?" Scarlet was stunned yet again. Much as she adored and respected Liam, she never had the slightest thought that he would surpass Lardon. That he would be the strongest *human*, she did not doubt, but she'd thought that the *divine dragon* was in a whole different dimension. Only in her wildest dreams could her master surpass Lardon—and that the divine dragon herself would guarantee it. "Master...is truly one-of-a-kind."

"Ha ha. He certainly is." Lardon's lips then curled into yet another mischievous smirk. "However, it's quite unfortunate for you."

"Huh? Wh-What do you...?"

"That boy has no interest in love. I believe it will be hard for your feelings to be reciprocated."

"Wh-Wh-Wh-Wha...!" Scarlet's face instantly flushed. She turned so bright red amid the dark night, it almost seemed like her head would start spewing steam any second now. "C-Can the same not be said for you, Divine Dragon?" she snapped back, shocked by her own courage. Now that she had crossed the

line once, perhaps it was easier to do it a second time.

“Indeed. I plan to birth an offspring one day.”

“HUUUUH?!”

“But not now. Moreover, I carry different emotions and values to you humans. There is no problem.”

The result of Scarlet mustering her courage to speak her mind to the divine dragon twice ultimately ended in a surprisingly worldly topic. Oddly, she felt more at ease now and stuck her lip out in a pout. “I did not know you enjoyed teasing humans so much.”

“Ha ha. Perhaps I do.”

Beneath the eternally unchanging moon, two girls slowly opened up to one another thanks to their shared feelings for a single man.

The Elven Raffle

Liam Hamilton had exceptional magic talent, showed great aptitude for a wide variety of magic, and was even crafting original spells left and right. Not to mention he had been acknowledged by a legendary dragon, founded a nation of monsters, and built a progressive magic city from the ground-up.

Suffice it to say the boy had achieved one astounding feat after the other and stood as a well-accomplished man—but he was still undeniably human. Gods were said to be all-knowing and all-powerful, and Liam was not so.

Even today, in a corner of the magic city, something was happening without his knowledge.

Underground spaces were normally draped in a very somber and dreary ambience. Add in some flickering torches and ebbing shadows, and a suspicious cult gathering would fit perfectly into the scene.

This particular basement room was, in the same vein, made of dull slabs of rock and devoid of natural light, but thanks to the Liam lamps, magical lighting invented by their namesake, it was unbelievably as bright as a banquet hall. As for the participants, they were all elves—monsters that had evolved from pixies by Liam's magic.

"I wonder if I'll finally win today..."

"I've had no luck three times in a row now. I *need* to win this time."

"Three times? Psh. I haven't gotten lucky for the last *five*."

Elves were a race of mystical beauty, their delicate features giving them an intellectual air, but it turned out they weren't very different from human ladies. When gathered together like this, their combined chatter and clamor buzzed raucously within the closed space.

Finally, the time had come upon them.

A single elf entered the room. Reina, the elven chief and an executive of this

nation of monsters, appeared amid the boisterous elves with graceful steps and stood before them all. Two more elves followed and set up a table and box behind her. There was a round hole on the top of the box, just wide enough to stick a hand in while the contents remained obscured by a cloth.

After casting the box a sidelong glance, Reina swept her gaze over the crowd of elves. “Thank you for waiting,” she said, tone soft and calm. “We will now begin this month’s raffle.”

“Finally!”

“I can’t wait!”

“Ms. Reina, how many winners will there be this month?!”

The elves clamored instantly, even more so than earlier, but Reina remained unfazed and gently raised a hand. The elves fell silent at once and waited for her answer with bated breaths.

“Five,” answered their leader. “We have two new slots and three for replacement.”

The room of elves nearly burst with excitement.

“New slots?!”

“Aren’t those only added when Lord Liam says he needs more help?”

“Exactly! That means whoever nabs those slots is more likely to serve him personally!”

Today, the elves had gathered to select new maids by raffle.

Elves were the most physically attractive among the monsters and so took charge of tending to Liam’s daily needs. None of the other races saw issue with this; to begin with, monsters were born to fight. Although the monsters of this nation had evolved through their contracts with Liam, most still specialized in combat and were very much unsuited to work as maids. Only the female wolfmen could possibly contend with the elves, but with their leader Chris always raring for battle, the rest also insisted on being fighters instead.

Hence why the maids were all elves—elves who were extremely fond of Liam, at that. “*I wish to serve Lord Liam!*” they would all cheer, but alas, Liam could

only have so many maids at a time. Thus, Reina came up with the idea of hosting this monthly raffle to regularly swap out the maids. To the elves, this was a matter of grave importance. Humans sought to become millionaires overnight through the lottery, but their zeal could never compare to the elves' burning desire to serve Liam.

"Just to confirm," Reina continued. "As always, everyone wishes to participate, yes?"

"Yeees!" the elves cheered in unison.

"But only five will win. The chances are one in fifty."

The more popular the raffle, the slimmer the chances. The odds were not in their favor, but the elves couldn't care less. The hope and determination in their fiery gazes did not waver one bit.

Reina nodded. "Okay. Everyone, line up and draw your lots."

The elves obediently formed a line and drew their lots one at a time. Nearly two hundred and fifty elves, yet only five winners—as expected, they began with a string of losses.

After thirty elves, one finally cheered. "I got it! Ms. Reina, this is a winning lot, right? Right?!"

"Yes, you're right. That's a replacement lot. That means you'll be a laundry maid next month."

"Yaaay!" The winner bobbed her head in excitement.

The other elves turned their envious gazes to her and whispered.

"A laundry maid... So she'll be doing laundry, right?"

"Yeah. I guess it's not *that* good since she won't be serving Lord Liam directly."

"But...she'll be in charge of washing his used clothes and bedsheets, won't she?"

The devil's whisper, uttered by one of the elves, brought a new wave of vigor over the room. They froze for a moment, their gazes all eerily shifting toward

the raffle box in one unified motion.

“Lord Liam’s clothes...”

“I’d get to smell them as much as I want!”

“Hey, sell me that! I’ll pay you— Just name your price!”

Unfortunately, there was nobody to provide the angel’s whisper in turn. The moment the elves equated laundry work with Liam’s used clothes, their eyes were painted with thick and unrelenting greed—but the same went for the winning elf.

“No way! This is mine! I drew it, and I’m *never* handing it over to anyone!”

All at once, the elves sighed in resignation.

“Oh well.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t sell it either.”

“There are still four chances left!”

Elves were free of the stubborn jealousy and vicious spitefulness of human women. They simply and purely adored Liam. This race of mystical beauties loved so strongly that when they did, no other emotion could worm its way into their hearts.

In this way, the elves were a beautiful race, both inside and out.

Afterword

Light novels are written by humans to depict human lives.

Hello, everyone! It's nice to meet you, or maybe it's "long time no see" for some? I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novel author. I sincerely thank you for picking up a copy of *I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic Volume 3*.

This makes the third book for this series. We were able to publish this thanks to everyone who picked up a copy of the last volume. The first and second volumes are sometimes released based on expected sales, but everything after that is completely dependent on actual sales. Therefore, the fact that we were able to bring this third volume to you is a hundred percent thanks to everyone's support.

I truly cannot thank you all enough. I am very grateful.

Kentaro Yabuki, the artist of *To Love Ru*, which I consider my bible, shows through his work that "one must write what the readers want to read—and something greater along the same lines." With that, for the readers who enjoyed the first two volumes, I offer you this third volume on the exact same line as the last: our protagonist who reincarnated as a noble learns, casts, and succeeds in magic. That is this series's concept, and I guarantee you the third volume has not strayed from it.

Just as how oyakodon and haikara udon will never disappear from Nak*u's menu, this same concept will never disappear from this series. Therefore, anyone who enjoyed the first volume can rest assured and read this one as well. Likewise, if you've picked this series up from this book, then I would like to encourage you to give the past volumes a try too.

Lastly, some words of thanks:

To Kabotya, the illustrator, thank you as always. Lardon's really cute!

To my editor and TO Books, who made this third volume possible, thank you

very much. I truly cannot thank you enough.

And to all the readers who picked up a copy, I give you all my most heartfelt gratitude.

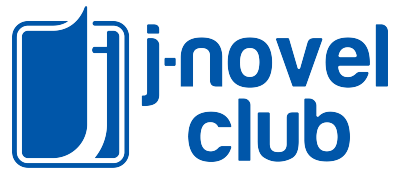
I now set my pen down while praying that this volume will sell well so I can bring you the next one too.

Sincerely,

Nazuna, May 2020







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Volume 3

by Nazuna Miki

Translated by Joey Antonio Edited by Christian Jay Aniz

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