

Author: Ryuyu

Illustrator: Daburyu

Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My **DUNGEON**

2



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Prologue: Morning

If I had to describe my story, I'd say it was "wack as hell." Believe it or not, I died once. It was the dumbest, most random death of all time, but I'd woken up again because I was resurrected somehow. Well, reincarnated, if you want to get technical.

If I'd just been reborn and that had been the end of it, maybe— Actually, no. The fact that I was even alive again *was* pretty freaking wild in itself, but the kicker was I hadn't ended up in Heisei-era Japan or anything. Hell, I wasn't even on Earth. No, no. Now, I was living in some fantasy-themed other world that had magic and monsters that just kinda did their own thing. Oh, and I couldn't possibly forget that dungeons were a thing here too.

The bonkers cherry on top of this nutty-ass sundae was that I'd been reborn not as a human but as an archdemon, and a demon lord at that. I was like one of those final bosses that showed up in RPGs and stuff.

Okay, so demon lords in this world were actually nothing like final bosses. It was just a title for anyone in charge of a dungeon. Speaking of, it turned out that the whole reason I'd been reincarnated was because my dungeon had summoned me. "Truth is stranger than fiction," sure, but "strange" didn't even begin to describe this.

In any case, there you have it. That's my story. Wack as hell, right? But still, I was the archdemon lord of my very own dungeon, and I worked hard every day to improve that dungeon. I definitely didn't mind this new life, though. I was grateful just to have another chance at it considering that my first one was already over and done with. Besides, I was being extra careful not to jeopardize this one. Dungeon life was sweet and easy; it was *way* better than my old life.

Hence...

Morning.

Resting comfortably, I was halfway between being asleep and being awake when I heard a voice pulling me to the awake side.

“Yukiki! Lady Lefifi! It’s mooorning! Waaake uuup!”

“Nnh...”

“I *said*, wake up!”

A young voice, pure and soothing. As it slipped into my ears like a lullaby, I managed to squeeze out a few words.

“Just... Just a little longer.”

“Nooo! Miss Leila already made breakfast for everyone!”

“O-Okay, okay, I get it already. Stop shaking me, would ya?”

The owner of that voice was Iluna, the little vampire girl, who’d been shaking me this whole time to get me to wake up. Still half asleep, I opened my eyes and saw Iluna peering down at me. Next to her was our family’s pet, Shii the slime. Copying Iluna, it tried to shake me too, nudging me over and over with its jiggly body. *Maybe it thinks this is a game? How cute.*

I gathered up all my energy and picked up my torso. As I did, though, I realized that something warm had glued itself to me.

“What the...?”

I turned my head to check, and a young girl with silver hair, horns, and a tail was gripping my clothes tightly in her sleep. Her true form was that of the Supreme Dragon, a creature who possessed such monstrous power that she completely dominated this world’s hierarchy. And yet, seeing her innocent face now, it’d be easy to mistake her for the tweenybopper that she looked like.

Oh, yeah, I remembered now. Yesterday, as per usual, Lefi’d gotten all worked up after losing at every board game we played, so she’d forced me to once again keep playing until it was practically dawn. Ever since the time not too long ago when I annihilated those dumbass humans and she lost at the games we played that same night, she’d been twisting my arm for matches after everyone went to sleep. Maybe this was her way of trying to get payback for the ass-kicking I’d given her then. I could see the games still sitting on the floor around

us because, just like all the other nights this happened, we'd passed out at some point while still playing.

"Hey, Lefi, it's morning."

"Nhhh..."

"Yo, wake up. Time to eat."

"Nghhh... Just seventeen years and twenty-four more days. Then I shall awaken..."

Well, that is a bizarrely specific number.

"Lady Lefifi, come on! Wake! Up! Breakfast is ready!"

"Ugh... I understand. I understand, so cease that infernal shaking..."

I sluggishly stood up, smiling wryly at Lefi's words. I'd pretty much said the same thing when Iluna had been shaking me awake earlier. My body felt stiff and I hurt everywhere, probably from sleeping in the gaming corner instead of on our futons. *Damn you, Lefi. I hate losing too, so I get it, but jeez, just get good.* At this rate, our matches would never end.

Thanks to my demon lord body, I could get by fairly well with only a few hours of sleep, but staying up basically all night was a little rough, even for me. I started doing some stretches to loosen up the stiffness in my body. I cracked my neck from side to side and rolled my shoulders back and forth. While I was doing that, Iluna spoke, staring up at me curiously.

"Oh, Yukiki. I think you got cooler!"

"Hm? Really? Thanks, then. You're a cutie too, Iluna."

"Hee hee hee! Thank you, Yukiki!"

As Iluna and I chatted, we headed to the corner of the throne room with the big, long table. Lefi trudged along with us, her head swinging sleepily. I saw that one of the seats was already taken by the dog-eared, maid uniform-wearing werewolf girl Lew. She'd argued with me in her early days about how inappropriate it was for maids to eat together with their masters, but I'd stood my ground. All I wanted was for her and Leila to help out with the chores—I didn't need them to kowtow to me like in a typical master-servant relationship,

so I'd told them both that they didn't need to be so uptight.

"Morning, my lord, Lady Lef— Wait a minute. You seem sort of different, my lord."

"Huh? Really?"

"Yup. I can't quite put my finger on it, though..."

What the heck? Is something off about me today?

"Master, Lady Lefi, good morn— Oh? What's this?"

That came from Leila, the young woman with the sheep horns, part of the ovine race in the demon species category. Carrying dishes from the kitchen, she got right up in my face as she spoke. A feminine scent lightly tickled my nose. It all made my heart give a hard jolt.

"Wh-Whoa, what's the deal?"

Without answering me, Leila continued to inspect every nook and cranny of my body. Once it looked like she finally had some kind of answer, she spoke again.

"Master... Is it possible that you've undergone an evolution in your race?"

"What?"

What the hell does that even mean? So I asked her. According to Leila's explanation, "race evolution" occurred after an individual had gained a certain amount of experience. Basically, once they reached a certain level, they evolved into a higher-order creature. So, pretty much like a Rokemon evolution.

On top of that, only demi-humans, members of the demon species, and monsters could evolve; humans couldn't. And even among the various folks that *could* evolve, the degree of evolution differed from individual to individual. Also, monsters could evolve fairly quickly, but demi-humans and demons had a much harder time. They apparently had much tougher evolution requirements, so an evolution event would only happen if an individual's level was super high.

Once Leila had finished talking, I checked my stats.

Name: Yuki

Race: Demon Lord

Class: Demon Lord of Judgment

Level: 37

HP: 2,921 / 2,921

MP: 10,321 / 10,321

Strength: 897

Stamina: 912

Agility: 804

Magic: 1,132

Dexterity: 1,409

Luck: 72

Ability Points: 6

Special Abilities: Demon Eyes, Polyglot, Flight

Abilities: Inventory, Analysis 8, Unarmed Combat 4, Elemental Magic 4, Stealth 5, Scout 4, Swordsmanship 2, Weapon Enhancement 3, Sorcerer's Grant 2, Traps 1

Title: The Demon Lord from Another World, The Supreme Dragon's Owner, The Adjudicator, Enemy of Humanity

Dungeon Points (DP): 420,131

"Oh, damn. You're right. My race is listed as 'demon lord' now."

I obviously hadn't noticed until just now, but I could see that my class had changed to "Demon Lord of Judgment," which sounded kinda cool, and my race had gone from "archdemon" to "demon lord." *B-But why now? Wait a sec...*

I knew exactly why this had happened when it did. It had to have been because I'd massacred those humans the other day. Couldn't have been a coincidence seeing as I'd also gained the new title of "Enemy of Humanity,"

which made me think that heroes might start showing up here in the near future. I'd gone monster hunting a lot in the few days since the bloodbath too, so it was safe to assume that all that activity had finally made me hit the level required for evolution yesterday.

Looking at my new data further confirmed my suspicion that the dungeon and I had an intimate bond. I had no doubt that the carnage I'd unleashed against those humans had directly affected the class upgrade and additional title, but I hadn't actually done any of the fighting myself. I'd only used the dungeon's traps to pull off the win, which meant that a dungeon and its lord were most definitely in the same boat. They both needed each other, and if one perished, so too did the other.

That was the only downside to the relationship, though. I mean, even though the dungeon had technically done the killing since I'd used its traps, I'd been the one to reap the EXP rewards. That day, my kill count was the highest it had ever been. Humans were weak, so one alone wasn't worth much DP or EXP. Get enough of them together, though, and every little bit eventually added up. A good chunk of my DP now could be attributed directly to my wholesale slaughter of that army, considering how many corpses had been converted to cash money. So, all in all, there was a high probability that that incident had given me a shit ton of the EXP I'd needed for race evolution.

That said, I definitely couldn't discount the impact my other sources of DP had on my "bank account." The monsters in my dungeon's territory, whether living or hunted by me, were apparently stronger than the ones in neighboring territories, so I got some decent income from them. And of course, there was my golden goose-dragon, Lefi, raking it in for me around the clock. Which meant it was totally fair to think of these revenue streams as nourishment for both my growth and the dungeon's.

So if I'd undergone an evolution, it was entirely possible that the dungeon had experienced some kind of change too. I'd have to check later. There might be new features or something.

"Interesting. Veeery interesting... So demon lords can evolve fairly quickly. Does that mean their existence is closer to that of monsters? No, that's not quite right. A demon lord depends on their labyrinth for survival since the core

of their existence is the labyrinth itself, so if I conduct my analysis with that foundation in mind...”

Leila muttered to herself as she continued observing me like I was some kind of lab rat. I couldn’t put my finger on why, but it had me kinda scared.

“U-Um, Miss Leila? The look in your eyes is kinda freaking me out...”

“Oh, goodness me, I apologize for my rudeness. I find this phenomenon quite fascinating, so I unwittingly lost myself in thought.”

S-So I’m a fascinating phenomenon? Cool, cool, cool. It felt like I’d just discovered a new side of Leila.

“Ahem... A-Anyway, all you ladies figured it out just by looking at me, huh? I didn’t even notice, and it’s *my* body.”

“It was easy to tell because it’s you, Yukiki! I knew right away!”

“A therianthrope’s senses are super sharp, my lord, so you could say determining any differences like that is a specialty of mine.”

So they all said, but when I caught a glimpse of myself in the full-length mirror nearby, I didn’t see anything different about me. Maybe transformations like these were easier for others to spot than the actual person?

“Well, whatever. Let’s just dig in for now. Lefi, you t— Jeez, woman, you sure can sleep anywhere.”

She was sitting properly in her chair, but her head was swinging up and down as she caught some z’s.

“Come on, Lady Lefifi! Breakfast time!” Iluna huffed while she shook Lefi awake.

“Ugh... Nh... Pishposh. What does it matter if I nap? It’s not as if I have any business to attend to.”

“No, no, no! You’ll get as big as a cow if you keep being so lazy!”

I snickered at the sight of the little girl scolding someone infinitely older than herself. I could tell Lew was struggling not to laugh too, while Leila watched over them with her own sunny smile.

In case it wasn't obvious, spending my second life with these ladies was a whole lot of fun. There wasn't a single part of me that wanted to go back to Japan or even be human again. That was why I'd put all my energy into being the scariest goddamn demon lord this world had ever seen. I'd live my best demon lord life here, enjoying the rowdiness of our day-to-day to my heart's content.

Chapter 1: The Road to Ambition

“All righty, let’s see if anything’s changed.”

I opened the interface as I sat cross-legged on the throne that had been in the throne room since day one. Features, features... Didn’t seem to be any changes there. But as I browsed through the menu, I saw that the list of items in the DP Catalog had gotten bigger. There were a few new pages with more varieties of monster summons, more types of facilities I could create, and a bunch more of a bunch of other stuff. *Huh, interesting. So the Catalog I was looking at before wasn’t even the full version.*

Looked like I’d been right to think that the dungeon leveled up right along with its demon lord. Which meant it was very likely that the dungeon would unlock more functions as I grew even stronger from here on out. Color me excited. Maybe I needed to try harder to expand the dungeon’s territory even more and really bring in the DP. As I kept scrolling through the menu, a voice laced with curiosity came from nearby.

“Well, well,” came a curious voice from nearby as I kept scrolling through the menu. “And just when did your magic transform, Yuki?”

The voice belonged to Lefi. Finally fully awake, she seemed to have noticed the change in me, though her head was tilted in confusion as she asked me that question.

“Dunno, but as it turns out, my race evolved.”

“Is that right? Ah, indeed it has. So I take it that ‘demon lord’ is also a race?”

“Yeah, seems so. What, you’ve never seen that as someone’s racial classification?”

“It is not my habit to read through others’ attributes. I have no need, as I am far stronger.”

Yeah, okay, that makes sense. In her mind, every other living creature’s race may as well have been “weakling.” No duh she wouldn’t bother checking out

the stats of us Z-listers. She definitely hadn't when we first met.

"Oh, yeah, Lefi, that reminds me—have you ever evolved?"

"No, I have not. Race evolution is the process by which creatures escape the constraints of their original bodies by becoming more powerful. Ancient dragons are naturally powerful from birth, so we do not experience any further evolution."

Wh-Whoa, for real? That's freaking nuts. Ancient dragons are seriously so strong from the get-go that there's no next stage for them? So basically, instead of starting as Dradinis like everyone else, they're born as Dragonides?

"Well, I myself have not reached the highest plane of existence yet, so evolution is not out of the realm of possibility."

"Yeah, just a few more levels for you, right? I mean, you're at 987 right now."

If we rounded up, she was basically level 1,000.

"Bwa ha, several decades have passed since I reached this level. It will only become more difficult to increase moving forward, but at this rate, perhaps evolution may occur in a millennium."

Damn, this is a pretty heavy conversation, considering the scale of time we're discussing. But wait, my lifespan's about that long now too. A thousand years, huh? Well, if—or when—she ever does evolve, I'll throw her a huge party to celebrate.

"In any case, Yuki, despite your evolution, I see no difference in your appearance."

"You mean there usually *is* some kind of change with evolution?"

"Indeed. Some aspect of the creature transforms completely. For example, a monster might grow horns or fangs once it evolves. For members of humanoid races like yourself, the color of your hair and eyes changes. I have even encountered a few individuals from the demon species who have undergone stomach-churning mutations, such as having fangs and tentacles sprouting from their bodies. They used their sticky, wriggling appendages to attack. Truly revolting fiends, if I am honest."

Lefi lectured away with a deeply disgusted expression on her face. *T-Tentacles? Thank the freaking maker I didn't end up like that.* I would've lost my shit if I'd turned into something with a whole bunch of limbs, or worse, some kind of chittering insect-like thing. Now that I thought about it, I really *was* better off having been reborn as a demon lord instead of some random adventurer with a low Sanity stat. I probably would have ended up going insane, assuming I didn't get myself killed right out of the gate. That was extra true seeing as gore was *not* my jam.

Time out, though. I just remembered that there was one thing I still hadn't checked: my wings. It wasn't impossible that something had happened to them.

Shit, shit, shit. What should I do? I was pretty sure I hadn't grown tentacles or anything freaky like that, but what if I *did* have some that sprouted alongside my wings? If I suddenly had tentacles twisting and snaking from my body, I was almost positive I'd be screaming bloody murder while tearing them off with my bare hands.

I knew that my fear of confirming the reality was irrational, but I couldn't help being super hesitant. The show must go on, though, so I pushed through the inexplicable terror and made my normally concealed wings appear.

"Whoa, there are more of them."

Though my appearance itself hadn't changed, it seemed that some kind of transformation had occurred after all. What should have been just a single pair of wings was now two, with the second growing from slightly below my shoulder blades. The new ones were dark red too. Compared to my original bat-or-dragon pair, the new pair looked like the kind a demon or grim reaper would have. In all honesty, they were cool as hell. The main character syndrome I'd buried deep inside was having a goddamn field day with this.

Phew. I sure am glad it isn't tentacles. I still couldn't escape the feeling that my evolution was an omen of things to come, but that was par for the course for a demon lord. Wouldn't be fun being one if something wicked didn't this way come.

"Heh heh heh... What do you think, Lefi? Really nice, right?" Conceit in my voice and on my face, I turned to look next to me and saw Lefi open-mouthed

and stock-still. “Umm... Miss Lefi?”

“S-S-So... So stunning.”

“What?”

“Y-Y-Y-You! Yuki, what *are* those?! You have hidden them from me until now?! How *dare* you?!”

“Eep! H-Hey, calm down! And don’t touch my wings! You know it tickles!”

“N-Now, now. There is no need to say that. A light amount of touching will pose no problems, yes? S-So, please. *Please*. I-I beg of you, just one touch.”

Lefi climbed on my lap since I hadn’t moved from my seat on the throne. Her cheeks were flushed and she was panting heavily in freakish excitement. She raised her arms toward my wings, fingers twitching to stroke them, but I grabbed her head and forced her to stop in her tracks.

“Stop it, you little shit! Control those grabby hands! And the rest of yourself too! You’re acting like a dirty old man right now!”

“Why do you stop me?! Permit me a small touch! You can allow that much!”

“Because everything you’re doing is grossing me out!”

Too bad for me there was no way I could win against the Supreme Dragon’s power. Lefi moved closer and closer as she gradually outmuscled *me* instead of the other way around.

“God dammit, you wing nut! I give, okay?! I give, so calm the hell down, will you?! If you do, I’ll let you touch them!”

“At once, sir.”

She stopped moving the minute she said that.

S-Son of a bitch, she’s serious!

“Th-Then, you let me touch yours too. It’s not fair if I’m the only one getting felt up, right?”

I was hoping she’d stop being so loony if I touched her wings too.

“H-Hmph. It is as you say. So be it; I will allow you to touch mine so that you

will let me do the same.”

With that, Lefi brought her wings out. Her gorgeous wings, the same silver as her hair.

“Wow. They’re just as beautiful as I remember them.”

I said that on the spur of the moment, but truth be told, I’d been wanting to stroke her wings for a long time now. I just *knew* they’d feel amazing.

“O-Oh, is that so? Well, then I return the compliment. Your wings are most impressive as well.”

“Y-Yeah? Thanks.”

Things had taken a turn for the weirder, but there we were, offering our wings to each other for touching. *Ahh... This is incredible.* I wanted to caress Lefi’s wings forever. They were as soft and smooth as silk. It was like rubbing a luxury down blanket. *This is...bad, actually. I could get addicted to this sensation.* If I made a pillow out of her wings, I could fall asleep easily and peacefully, floating my way up to heaven itself. Not a bad way to go.

“Ngh... Yuki, you... Oh... I-I do not mind you touching my wings, b-but I ask that—mm—you be gentler.”

“Y-Yeah... Ahh... S-Sorry.”

I found her touch ticklish, but apparently, she was even more sensitive than me. Every time I trailed my fingers through her wings, she made bewitching sounds.

Everything else faded away. I didn’t even know how long we’d been doing this. Entranced, we kept touching each other’s wings. Sensual gasps escaped her lips whenever I stroked her wings, and my own breathing got raspy as I rode an insane high from the experience.

Then, eventually, our eyes met. Was it inevitable because she was so close to me, touching my wings to her heart’s content? Because *I* was touching *hers*? Both?

Her gaze hazy and cheeks red, Lefi panted wildly. Neither of us said a word as we gazed at one another. I couldn’t take my eyes off her face. As I stroked her

wings with one hand, I unconsciously lifted the other toward her cheek.

“Umm... Excuse me, Master, Lady Lefi. I think it might be best if you restrict such lascivious activities to nighttime when you won’t have an audience.”

“You’ve got it all wrong!!!”

“That is not the case!!!”

Our simultaneous shouts of denial echoed through the throne room as we leaped apart under Leila’s reproachful stare.



After whatever the hell *that* was with Lefi, she’d cleared her throat and, still blushing, headed to her futon with an “I-I feel sleep taking hold now that I have eaten, so I shall take another nap.” I’d tried to play the whole thing off too, muttering, “W-Well, I’ll just practice some magic, then,” before heading from the throne room to the meadow. Leila’s warm, knowing gaze had embarrassed the absolute hell out of me.

While being blasted by the winds in the meadow, I took a deep breath in, then let it back out. *Damn, what do I do?* I knew for a fact that I wouldn’t have the confidence to look her in the eye when we saw each other again. I’d totally forgotten myself because her wings had felt so fantastic. The sensation was like crack. Anything high-quality made you want to cherish it to the point that it became an obsession, and Lefi’s wings definitely fell into that category. Just touching them had had me tripping balls in the best way possible. Those things needed to be put on a controlled substances list.

Okay, okay, let’s just pretend nothing happened. We’d more or less done exactly that for the whole Iluna kidnapping incident, so if it worked then, it would work now. That was the best possible solution I could think of. I was almost positive Lefi would be on the same wavelength too. Since we lived under the same roof, so to speak, any kind of weird vibe between us would just strain our relationship. *Yup, nothing happened, and that’s that. Let sleeping dogs lie.* If I’d been a politician on Earth, they probably would’ve labeled me as “that two-bit clown too afraid to rock the boat.”

With that absurd thought, I managed to calm myself down enough to forget

what had just happened and focus on a new topic. Until Lefi spoke to me earlier, I'd still been skimming through the various dungeon updates in the menu, so I picked up where I'd left off. Then, out of nowhere, one of the new options caught my attention. It was called "Grand Design," and it had to do with the creation of dungeon facilities.

This function allowed a user to spend DP to bring the designs in their head to life. There seemed to be no limits on the structures that could be created, so a person could create anything their heart desired, from a kennel to a massive building. Basically, my thought process was that if I used this feature, I could make my secret ambition, *the* castle, a reality. The fact that it was possible to create a building from just my imagination was very on point for an isekai. All hail the dungeon's mysterious powers! *Hmm, maybe I should just start rebranding all the dungeon's mysterious powers as dungeon abilities.*

But the world wasn't so kind. Though this particular dungeon skill seemed ultra convenient, it unfortunately came with a lot of inherent disadvantages. First of all, it would eat up my DP like there was no tomorrow. How much, you ask? Basically all of it. The DP that trickled in steadily every day and every last cent of what I'd gotten from killing those humans a while ago would be all gone. I'd be flat broke after a single attempt.

With that in mind, I should mention that creating something from my mind cost almost ten times less than buying it from the Catalog did. Using the ability had a single price, which was actually really neat. Both the kennel and huge building I mentioned earlier took the same amount of DP to make, so in that sense, you could call it a bargain.

The next tricky thing about this skill was the image in the user's mind. I'd have to work my ass off to have a rock-solid vision in my head if I wanted to make a building; it was the same as all the effort I'd put in to create my water dragons with Elemental Magic. I needed to have a firm hold on the whole image, down to the tiniest detail. If I didn't, I would fail and trash on the same level would instead be created. So, yeah, this was no joke.

On top of all that, the ability consumed magic too. And it *did* use magic proportional to the size of the structure, which meant that if I didn't have enough magic to bring the building to life, even if my mental image was clear

and strong, the final product would still be a trash heap.

I had a hard time imagining how much magic I'd need to create my castle.

Despite all the massive constraints on the ability, I could still say that its sole merit, that it was overwhelmingly cheaper than any of the castles in the DP Catalog, outweighed all the annoyances. Even the cheapest castle in the Catalog had an extra zero compared to what the ability cost, and the more amazing castles had like *three* extra zeros. It would take me a decade to save up for one of those. It wasn't really an issue to have an expensive castle as a goal since I'd be alive for at least a thousand years, but I was too impatient to wait a decade. I'd keep it as a backup in case I failed at my Grand Design attempt.

With this dungeon ability, though, I could build my own original castle. A fully custom castle à la Pimp My Castle. That had a nice ring to it. Well, there was one veeery minor issue with that, and it was whether or not I had the aesthetic sense to pull it off. Another question was if I'd be able to modify the interior later on. Changing up the inside looked like it would be a separate DP cost, but apparently, as long as the exterior was complete, the inside could be redone as many times as I wanted. In other words, I had free rein over the interior design.

Just thinking about it had me hyped, but I also knew it wouldn't work if I just went for it without doing some prep work first. That was why I planned to work on my earth magic by making miniature castles. I figured that would be good practice for when I finally attempted a Grand Design castle. It was also the main reason I'd come to the meadow in the first place.

Hmm... For the first drill, let's not think about the interior at all. Instead, I'd focus entirely on the exterior. It would have been impossible to imagine both at the same time anyway. A noob needed to work on one thing at a time instead of worrying about doing everything all at once. As a former Craftminer myself, fabricating the exterior would be a piece of cake, then I could just bang out the interior later. I mean, it was common knowledge that Craftminers were basically magicians when it came to manipulating space.

"Okay! Here goes attempt numero uno!"

Psyching myself up, I started building the miniatures.

“Um, my lord? What’re you up to?”

“Oh, hi there, Lew.”

Lew walked out the door connecting the meadow to the throne room. Given the laundry basket she was carrying, she’d come to hang the laundry out to dry.

“Woow! Did you make these, my lord? You’re really good at it. Makes sense since you’re so clever.”

With wonder in her voice, Lew studied the throng of models I’d created. They were situated on the ground in front of where I’d been lying for a while now.

“You think so? Well, I appreciate the vote of confidence.”

“Wh-What’s wrong? It’s unusual for you to be so low-energy...”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m just tired is all. I feel like my brain cells are about to self-destruct.”

“B-Brain cells? What’s that?”

“Right, so, I’ve been working the ol’ noggin so damn hard trying to make stuff over and over again that my brain is basically on meltdown. It’s like when you take a sheet of bubble wrap and twist the whole thing to make all the bubbles pop at once. That’s how my brain cells feel right now.”

“I... I see,” Lew replied, looking completely lost by my explanation. “I’m not sure I understand, but it’s obvious you worked hard, so good job.”

I’d had the material and my needlessly high Dexterity stat to go along with it, so I’d made a bunch of dirt models that were decent, but decent wasn’t nearly good enough. My ultimate goal was Amor Londo, the super-cool castle that sent my inner schoolboy into a frenzy. As far as I was concerned, “decent” was hot garbage.

Even though I’d suspected that things wouldn’t go as planned, the end result still frustrated me. No matter how often I utilized my earth magic, how hard I tried to mobilize the aesthetic sense that should have been lying dormant inside me, or how fast I spun the wheels in my head, I just could *not* construct the splendid, grandiose castle of my dreams. Mad props to Enviro designers because this shit was *not* easy.

No. No, no, no. It was too soon to complain. Seriously, I'd only been playing with the dirt for like three hours now. The Enviro designers had to have poured their blood, sweat, and tears into achieving the level of mastery that was the game. It would be impossible for me to get anywhere close to that after just a few hours. My prediction had just been way too optimistic.

Besides, it wasn't like I was flying blind here. I had a reference point for my castle's design. As long as I kept my goal in mind, I was in a way better position to succeed than they had ever been. *That's right, because I'm a creative demon lord.* I would forge my own path. If I threw a fit and gave up just like that, I wouldn't amount to much moving forward.

"Okay! Time for round two!"

Psyching myself up again, I put all my willpower into concentrating as hard as I could and shut my eyes.

Imagine it. Envision it in all its glory.

A castle. A castle as black as night and darkness. Magnificent ramparts so deeply black that they overpowered anyone looking at them, making them think that the walls had no intention of letting a single person pass through. And right in the center of those walls, the main gate, massive enough for giants to walk through and sturdy enough to withstand even a dragon attack without a single creak.

Within the walled grounds would be a number of keeps, also jet-black, with towering spires. These spires would be on proud display, visible from anywhere and everywhere to create the illusion of a bizarre vastness. Then, smack in the middle of this walled city would be the pièce de résistance: an overwhelmingly massive palace, almost like a grand chapel. Its austerity would radiate so powerfully that it would overwhelm everything around it.

At night, from the totally black castle, the lamplight seeping from the windows would illuminate the darkness ever so faintly. Simultaneously wondrous and eerie, the magic of the scene would definitely stir the emotions of all who beheld it.

That was the sort of castle I wanted. It would inspire awe, despair, and terror. A castle straight out of my wildest dreams with the power to make someone

feel all those raging emotions and more.

With the image solidified in my mind, I activated my Elemental Magic and started manipulating the soil in the meadow. It squirmed and shaped itself like it had consciousness. *Damn, Elemental Magic sure is handy.* The process would have been way more complicated if I had to make real figurines and miniatures with real materials, but by using this magic, I could forgo all of that. All I had to do was pour my power into the dirt while holding firmly to the image of the object in my mind. Then, voila, Yuki said, “Let there be life!”

Finally, my masterpiece was complete.

“Hot *damn* I’m good.”

A beautiful, enormous castle. Granted, it was still technically a miniature, but to scale. It gave off a magnetic aura guaranteed to attract and fascinate people endlessly.

This... I like this. It was still brown because of the soil, so that was kinda disappointing, but overall, it looked really cool. It carried the kind of charm that made someone want to stare at it forever.

“Oh my gosh! That’s incredible, my lord! It’s so, so cool!”

“Yeah, I did pretty well, if I do say so myself.”

I nodded in satisfaction as Lew cheered me on. This would definitely be the model for the castle I wanted to build. I’d iron out the details even further to create its perfect, final form later on. I’d paint it the black I imagined too. I was suddenly a *lot* more motivated to work on this project.

“Just you watch, Lew. I’ll make this even more perfect!”

“Th-That means it’ll be even more spectacular than it is now?! Wow, I’m so excited I can’t stand it!”

“Heh heh, like I said, just you watch. This creative demon lord will create a whole new world here.”

My enthusiasm off the charts now, I continued my castle-building exercises as Lew spectated, having completely forgotten about the laundry.



“Oh Leeew. I asked you to hang up the laundry, didn’t I? Please explain why such a simple task is taking so long, would you?”

“N-No, it’s not like that, Leila! This was an act of God! Totally inevitable! Who am I to deny the irresistible charm of such magic?! So I didn’t do anything wrong, okay?! And therefore, I-I request clemency with this explanation!”

“Request denied.”

“Whaaat?! H-Hold on! I want you to listen to me! Please! I-It was really amazing!”

Having discovered Lew slacking off on her chores, Leila dragged her off with a scary grin on her face. I, on the other hand, had a bitter smile on mine as I watched them go. Then, burying my strange sense of embarrassment deep within my heart, I spoke to Lefi, who had her face buried in her pillow.

“Ahem. Um, sooo... H-Hey, Lefi? Can I ask you something?”

“Ngh... Ah, uh, hmmm... Wh-What is it?” she replied, flustered and a little confused. She pulled herself together as she kept talking. “If the subject matter falls within the scope of my knowledge, I shall give you an answer.”

“Ummm, well, I-I’d like to increase my magic. Do you know how I can train to do that?”

When the time came to use Grand Design, the biggest hurdle was going to be the amount of magic it required. I had just finished using elemental magic to make mini figurines, but lo and behold, my power, which never ran out, had actually run out. Seeing my magic fall short this early in the process had me super nervous about it being totally consumed when I finally built the real castle. So, on the slightly more-than-slim chance that I’d come up short when my big moment arrived, I decided my best bet was to go back to the dungeon and consult Lefi, and here we are.

By the way, let me tell you about those figurines. Iluna had been playing in the meadow with Shii while I was practicing, so she’d ended up stopping by to watch, joining Lew in the audience. They’d both gotten super excited every time I made something. That had led me to start making dolls that would make girls happy, which was why I went with creatures that looked like the Calico Families.

I was almost positive that my magic had run out because I'd made a boatload of those little folks. Lew and Iluna were both super happy with them, though, so it was a win in my book regardless.

"Oh? Is the aggregate amount of your magic not greater than the ordinary person's? Are you attempting to perform some sort of forbidden incantation?"

"No, I don't plan on using my magic for something that sounds so dangerous. There *is* something I kinda wanna do, but I don't think it's possible at my current power level. I'm fine with letting it increase the natural way, but if there's some kind of special technique that can speed up the process, I want to try it."

Since this was the kind of world where doing physical training raised my stats, I figured there had to be some kind of training to increase my magic too.

"Hmm... I know not your intentions, but I can offer a temporary solution if it suits your needs. I am able to lend you my magic—have it become yours."

"Whoa! That's a thing?"

"Indeed. Do you recall how, in the first teaching I gave you, we shared magic between ourselves? Well, in lieu of that two-way circulation, I can instead pour all of my magic directly into you, thus lending it to you, albeit only for a short time."

Shiiit, she's talking about doing that thing again, isn't she? The one where my head would have exploded if I'd failed to endure it? It was a little late now, but I literally just realized how freaking dangerous that actually was.

"Would that work the other way too? As in, can I lend you *my* magic?"

"It is not yet possible for you. In order for me to pour my magic into someone else, I must first synchronize my wavelength with theirs so that I can alter my own magic to match their essence. You will likely never reach my level of magic control, but perhaps in time, you may become capable of such a feat. Heh heh."

With some of her usual sass seemingly recovered, Lefi's answer put a smug expression on her face.

Yup, there she is. The Lefi we all know and love.

“Hmm, I see... I think I’ll save that as a last resort, then.”

“I shall gladly oblige, so long as you reward me with donuts.”

Silly me, how could I have forgotten your love of sweets? But damn, woman, you really don’t get tired of them no matter how many you eat, do you?

As an aside, Lefi loved sweets of all kinds, but her favorite was still the one I’d given her first—the chocolate bar. Just like a certain awkwardly squatting, sweets-loving detective, Lefi liked to nibble on chocolate bars a little at a time.

“Now then, some other ways to increase one’s power would be... Hmm... I do believe that the most efficient route would be to exhaust your magical reserves completely. As you possess quite a large amount of magic, I think it best that you use it every day on a large scale. Should you do so, your overall power will increase gradually. Remind me, what is that magic of yours? The one you use often?”

“The water dragons?”

Not to get technical, but they were *hot* water dragons. I still had a tough time controlling the water temperature and dragon shape simultaneously, though. Add on the fact that I incorporated earth magic to increase the lethality with the sand razors, and the difficulty level went up even more.

“Yes, that. If you unleash that amount of magic while practicing your ability to manipulate it, you will accumulate more magic and improve at controlling it as well.”

“I think I get it...”

This was my first time using up all of my magic; not even practicing my water magic had gotten me there before. That said, I’d never actually tried to produce an endless number of dragons. *All right, this might not be so hard after all.* I couldn’t do anything else today since my magic tank was already empty, but starting tomorrow, I’d add draining my magic to my daily schedule, even if it meant I’d have to work until late at night.

Actually, there was an even simpler option. I just had to do something like what I’d done today with using earth magic to churn out those miniatures. Basically, all I needed to do was use magic nonstop. If I did that, the vision of my

dream castle would get a whole lot clearer. I could even take breaks to reset—and make Iluna happy—by making more Calico Families. Forget killing *two* birds with one stone, this strategy would have me taking out at least four.

“Thanks, Lefi. You’re a lifesaver. I’ll hit you up if I get stuck again.”

“Oh, um, y-yes, well... I-I am glad to be of assistance, Yuki.”

The bashful smile on Lefi’s face as she replied was so adorable that it almost made me lose my damn mind.



“Welcome home, darling. Dinner’s ready!”

“Thanks, honey. Ahhh, I’m so friggin’ tired. Dinner’s ready, you say? Can’t wait to eat some more of your home cooking.”

“Sit down, sit down. I’ll set the table super fast... Here you go! Eat up, okay? We have rice and miso soup and fried chicken and sashimi and pepper steak and ramen!”

“W-Wow! A feast, huh?”

How the hell is anyone supposed to eat that much?

“That’s right, darling! I wanna cheer you up with all this yummy food!”

“O-Oh, yeah? That makes me happy. Nom nom nom. Mmm, your cooking really is the best.”

“The secret ingredient is lots of my love!”

I pretended to munch away as I smiled awkwardly at the beaming Iluna —“pretended” being the key word there. She hadn’t actually cooked anything; what we were doing now was playing house with the help of some bright-colored tableware I’d created for her. It looked like the fancy sets you’d find in kindergarten classrooms, but hey, I thought the thing had turned out pretty good.

Speaking of the colors, because I’d been practicing earth magic so much lately, I could now easily manipulate both the quality and color of the soil. Also, what I’d been mentally referring to as “dirt” and “soil” was just the stuff I’d

been using for earth magic. That was a mistake on my end, though, because earth was more than just those two things. Rocks and minerals were parts of earth too—and minerals came in all kinds of colors.

Once I'd realized my error, I'd gotten an idea. "So does this mean I can actually change the colors?" I'd asked myself. Through a good deal of trial and error, I'd learned how to color my creations. On Earth, people used to make colored dyes by grinding minerals, so there was nothing weird about my method. Plus, I'd confirmed another bit of knowledge from it: in order to master magic—and particularly elemental magic—innovative, versatile thinking was a requirement. Pretty on point for a creative demon lord, eh?

Incidentally, as far as increasing my total magic, it was going just as Lefi had said it would. By completely draining my magic, the amount of MP I had was steadily growing. Granted, it was by so little that it made literally zero difference, but it was going up nonetheless. Slow and steady wins the race, you know? I was fully committed to working hard so that I could turn into an MP monster.

"Um, Master Demon Lord, you made all of these, yes?" Leila, who was sitting next to us and playing the role of my and Iluna's daughter, asked.

"Sure did."

"Lady Lefi utilizes her magic on an extremely large scale just like you," she went on. It seemed like she was doing it subconsciously. "Both of you combined are, frankly, making me reconsider my framework of magic."

Sorry, Leila, can't help you there. My only reference for magic is Lefi.

"I don't know anyone's magic except mine and Lefi's, so I'm not sure I get it, but is it really that weird? Our magics, I mean. The look in your eyes tells me that you're thinking *hard* about this."

"It seems I owe you an explanation. Based on what I've seen so far of the power the two of you use without chanting spells, can I hazard a guess that it's elemental magic?"

"Bingo."

"As I thought. Hmm... Currently, what we call elemental magic is *considered a*

lost secret art. There are very few people who can actually control it. I'd wager less than one hundred exist in the world."

"...Come again?"

"The state of magic today relies on spellcasting as its foundation. A spell creates the structure, and pouring magic into that skeleton activates it, giving it 'life.' In that sense, I'd say it can be thought of as a form of sorcery."

Leila lectured like a professor.

A-A lost secret art, huh? Well, if I think about Lefi's status in this world and that she does use magic like that, I guess I can understand why people say it's rare magic.

"It sounds to me like you're saying that spells are the heart of magic, but I learned something totally different. I was taught that spells are just aids and that what's truly important in making magic come alive is the user's imagination."

"That only applies to those with the appropriate aptitude for using magic in such a way. It's impossible for anyone else. Records exist of members of the demon species using elemental magic in ancient times, but a vast majority of today's demons can't use magic without spellcasting. On occasion, some are born who can use magic like their ancestors, but only to a lesser degree. We call them 'atavi.'"

"Interesting..."

I think I'm starting to get it. I remembered what Lefi told me when we first met—that the first demons were born spontaneously when mana in nature coalesced around something at a certain point in time, but that most of today's demons were instead born through natural reproduction and had two parents.

It was only a matter of time before demons had started crossbreeding with other species, introducing more variety to their genetics as generations passed. Thanks to that, these new demons' aptitude for magic gradually weakened, resulting in the situation as it currently stood, with most demons unable to use elemental magic.

To replace that inability, they'd probably developed the technique known as

“spellcasting.” This new method allowed them to compensate for a trait that used to be second nature but was now virtually impossible. It was a natural leap in innovation for them.

The reason I could use elemental magic so easily was most likely due to my physical makeup being very similar to that of the original demons. *Praise be to the ever-gracious dungeon for my humble existence. Maybe I should kiss the dungeon core next time I see it.*

Still, though, our discussion really drove home how ridiculously lacking my knowledge of this world was. I needed to do more research and learn about the people of this world so I didn’t do something cataclysmically awful, even by accident. Going on an excursion to a settlement sometime soon wasn’t a bad idea either. Didn’t matter if it was a human one, a demon one, or one for something else.

“Boooo! Yukiki, Miss Leila, we’re still playing house! You can’t talk about other stuff!”

Leila and I hadn’t even realized we’d gotten so absorbed in the discussion until Iluna got upset and chimed in. She looked adorable puffing out her cheeks while she pouted like that.

“Sorry, that’s my bad. Ummm, where were we? Let’s see, my wife was tormented by our daughter’s sickness, so for both of their sakes, I went on a journey to find a cure. I finally found one, but when I came home, I learned I was too late and our daughter would soon be dead anyway. That about sums it up, yeah?”

“Yeah! Honestly, Yukiki, you better do it right this time!”

“Sorry, sorry. I swear I’ll stay in character from now on.”

“Ummm, beg pardon, but there isn’t even the smallest chance for me to live?”

Give it up, Leila. Our princess always gets what she wants, and the minute she decided to off you, you were done. Don’t worry, though, because Iluna and I will make sure to grieve. You can rest in peace, okay?



“Can I help you, Lew?”

I’d used the door from the throne room and turned the knob so I could exit directly into the cave, bypassing the meadow area entirely. When I stepped through it, though, I saw Lew peeking out from the entrance.

“Oh, well, yes. You’re off to meet Lord Rir today, right, my lord?”

“Yeah. Haven’t seen much of him lately, so I figured I’d say hi.”

All right, that was kind of a lie. The main reason I was out here instead of in there was because using a shit ton of elemental magic every day recently had me fed up. I wanted to kick some monster ass and shake off my stress—uhhh, I mean, I wanted to check how much my magic had improved, so I’d decided to go on a little field trip.

“That’s why I thought I’d wait here on the off chance he’d show himself.”

“He’s already here, you know. He just chose not to reveal himself because you’re camped out there.”

My map signaled the presence of an ally nearby.

“Whaaat?! Are you serious?!”

“Look, let me give it to you straight. He finds you repulsive.”

“Y-You could stand to be a little *less* honest!”

Well...

“Anybody would hate being stalked like that, though. I know your people deify him or whatever, but if it were me being treated like that, I’d sure as hell bolt too.”

“Ugh... B-But they’re so incredible! The amazing fenrirs!”

With that, Lew started her spiel on the various fenrir legends handed down through generations of werewolves.

Story 1: something about a fenrir powerful enough to not only annihilate an entire host of human soldiers but also destroy a city.

Story 2: another fenrir who spent several years fighting ten thousand enemies and survived.

Story 3: supposedly, any land commanded by a fenrir would be permanently blessed by nature, with flowers blooming everywhere and thick woods flourishing.

Story 4: since fenrirs were their ancestors and the werewolves had inherited that sacred bloodline, revering such an esteemed existence was a given, so there was absolutely nothing wrong with her behavior.

It was obvious from the sparkles in her eyes that Lew believed everything she was saying. I was skeptical, though. Then again, it *did* seem like fenrirs were legendary the same way Lefi was. The lazy dragon herself had said she'd had a tough time fighting one back in the day, so there was no questioning their incredible strength. In that case, maybe there *was* some truth to those legends.

Okay, back to the ancestor thing. What the hell had even happened to turn them from wolves to humans? *Oh, wait, now I remember. Human transformation is a thing here, duh.* If I thought about it like that, it wasn't so strange after all. Probably.

Wild. But it got me thinking: if Lefi and I had a kid, what would it look like—
Fucking hell, me. What the shit am I thinking about?

"My lord? What's the matter? Your face is red. Oh, I know! You're super impressed by the legends of the fenrirs, aren't you?!"

"No. Wrong. Shut up. It's nothing. I'm fine."

Whatever, I got it now. Basically, she couldn't contain herself because a literal legend actually existed, and she knew this one personally. She'd get used to Rir in time, though. I was sure of it. And if she hung out with him enough, she'd eventually cool down about it too.

"Wanna tag along today, then?"

"Huh?! You truly mean it?!"

"But you better behave, okay? If you wander off and get lost, you're dead meat."

"Oof! O-Okay! I'll be good, so please take me with you!"

“Eeeeeek!!!”

“You’re gonna make my ears bleed,” I grumbled at Lew as she let out those grating screams.

“B-B-Buuuut!!! We’re going toooo faaassstt!!!”

Her screams stretched into infinity as she clung to Rir’s back for dear life.

“Just FYI, this is only a fraction of Rir’s true power. Oh, Rir, stop over there.”

At my request, Rir shifted his full body weight to come to an immediate halt.

“Oomph!”

In doing so, Lew’s grasp on him slipped. She ended up flying off him ass over head and face-planting into the ground.

“Hey, if you wanna make me laugh, you don’t have to go *that* far. Anyway, just do as you’re told, will ya?”

“Seriously?! It’s not like I’m doing this for fun!” she shot back as she jumped to her feet, dirt still plastered to her face. The fall hadn’t knocked any of the wind out of her sails, that was for sure. “Gah... You certainly don’t disappoint, Lord Rir... As for you, my lord, I definitely think there’s something wrong with you. How can you possibly maintain your composure in the face of such speed?!”

Rude much? Not like I can help being an adrenaline junkie.

“Forget that. You’d better haul your butt back here fast, Lew. An enemy’s coming.”

“Huh? Oh my gosh!”

After nervously turning around and seeing a monster, she raced back to us in a panic.

“Graaawr! Screeee!”

A Rock Bird had come to check us out. Yup, the monster that made delicious fried “chicken.” Keeping us in sight and clearly super wary of us, it screamed with its death-metal-style voice.

“I hate your shrieks so much, man. Be a good little birdie and turn into food

for me.”

While still on Rir’s back, I worked up my magic, then clapped my hands together loudly.

“Graaa—”

Suddenly, two rounded plate things emerged from the ground directly beneath bird asshole’s head. They both had painful-looking spikes inside them, similar to the needle-point holders used in ikebana. Then, like a mouth closing, the two “plates” slammed shut around the bird’s head, its spikes piercing straight through the flesh and bone. There was a squelching sound as blood sprayed everywhere, then the Rock Bird dropped to the ground, dead.

I called that little magic trick, which I’d invented during my intense earth magic training sessions, the “Iron Maiden.” If you couldn’t guess by the name, it was an extremely lethal killing technique. However, since it required a bit of time to set up properly, it wasn’t terribly hard for fast or highly perceptive enemies to avoid, so there were pros and cons to it.

This was actually the first time I’d used the move against a monster. All in all, it wasn’t half bad. Looked like the kind of attack that could deal a huge amount of damage to slow enemies.

“Woow... You really *did* take it out in one shot...” Lew muttered with a sort of twitchy smile.

“Eh, it’s nothing to write home about. All right, Lew, we’re off. Hurry and get on.”

I urged Lew to jump onto Rir while tossing the bird’s corpse into Inventory.

“What?! W-We’re not done?!”

“Of course not. We literally just left the dungeon.”

“O-Oh, well, um, I’m really happy that Lord Rir is giving me a ride and all, but maybe he could go a bit slower?”

“Aw, come on, Lew, be honest. You actually *do* like it when he goes fast, don’t you?”

“Grr.”

“See? Even Rir agrees. Come on, chop-chop.”

“Eep! I’m getting really bad vibes from both of you!”

With an evil smirk, I grabbed the trembling Lew’s arm and hauled her up behind me on Rir’s back.

“And we’re off!”

“Noooooooo!!!”

Lew’s screams echoed endlessly all throughout the forest.



Waking up from her nap, Lefi suddenly turned her head toward the throne. There, she saw Yuki sitting, adorned in a hair-raising set of armor colored in shades of black and red. From the sides of the helmet jutted warped horns that pointed forward, and for whatever reason, the body armor tapered into sharp points all over. The outfit sent shivers down her spine.

Of course, she couldn’t see his face, hidden as it was under the helm, but there was no doubt in her mind that it was Yuki beneath it. He was the only one in the dungeon who would wear such a thing. She didn’t even need to use Analysis to confirm her hypothesis.

The rest of the dungeon’s residents were going about their everyday lives as they normally did because they were quite used to Yuki’s eccentric behavior. No one even commented on his current state. She felt that they were all far too used to his shenanigans.

I did not know he possessed such battle raiments. Caught off guard with such a sight the moment she awakened, Lefi watched him in idle silence. After some time had passed, her brain finally restarted and she opened her mouth to speak.

“Yuki, whatever are you doing?”

“Hm? Oh, hey, Lefi. You’re finally up. Right now, I’m in the process of getting new ideas.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m almost there. Just a biiiit more and I’m there—I can feel it. But I’m having trouble actually getting to the finish line, you know? So I figured that dressing up like a demon lord would put me in the mood to come up with some inspired concepts for my demon lord castle.”

Ah, now I remember. This man is trying to build his own castle.

“Will that truly help you accomplish your goal?”

“You know what they say: gotta get into the right frame of mind first. I’m banking on hyping myself up like this changing the way I think!”

“I see... Do as you wish,” Lefi replied halfheartedly.

The man was full of small idiosyncrasies like that. If she were to be frank, she would say that he most likely fell into the “oddball” category of society at large. Normally, he was, well, exceedingly normal for a young man, but perhaps those destined to be demon lords needed to have something pointedly different about them.

“Oh yeah, Lefi. You’ve seen castles and stuff, right? I remember you saying something about burning down some demon lord’s castle at some point.”

“Hm? Well, considering my long life, I have seen quite a number of the structures ‘people’ have built.”

“Then take a look at the miniature I made of my castle! I need opinions from a fresh perspective because I’ve got builder’s block.”

“I suppose I could, but perhaps it would be better if you approached Leila instead? I suspect her level of knowledge surpasses even mine. She may know quite a bit about such arts.”

From what Leila had mentioned about herself, Lefi knew she had been raised in a community focused on magical education. As a result, she possessed a vast compendium of information.

The ovine race of the demon species had been an inquisitive lot since ages long past. They had incessantly researched a multitude of fields, so the breadth and depth of their knowledge were unparalleled, to the point that other races couldn’t even hope to catch up. By Lefi’s estimation, Leila was an outstanding

font of information even among such eminent scholars. Lefi also thought of Leila as yet another eccentric.

“Um, I actually had Leila look it over already, but she’s apparently more interested in the realm of magic. She ended up completely ignoring the model so that she could watch me actually perform the magic. Also, architecture isn’t her specialty, so she doesn’t know much beyond the basics either.”

“Hmm... Yes, that does sound very much like her. Well, I have no reason to deny you, so come, show me your creation.”

Yuki led Lefi outside to the meadow, where she saw many figures created via elemental magic.

“Oh my! This is quite a sight! Wait, what is *that*?”

“Oh, that? I call it ‘Ultra Bot, Model Fluffrir’! It’s cool, right?”

Reeking of pride, Yuki folded his arms triumphantly. By the by, he was no longer wearing that outrageous armor. He’d taken it off earlier, saying, “Too hot.”

Lefi had been tempted to inquire further about Yuki’s reason for wearing that battle garb, but she also knew that it was often best to let things go with the man. Otherwise, a conversation would never go anywhere, so she had restrained herself.

“So that is Rir?”

“Yup. Because he’s so awesome! I included transformation and fusion components to make it a million times cooler! It’s a fully specced-out model straight from a geek’s fantasy!”

“Is it actually capable of transforming and fusing?”

“Nah. I made it *look* like it could, but it can’t. I could probably make the smaller parts functional, but I’m pretty sure the whole thing would break if I tried it on a much larger scale.”

With her initial question, Lefi had pointed to a wolf figurine, one likely to have been modeled after Yuki’s pet. It possessed a clunky appearance, almost as if it

were made of pieces of metal connected together. It was also quite a bit larger than the other creations surrounding it.

She stared at Yuki in silence. The supremely smug expression on his face was one she had never seen in all her long years. Wordlessly, she compressed an extremely heated fireball into the palm of her hand, then directed it at the wolf figurine. With a *fwoom*, it crashed into the model. The blast reverberated through the area, and when all was quiet again, not a trace remained of the wolf doll. Ashes rained down on them from the sky, fluttering like snow.

“Nooooo!!! Y-You asshole!!! Why the hell would you do that?!?!?!”

“Because your face displeased me.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?! *That’s* your reason for destroying my beloved creation?!”

His self-satisfied expression had irritated her to the point that she’d subconsciously wanted to shock him out of his complacency. Seeing him collapsed on the ground in utter despair was much more than she’d expected as an outcome, though.

“Ahhh, my precious Ultra Bot, Model Fluffrir...” Yuki mumbled, on his hands and knees.

Hmm, so it was indeed a work of art for him. Feeling remorseful, Lefi hurriedly crouched in front of him.

“Y-Yuki, I acknowledge that what I did was wrong. I apologize. But with your powers, you can create another one quickly enough, yes?”

“Well, I guess. I mean, I *am* a creative demon lord, after all. Making something like that is a piece of cake now.”

“Indeed. It was unacceptable of me to destroy your creation, but I shall have you know that I did it only because I have the utmost confidence in your ability to effortlessly recreate something similar. M-More importantly, I would very much like to see the model of the castle you plan to build.”

“Hm. Hmmm. All right, c’mon. My pride and joy will leave you speechless!”

Pulling himself together, Yuki stood up. In her heart of hearts, Lefi gave a

small sigh of relief.

“Psych! Fooled you, didn’t I?! We’ll get to my castle in a minute, but first, manifest, Ultra Bot, Model Lefisios!”

“Bwuh?! Wh-What in tarnation?!”

All of a sudden, the surface beneath their feet started shaking. In the next instant, a sculpture designed after Lefi herself rose from the ground. It was quite large, and it captured all of her features in minute detail. Anyone looking at it would know immediately that it was a mannequin of Lefi.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, hear ye, hear ye! I present to you the supremely enraged version of Lefisios! Please take particular note of the aura of the horned demoness—and the ferocious fangs as an added bonus!”

“Enough, you imbecile!”

Once again, Lefi produced a compressed fireball, this time hurling it toward her own likeness. It was blown to smithereens in seconds.

“Ahhhhh! Damn you, woman! You incinerate my creations not once but *twice*?! But that isn’t going to stop me! Art flourishes most in times of strife! I will not yield to unjust violence! Come forth, Model Lefisios Numbers 2, 3, and 4!”

“Yuki! Cease with these effigies posthaste! I am absolutely revolted by them!”

“Bwa ha ha ha! Sorry not sorry, Lefi! Making miniatures of you is as easy as breathing to me! I don’t need to use any brain power to create ‘em, so break ‘em all you want!”

Every time Lefi demolished a model, Yuki created another one to take its place. Oddly enough, each one was posed differently, but she found them all detestable regardless.

“I can do this forever, Lefi! Number 5, Number 6, Number 7! We retaliate against our unjust oppressor!”

“I will make you regret creating such abominations of me!”

Evening.

“Hey, Lefi?”

“What?”

“Remind me again why we came out here?”

“Hmmm... I do not rightly recall...”

The two tilted their heads in matching expressions of bewilderment regarding the disastrous scene. Innumerable pieces of destroyed models lay scattered about as if Yuki’s homemade army had been carpet-bombed.



Preparations, check. DP, check. Mental image, double check. It was super solid in my mind thanks to all the practice I’d had making the figurines with elemental magic. Another plus of the training was that my ability level for that magic had gone up.

My only remaining concern was my total magic. I was ready with a high-quality mana potion just in case, though. It didn’t work immediately, but it did speed up the natural recovery rate of magical power. And if that wasn’t enough either, I’d already asked Lefi to become my MP tank if push came to shove.

My game plan was more than set at this point, so it was time to actually run the play. On the off chance I still failed, that would just mean I got ahead of myself. No biggie.

“Yukiki, whatcha up to?”

“Listen carefully, Iluna. I’m going to clear the road for my life’s greatest ambition!”

“Am-bi-shun?” Iluna asked as she cocked her head curiously.

“Yuki, I find your words entirely incomprehensible,” Lefi added, sounding exasperated.

“Heh. Such is the fate that occasionally befalls a man’s dream.”

“Bah, this fool has gone beyond our reach. He has submerged himself completely in his own world.”

“My lord is prone to that kind of behavior on rare occasions, huh?”

“Hmmm. Well, I do believe that’s characteristic of men in general.”

The peanut gallery was annoying, but nothing and no one could stop me now. I was overflowing with willpower, magic, and imagination—the three elements necessary to make me the most powerful man in the world, feel? I was ready to *do the thing*. Anyway.

Currently, I was standing in the meadow area. Behind me was the girl squad. Earlier, I’d summoned the troops in our dungeon with an announcement: “I’m going to show you the most amazing spectacle you’ve ever seen, so follow me!” Rir and Shii were here too.

“Lefi, I’m counting on you if the time comes.”

“Yes, yes, I understand. I will fulfill my role accordingly.”

Lefi agreed with a wry smile on her face, knowing full well what I was about to do. Having gotten the go-ahead from her, I opened up Inventory, pulled out the mana potion I’d prepared in advance, and chugged it. It was bitter and suuuper gross, but only a minor obstacle on the road to my ambition.

“Haaaah...”

After returning the empty potion bottle to Inventory, I took a deep breath and focused my mind. *The image...rock solid*. I’d made so many damn models that I’d started playing with dirt in my dreams too. From the detailed exterior to a general interior design, the picture in my mind was crystal clear. So clear, in fact, that I felt like I could almost see it right there in front of my eyes.

I wanted the castle situated in such a way that when I exited from the cave into the meadow, it would be smack-dab in front of me. I’d already used DP to move the inn somewhere else too. So, with the vision of the castle still in my mind, I opened the interface and selected Grand Design under the Dungeon category. Dungeon ability, activated.

A moment later, an extraordinary sense of emptiness assaulted my entire body. *Fuck. This is rough*. The attempt was sucking up wayyy more magic than I’d anticipated, and it was doing it a whole lot faster too. Cold drops of sweat oozed from my forehead. I desperately resisted the despair trying to steal all of my energy and kept a fierce hold on my determination because I didn’t want

the image of the castle to break. I continued imagining it in my mind, but...

Shit! This is bad! The mana potion can't keep up!

It had to be because what I wanted to make was just too massive. I was literally watching my MP steadily disappear. I'd gotten the number to over 10,000 thanks to Lefi's advice, but right now, it was below a third of that and still dropping.

"Lefi! Help!"

"Understood!"

I was positive she already knew how much my magical reserves had been depleted. She must've prepped herself beforehand to make the magic transfer easier because the minute I'd called out to her, I felt the touch of dainty hands on my back.

The moment I felt them, an insanely hot torrent of power rushed into me.

"Hngh! Hnghhh!"

I gritted my teeth, taking deep breaths over and over again so I wouldn't be crushed under the weight of that power.

"W-Well. That's certainly a tremendous amount of magic, isn't it?"

"J-Jeez, even I can tell. That much magic is so far beyond massive it's crazy."

I could hear Leila and Lew talking, but I just didn't have the leeway to respond. I was using everything I had and then some to handle the colossal amount of energy Lefi was pouring into me. It felt like being caught up in the rapids of a huge river. I was afraid I'd overheat and combust at this rate.

God fucking damn it!!!

At this point, sheer willpower was the only thing keeping me going against the overwhelming burden being put on my body. I stubbornly exerted all my energy into holding the image steady in my mind. Then, at long last, the ground rumbled deeply as it began to tremble.

"Whoa! What's happening?!" Lew cried out unconsciously in surprise.

The shaking only grew more intense—so much so that it was getting tough to

stay standing. Once it reached a critical point, a thunderous roar drilled into our ears. Something had broken through the surface of the meadow, kicking up a cloud of dust and dirt as it did. Then, a moment later, silence.

As the haze gradually cleared up, that something grew more and more distinct until finally, we could clearly see a towering black castle so absolutely massive that it seemed endless. It was just like I'd imagined it would be. Actually, no. It was so insanely magnificent that it was even better than I'd imagined.

"I-I did it..."



The second I confirmed that it existed, the last bit of energy suddenly left my body. Just when I thought my knees would buckle and I'd go down for the count, Lefi, still behind me, pushed firmly against my back. Her support was the only thing keeping me on my feet.

"You did well."

"Heh heh... So whaddya think? Awesome, right?"

"Indeed. Well, to be a bit more precise...this is certainly more than what I'd pictured."

I could feel my mouth curling into a grin at Lefi's honesty. Glancing back casually, I could see the rest of the girl squad standing there in shock, their mouths hanging open and eyes wide. What I found even funnier was Rir, who was just as open-mouthed and dumbfounded.

"Impressions, everyone?"

"Y-Yukiki! Wowowowowow! Is this our new home?!"

"Sure is. We've got more rooms than we can possibly use, so take whichever one you want, okay?"

Or so I said, but the only area with a complete interior was the huge, beautiful palace-like structure that stood front and center. Aside from that, I was pretty sure the rest of the castle was empty, with only stairs and corridors at the bare minimum.

I'd make sure to add on rooms and spruce up those parts as the next things on my agenda. Right now, though, I was freaking whooped.

"It seems that I continue to underestimate your abilities, Master Demon Lord."

"M-My lord, now I know why you've been making so many models recently. It was for this castle, huh? I've never seen anything like it before!"

I nodded my head with a satisfied "Mm-hmm, mm-hmm" at their thoughts.

"As it happens, there is something I would like to ask you, Yuki," Lefi said.

"What's up? I can't feel any better than I do right now, so I'll answer any

question you've got."

"Where is the door that connects to the throne room? I presume you moved it elsewhere, so I would like to know how we might return to our beds."

"...Shit."



All right, lemme give it to you straight: the castle, my ambition, ended up being suuuper inconvenient. I mean, sure, I *probably* should have seen it coming, but still. I just made the thing too huge. It was majestic as hell—maybe *too* majestic—but it was also too damn big. So big, in fact, that getting around the place, both inside and out, was a giant pain in the ass.

Of course, when I first realized I'd actually created it, I was over the freaking moon. Everyone else's cheers only added to my excitement. Unfortunately, though, it was massive. Way. Too. Massive. That made the hallways crazy long too.

I'd put enough rooms in the central palace for everyone to have their own, but because it was such a hassle to go anywhere, no one actually used them. We were all still living our lives in the throne room. It hadn't even taken that long for the others to stop visiting the castle and go back to their normal routines in the dungeon.

Correction: Iluna was the only one who still enjoyed the castle. Every day since I first made it, she'd give me a cheerful "I'm going exploring!" then dash off with Rir and Shii. They played on the castle grounds, poking around here and there. That was my sole joy now.

By the way, I'd connected the door in the dungeon's throne room to a separate throne room I'd created in the castle. Basically, both of these throne rooms were now linked. It felt kinda confusing having two throne rooms, so I'd started calling the dungeon's throne room the "real" throne room—mostly because that was our default living space.

Eh, it is what it is. A colossal, imposing castle like that in the middle of a cave was a hell of an invader repellent. So yeah, all my hard work would pay off one way or another. Having mastered earth magic, I was sure any trespassers would

be in awe of the beautiful garden I'd made inside the gorgeous courtyard I'd built. They would for sure be amazed by the western-style stone armor sets I'd created and lined up in the halls like real soldiers too. I could practically hear intruders exclaiming, "I-I never imagined I would be so blessed as to lay eyes on such a magnificent castle!" Mm-hmm, I was positive its mere existence would deal some serious mental damage to any would-be raiders.

Yes, definitely. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I couldn't think of a single RPG demon lord who actually dicked around in their own castle. They usually just kept their asses glued to their thrones and acted all intimidating. What I'm trying to say here is that it definitely wasn't weird for me to still have my base of operations be the real throne room and just, you know, keep doing my usual thing in my usual place like I always did. Never mind all the blood, sweat, and tears I'd put into everything related to the castle. Absolutely, positively A-OK with the current state of affairs.

More than that, though, at the end of the day, the castle was *my* ambition, *my* fantasy. And fantasies got people hyped up just by existing—kinda like Disneyland, you feel? Which meant that it was fine to go there and have fun, but there was no real need to actually *live* there.

Am I right or am I right? I'm totally right.

"Hmm, yes, well... How shall I put this...? Of all the castles I have witnessed in my lifetime, yours is certainly the most glorious."

Lefi tried to cheer me up as I sat listless and sulky on the throne.

"Just be honest with me. I can take it. I know what you really wanna say is, 'Why the hell did you make this monstrous pile of trash? All it does is take up room and get in the way.'"

"Oh my, you are indeed wallowing in the depths of self-pity. I have never seen you in such a state before."

She was trying really hard not to laugh at my lackluster response.

"What the hell, Lefi? Spit it out already, would you?"

"No, no, I just find your current attitude amusing."

With that, for who knows what reason, she hopped onto my lap with a soft *whump* and let her body relax into mine. I could feel her warmth, and her familiar scent tickled my nose.

“Whoa, hey!”

“Do you object?”

“...N-No, I guess not.”

I did my best to make sure that sounded as nonchalant as possible. I felt like I’d lose the battle if I showed her how shaken I actually was, especially since she was as relaxed as ever. After that, we both shut up for a while. The silence was peaceful—comfortable, even.

“Yuki, you are warm,” Lefi muttered out of nowhere.

“Yeah, ’cause I’m alive.”

“Bah ha! Indeed, indeed.”

Unsure of what she meant, I peered questioningly at the lazy Supreme Dragon’s face. In response, she twisted her neck and glanced up at me, positioned as she was on my lap with her back to my chest.

“Heed me well, Yuki. I am enjoying myself in the present. It matters not how many days pass; you never fail to pique my interest with your deeds.”

“What, you trying to comfort me?”

“Correct. It is only natural to do as such when a companion is brooding. So, as your elder, I thought to bestow my benevolence upon and coddle you.”

I smiled wryly at Lefi as she shrugged playfully.

“I’m not sure how I feel hearing that from you.”

“You appear levelheaded on the surface, yet there are many occasions when you behave foolishly. As I am a sensible adult myself, it is my duty to watch over you accordingly.”

“Oh yeah? Says the one who goes ballistic the minute she loses a game.”

“Th-That is neither here nor there! Furthermore, games are unenjoyable if they are not taken seriously!”

Lefi glared up at me, her lips pursed in irritation. I let out a laugh at the sight of it, then put my hand on top of her head.

“Lefi.”

“What is it?”

“Thanks for always looking out for me. You’ll have my back from here on out too, right?”

One of her cheeks rose in a half smirk at my words, and just like that, she laid her head back against my chest.

“Heeey! No fair, Lady Lefifi! I wanna sit on Yukiki’s lap too!” Iluna, freshly returned from her adventure outside, shouted while pointing accusingly at us.

“Oh, Iluna, you are home. Perhaps you would like to make the situation equitable by taking your place here too?”

“Hmm... Okay! Then Yukiki can hug me too!”

As soon as the words left her mouth, Iluna raced over with her tiny legs and jumped on top of us.

“Hngh! Oof!” Their combined weight crushed me into the throne. “J-Jeez, you two are heavy.”

“You are a man, are you not? You are able to endure it.”

“Thaaat’s right, Yukiki! And you’re not s’posed to tell girls they’re heavy, silly!”

“Okay, fine. Gotta tell you, though, this chair isn’t exactly soft, so you two smooshing me into it hurts.”

“Then leave it to me, Yukiki! I’ll use a spell to make it aaall better! Pain, pain, go away!”

“Wow! Amazing, Iluna! I don’t hurt anymore!”

“Pedophile.”

“Yo, I can hear you.”

The three of us, having turned into a lump on the throne, joked around and had fun for just a little bit longer.

Chapter 2: Meeting a Hero

“Shite! Shite, shite, *shite!*”

Lute Glorio Alisia slammed his fist down violently on the desk as he cursed in the office assigned to him. He had just been informed that the expedition he’d spearheaded had ended in failure. It had been a spectacular failure as well, as every last squadron—save for that of the deserters—had been annihilated. The outcome couldn’t possibly have been worse.

The knight commander who’d led the band of deserters had already been terminated and stripped of all military privileges, but Lute was so enraged that he wanted to behead the man. This failure held grave significance.

A great deal of capital had been allocated to the mission. Lute had solicited investors with the promise of a full return on their investments, yet all of it was now forfeit. Not only would he lose their trust and goodwill, but he was also certain that any of his future ventures would be greatly hindered.

Moreover, the fact that he had unilaterally executed a military order made the defeat that much worse. If the expedition had been a success, he could have gotten away with minor repercussions or even none. That was clearly no longer an option, though.

Such a disastrous result was punishable by court-martial. Lute would likely avoid such a fate on account of being the crown prince, but if the whole nefarious affair were to be exposed, he was sure to be censured. Should that happen, there would be a great many nobles who wouldn’t obey him when he eventually became king. Ergo, he was currently in a state of panic as he tried to think of ways to salvage the situation.

“How would you like to proceed, Your Highness? My analysis indicates that a greater number of troops would be required for another assault, but I fear mobilizing that many may attract the King’s atten—”

“I know that! I don’t need you to tell me!” After yelling angrily at the other

man in the room, Lute took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down. “Since strength in numbers proved an infeasible strategy, we’ll send a select few instead. What about adventurers? I think anyone in the Orichalcum class would work.”

“They are all already on assignment for another matter, and I regret to tell you that those in lower classes are not strong enough for the task considering their inability to best military personnel.”

“Tch. But *that* is still an option, is it not? The you-know-what secured by the Church?”

“*That*... Perhaps you refer to the hero? Unfortunately, the hero is still undergoing training, to say nothing of the fact that the Church controls them. If we were to approach the Church and request the use of their hero, I’m concerned that they would try to leverage the situation to their advantage.”

“Hah! No doubt they’d simply demand more money if that were the case. Miserly bastards wearing the guise of holiness. If we can just turn this situation around, there will be a great deal to gain from it. I suggest you allude so accordingly when negotiating with the Church. Have them take the bait.”

“At present, economic rights have already been granted to a number of investors. Involving the Church would mean further dividing the spoils, Your Highness. It would be remiss of me to not mention this.”

“Who cares? It’s not like we *need* to honor any promises we make.”

Making no further comments on the matter, the man lowered his head deferentially as Lute sneered viciously.

“Right away, Your Highness. As you command, so shall it be done.”



“Argh, why me...?” the girl, Nell, mumbled to herself as she trudged through the forest. She was the hero, after all.

Years ago, while living in the countryside with her mother, she’d suddenly been visited by a priest from the Church. He’d said, “You have the makings of a great hero,” and invited her to walk the hero’s path.

Heroes. The protagonists of fairy tales handed down since time immemorial, heroes punished evildoers with their sacred powers. Truly, they were legendary champions.

Nell's mother had always regaled her with stories of heroes, so she had yearned to become one ever since she was a little girl. Once the priest had arrived with his announcement, she'd taken up the charge without a moment's doubt. As a hero, she'd thought that not only could she help people in need, but she might be able to reduce her hardworking mother's burdens as well. Even though their little family was poor, Nell's mother had driven her body hard to take care of them. With that resolve, Nell had started her hero's journey.

Soon enough, Nell learned that a hero's training was extremely spartan. She endured harsh sparring matches with the knights that left her beaten and bedraggled. On top of that, she constantly underwent war drills to hone her battle skills. Lastly, there were the lectures given by the elderly imperial conjurers, which were sometimes the hardest to handle. She felt that if she lost focus for even a second, she'd end up lost in daydreams. Every day was a desperate struggle for her.

As a result of undergoing all that daily training, Nell's confidence in her abilities was relatively high. So when the order had come for her first mission as a hero—the mission she was currently on—she'd been happy, plain and simple. It meant that others acknowledged her strength too.

The directive handed down to her was clear: eliminate the demon living deep in the forest who had slaughtered many humans. Since this was her first mission, there was a hint of anxiety involved, but she was brimming with fighting spirit as well. The Church had even provided her with high-quality equipment, so she was well-prepared as she made her way in the forest. And yet...

“Graaawr! Screeee!”

“Eek!”

Nell readied herself for battle the moment she heard that gratingly loud shriek. At the same time, though, a humongous bird flew off into the sky.

“Ugh, seriously...? I can't take this anymore...”

She sounded like she was about to cry. She may have been a hero, but she was also just a normal girl. And like any normal girl, she was scared.



“Hmm?”

Reenergized and ready to take on the world again, I decided to fully commit to making my demon lord castle impregnable. My plan was to mod the castle to the absolute extremes. To make that happen, I'd been hard at work setting my own specially designed traps along with the dungeon's own traps. I was in the middle of doing so when *it* happened. My map suddenly opened on its own and started buzzing like crazy, just like it had in the past. An intruder.

“Well, well. What have we here?”

When I took a look, I learned it was a human, and only one human at that. But what I found interesting was their class.

Name: Nell

Race: Human

Class: Hero

Level: 42

HP: 2,120 / 2,120

MP: 6,981 / 6,981

Strength: 519

Stamina: 652

Agility: 817

Magic: 704

Dexterity: 987

Luck: 1,245

Special Abilities: Barrier Magic, Swiftness

Abilities: Holy Magic 5, Swordsmanship 4, Scout 2, Danger

Detection 4

Title: Holy Sword Master, The Impressionable Girl

“Huh. So this world *does* have heroes.”

Yup, the intruder’s class was indeed “Hero.” Their stats were the best out of all the humans I’d encountered so far. Just looking at their abilities was enough to tell me that they were powerful. Holy Magic was at level 5, for Christ’s sake. And since “holy” was part of the skill name, I had to wonder if that meant it would be overwhelmingly effective against a demon lord like me. I could totally imagine a game screen flashing the words “It’s super effective!” when I got hit with it. But forget that, sweet Jesus, that Luck stat was high. It being over 1,000 meant it was more than ten times what mine was. I’d love to have this hero with me at the casinos.

“Mm-hmm... A hero, huh...?”

I talked to myself while I watched the images being transmitted onto the screen by my surveillance summons, the Evil Eyes. The hero seemed twitchy and kind of on edge as they trudged through the forest. Upon closer inspection, the hero turned out to be a girl. Her hair was cut in a short bob, and though she appeared a bit boyish on the surface, her figure clearly proclaimed her otherwise. *So the humans’ strategy now is that if quantity ain’t cuttin’ it then quality is the way to go?*

Well, that was pretty shortsighted of them. They could have at least sent a party. But no, they deadass sent a lone ranger. I mean, seriously? Did they honestly think this was a viable tactic against *moi*? It was like they were tying their hands behind their backs all on their own. They must have had some kind of reason for it, but that didn’t make their plan any less stupid.

Okay, so, personal opinion here, but just to get it off my chest, I found heroes absolutely, positively repulsive, and nothing could change my mind about that. They were just so goddamn *boring*. If someone told them they needed to save the world or whatever, they were off like a shot without question. If they were told to fight, they did as instructed. And then there was the “helping people in need” thing. Like, it was just *constant*. Honestly, heroes were like freaking

robots. Waste of space and oxygen, man.

I mean, what was the point in living for others' sake? The state of herodom being what it was, I preferred the demon lord life hands down. Demon lords were free to do whatever, whenever, wherever, however, and whyever. They didn't owe anything to anyone. Get fired up to take revenge? Hell yeah. Expand territory? Do it up. Demon lords lived as they damn well pleased.

To some, that way of life might not be palatable because they saw it as a nuisance to others, but I sincerely thought that living your life true to yourself, no matter how selfish, meant you could live a life without regrets. If admiring that kind of mentality made me self-centered, so be it. That was the exact reason it didn't bother me at all that I'd been reborn as something other than human. It didn't matter how much my body changed because my true nature would stay the same. I would *always* be me.

Admittedly, I probably would have freaked out if I'd ended up as some creature that wasn't at least human*like*, but luckily, that hadn't happened. In fact, the dungeon had probably decided that I'd be much better off as a demon lord than anything else because of my personality. I didn't think I was far off the mark with that line of thinking.

At the end of the day, it didn't really matter. If the humans wanted a fight, they'd get one, hero or not. I was still in the middle of my modification "operation," but this was as good an opportunity as any to test the nasty traps I'd set around the castle and its grounds.

"Hey, you guuuys!"

As I called out to everyone, I jumped down from the castle and whipped out my wings. I glided through the air down to the courtyard, where our dungeon residents were gathered for a tea party, and landed near them with a *swish*.

Ever since I'd grown my second pair of wings, controlling my flights had gotten a lot easier, to the point that I was way more stable whenever I was in the air. My landings weren't just free falls anymore either; I could touch down right where I wanted to now. That's not to say I'd stopped doing my crazy dive-bombing thing, though. I totally still did whenever I went hunting with Rir. Not only was it fun, but it was also really good at destroying enemies.

“Hm? What is it, Yuki?”

“Dammit, Lefi, how many times do I need to tell you to stop touching my wings the second you see them?”

She’d slithered her way real close as soon as she’d seen me and started getting all touchy-feely with my wings. I smiled exasperatedly because I knew she wouldn’t listen to my scolding and just kept talking while letting her have her way.

“A hero’s heading our way, so just to be safe, I need you all to evacuate to the real throne room.”

“Bleh! A *hero*, my lord?!” Lew exclaimed, clearly disgusted by the thought of it.

“What? You know something about heroes that I don’t?”

“You’re dang right I do. They’re crazy strong and kill anyone who’s not a human without any remorse. I was taught since I was a tiny pup that they’re nothing but ruthless, cold-blooded murderers.”

“Ooh, okay.”

Humans called these individuals “heroes,” but to the folks who were the targets of their aggression, they were nothing more than homicidal maniacs. It reminded me of a saying on Earth: “Heroes at home, murderers abroad.”

“All right, everyone, hop to it. I don’t think we’ll have any issues, but better safe than sorry.”

“Okay, Yukiki!”

“A hero, hm? I’d love to take a peek. Just one.”

“Leila, you know curiosity killed the cat—or sheep, in your case—so I wouldn’t if I were you,” Lew warned her.

As the ladies chatted, they did what I asked and walked to the door directly connected to the real throne room, heading back inside. The door was positioned in a hidden corner of the courtyard. I’d actually installed a bunch of these anyplace doors at strategic locations throughout the castle because it was too freaking big to go anywhere easily.

Until recently, only the dungeon's "inner circle,"—meaning me and Iluna—could operate the doors, but the dungeon's level had gone up by one not too long ago, and I think that unlocked the ability for me to grant access to others. Now, as long as someone had my permission, they could use the doors freely too. It made me pretty happy that stuff like this was happening and making dungeon life more and more convenient.

"You are certain you do not require my assistance?" Lefi asked. She was the only one still here.

"Yeah, no worries. I finally get to test the castle's defense mechanisms, you know? All you need to do is watch the show while chowing down on some sweets."

"Hmm... As you wish, then, I shall do just that. But do not hesitate to ask should the situation take a dangerous turn."

"You know it. I'll definitely take you up on that offer if I need to. I don't think things will get that dicey, though, since I'm just going to play it like I did last time and activate the traps one by one from our safe zone."

With a smirk on my face, I headed back to the real throne room with Lefi.

"Is this...a cave...?"

On her prowl through the forest, the girl had let the monsters she'd seen pass her by without incident. Now, she stood in front of a yawning hole so deep and dark that it looked like it would swallow everything in existence into its void.

"Maybe even...a dungeon?!"

A dungeon—a demon lord's lair. The moment she realized what she was looking at, she went on high alert. She drew her holy sword, Durendal, from its sheath on her hip, the glint of the blade easing the fear that fluttered in her heart. Based on the conjecture she'd heard from her superior who'd handed the order down to her, her target for this mission, the rumored demon lord, was likely to be near at hand.

"The demon lord will most likely possess a formidable amount of power in light of the fact that he lives in the Demonic Forest," they'd told her at the time.

“There are stories that he was birthed by the labyrinth itself. And while it’s improbable that his habitat is within the Supreme Dragon’s territory, it may not be far from that area. In the event you come across an opponent you can’t defeat, make certain to use the magical tool we’ve provided you and retreat immediately.”

Releaux, the chief administrator of Alfiro, knew exactly who the demon lord was and what he looked like, having met him in person. But because he was so vehemently at odds with the people supporting the military expedition against the demon lord, information wasn’t flowing freely between the two sides. As such, the details the Church had received from the aggressors were murky at best.

The only direct intelligence the warmongers had obtained had come from the knight commander of a troop that had fled the battle. According to his report, the other mobilized units most likely hadn’t returned because they’d been annihilated by the demon lord. However, he hadn’t been able to guarantee the truth of his statement as he hadn’t witnessed the event himself.

Furthermore, what these instigators hadn’t known was that the Supreme Dragon and the demon lord had formed an alliance. Unlike the crown prince, the commanding officers of the coalition had been aware that the Supreme Dragon wasn’t just a legendary being. Because of that, they had also known of the old pact stating that the dragon wouldn’t attack so long as its territory wasn’t invaded. Using that knowledge, they had erroneously calculated that, despite living within the Demonic Forest, the demon lord wouldn’t have inhabited any space within the Supreme Dragon’s territory for fear of retribution. That meant they would be safe from its wrath.

“O-Onward...!”

Nell had no idea about any of these aspects of the current situation—not the political machinations nor the fact that much of the “intelligence” the war hawks had compiled and passed on to the Church was completely off base. Blissfully unaware, she stepped into the cave.

A rush of cool air wrapped around her body. The clanging of her greaves echoed throughout the lair. She had the feeling that something lived here, but

right now, she saw neither hide nor hair of anything alive. An ominous silence dominated the space, filling her with trepidation that threatened to crush her heart.

“...A door?”

The continued absence of living beings had disheartened her as she'd moved deeper into the cave, but when she finally reached what appeared to be its deepest point, she saw an out-of-place yet beautifully constructed door standing there. After performing an exhaustive inspection of the door and its vicinity, she determined there probably weren't any traps connected to it. Her decision made, she gingerly turned the doorknob, which gave a quiet *clink* from beneath her hand. As she eased the door open, she breathed out in unthinking astonishment.

“Woow...!”

A meadow spread out on the other side of the door. Despite being situated within a cave, it was lush and green, stretching as far as the eye could see. It created the illusion of falling into another world entirely.

What fueled that fantastical impression even more was the unrelievedly black, impossibly huge castle. It towered frighteningly from the very center of the meadow. It was such a deep jet-black that it was almost sickening. And yet, it possessed a beauty so unique that it set the viewer's heart ablaze with emotion. There it stood, in all its glory.

“Incredible...”

Nell had never seen a building of this scale. Even the royal castle in the imperial capital was less than half the size of this one. That was how overwhelming its mere presence was.

Enthralled by the castle for some time, Nell came to her senses with a gasp, jerking her head from side to side.

Not good! Not good at all! I need to focus!

It seemed her guess had been right about the cave being the labyrinth's entrance. She also finally understood why she hadn't seen a single creature in that tunnel. In essence, the real showdown awaited her inside.

Nell tightened her grip on her holy sword. As she scowled at the sight before her, she kept an eye on her surroundings, ever vigilant. Then, she started walking toward the massive gates before her, which had been swung open almost invitingly.

“I find that peculiar look on your face discomfiting, Yuki.”

Sucking in a breath, I mentally pulled myself back to the dungeon when I heard Lefi say that. I could feel her staring a hole through me, so I fake-coughed to cover up what I’d been doing. *What the hell was that, dumbass?* I didn’t even realize I’d been grinning like a dope at the sight of the hero being entranced by my castle.

By the way, it would be super lame for my demon lord castle not to have a name, so I had dubbed it Castle Ruan Phionelle. Lefi came up with the name. In the dragon language, it meant “one who reigns supreme.” Nice branding, really. I totally dug it. It definitely made the castle feel a whole lot more magnificent. Never mind that everyone still called it the demon lord castle!

“What’re you talkin’ about, Lefi? I wasn’t doing squat.”

“Ah, so that is the way the wind blows, hm? You’ve no intention of killing that lass, have you, Yuki?”

“What? Whaaat? Where’d that idea come from?”

“I can tell with a single glance. I sense no bloodlust emanating from you, which is most unlike the last time.”

I had no choice but to raise my hands in surrender at the scorn in her eyes.

“I mean, she *is* a young girl. You said the same thing.”

I know I said I’d kill any and all enemies, but come on. She’s a shrimp—hardly any bigger than Lefi. The carnage I’d unleashed a while back had been on dudes and dudes alone. That shit had been a sausage fest, okay? I’d felt absolutely nothing massacring them. I *did* feel weird about offing a girl, though.

I guess that pretty much said it all about my sentiments toward humans in this world. Actually, it was more like my sentiments toward certain humans

rather than humankind as a whole. If I wanted to kill someone, I'd kill them. And if I didn't, I wouldn't.

If I were up against a little girl and ended up killing her, my conscience wouldn't rest easy. Therefore, I simply wouldn't kill her. Instead, I'd only use traps that would make her lose the will to fight. I'd done my very best to avoid setting the especially lethal traps for her.

"You filthy rake."

"Damn, low blow, woman. B-Besides, you're so far off the mark it isn't even funny. How could I *not* feel bad about killing a kid who's basically your size? I'm not *completely* heartless, you know. Even someone like me would think twice about doing that."

I rushed to try to explain myself to Lefi as she pinched my arm.

"Hmph, so be it. Since you insist, I will allow it. However, should the situation become unfavorable as a result of your decision, I will not aid you. Understood?"

"O-Okay, I get it. Just trust me, will you? I've got all the confidence in the world in my traps. Here, watch."

I calmed Lefi down since she was still eyeing me suspiciously, then we both turned to watch the images the Evil Eyes were transmitting to the interface.



Inside the castle now, Nell soldiered forward down the somewhat gloomy hallway, still extremely wary of her surroundings. It was designed simply enough, save for the high-quality columns and chandeliers placed along it in regular intervals. Taken all together, it created an air of regality.

Her Scout ability hadn't reacted, which meant that there were currently no enemies nearby. That didn't mean she could risk dropping her guard, however, as she was in the heart of the enemy's stronghold. She advanced further down the hallway, her holy sword clenched in her hands, when she came across something.

Are these made of stone?

A platoon of armor sets was lined up on both sides of the hall. They had been so elaborately constructed that she almost got the sense they would start moving at any moment. The stone troopers held various weapons, which were also made from stone, in their hands—swords, lances, morning stars, and so on. Some even possessed arms she'd never seen before.

“Whoa...”

If she were to be honest, she found them quite sinister. When she spied the darkness creeping from the slits in the helms, she felt the unpleasant sensation of being watched. At least, that was the kind of frightening thought her imagination drew up. She was extremely reluctant to keep going, but she also knew that stopping here wouldn't be a good idea. So, with a measure of fear, she kept moving ahead—and then sensed something wrong.

“Huh...? D-Did they just turn to face me...?”

It might have been her mind playing tricks, but when Nell had taken a quick look behind her, it had seemed that the helms on all the armor sets she'd passed were staring in her direction.

“I-It must be my imagination. I still don't sense any monsters, so it *has* to be my imagination.”

Trying to convince herself of that, she once again began to walk forward, only to be met with a set of armor standing in her way that had most definitely *not* been there a moment ago.

“Eeeek!”

While letting out that bloodcurdling scream, Nell reflexively slashed at the armor with her holy sword using a move that had been drilled into her body. Unsurprisingly, despite the suddenness of her movement, her swordsmanship was superb. Her swing carried through, slicing the stone armor cleanly in two. With a *thud*, the armor's torso fell to the floor.

“O-Oh my gosh, honestly...”

She squinted inside the armor but found nothing of note. Just a hollow emptiness. No reaction from her Scout ability either. *Then who...?* A chill ran up her spine. The foreboding feeling she got sent her rushing wordlessly down the

hallway.

Nell sped down the seemingly never-ending path, following it straight to wherever it would lead her. After walking for some time, though, two rows of armor again appeared ahead of her. With a disbelieving sound, she stopped in her tracks. Just like earlier, they stood on both sides of the hallway, but what struck her the most was what lay in the center of the path: a set with its upper half and lower half separated, the torso clearly having been sliced off. It was the same one she'd cut down earlier.

"Hngh—"

That small gasp of fear escaped her lips. At the same moment, a door at the end of the hall flew open with a *bang*, and seconds later, she heard sounds coming from within. It sounded like something was crawling toward her, groaning so ominously that it caused the hairs on the back of her neck to stand on end.

"Arghhh... Arghhh... Aaarghhhhh..."

"Gruuur... Graaarr..."

"Hrk... Hrrrk..."

Normally, Nell would think that monsters were approaching. But Scout still wasn't reacting. Not even a little bit. She couldn't feel the presence of anything living, which was wrong in and of itself given that she'd trained so long and so hard to hone that awareness. Her heart hammered rapidly within her chest. Her breathing grew even more ragged.

Overwhelmed by the disturbing atmosphere, she unconsciously took a step back. When she did, though, her foot connected with something. Alarmed, her whole body instantly stiffened. Then, fearfully, slowly, she craned her neck around. Right behind her floated the massive, severed head of a woman, her mouth gaping wide in a horrifying facsimile of a smile.

"Noooooooo!!!"

The hero's screams reverberated unceasingly throughout the castle.

“Mwa ha ha! Nothing a creator loves more than seeing their creations succeed!”

Watching the hero get so completely done in by my traps made me feel incredibly grateful to her. It was nice to see all my hard work pay off. I was pretty sure this was how demon lords in games and stuff felt when they saw their opponents hopelessly entangled in schemes of their design—it brought infinite joy. As a demon lord myself now, I could finally relate.

I remembered there being a handful of demon lords who were way too chill with enemies who actually managed to get out of their traps. But I figured that attitude was probably unintentional on their part. They were just so damn excited to see folks solve them that they didn’t even realize how careless they were being.

Tangent aside, this time around, I’d say that the tricks had less to do with traps and more to do with the dungeon’s monsters. The poltergeist thing that had popped up near the hero wasn’t actually a spirit—you know what, scratch that. “Spirit” was a good way to describe it. Everything that had happened to the hero was caused by my new dungeon summons, the wraiths. They didn’t have physical forms and their “bodies” were semi-transparent, so you could just think of them as specters or ghosts. Or, you know, spirits.

I’d summoned three wraiths and named them Rei, Rui, and Roh. Of course, I hadn’t known what I would get when I’d summoned them, but they’d all ended up being little girls. Appearance-wise, they looked a lot younger than Iluna—they looked like three-or four-year-olds. I still had no freaking clue why I’d basically gotten three toddlers, but I was praying to every god in every world that Lefi wouldn’t start calling me a pedo or something gross like that again when she found out.

A-Anyway, the three sisters’ looks aside, each one had their own special talent. Rei’s power was telekinesis, Rui’s was illusion magic, and Roh’s was mind magic. So, first, the one who’d moved the armor and slammed the door was Rei. Using her telekinesis, she could move things without actually touching them.

Next, we had Roh. Her mind magic essentially created hallucinations. Her

power wouldn't be effective on anyone who was naturally calm and collected, but lucky for us, the hero was a total scaredy-cat. That had made it a piece of cake for Roh to do her thing. From my all-seeing perspective, I'd watched the hero turn down the hallway I'd designed in a square until she eventually ended up back at the start with all the armor sets. Based on the shock on her face, Roh's mind magic showed her something different altogether to keep her from figuring out the hallway's true nature.

Finally, we had Rui. She was responsible for the huge woman's face with the slit mouth and the horrifying moans. She could use her illusion magic to make people see and hear things like that. The most amazing thing about Rui's magic was the fact that the things she created actually felt solid if you touched them. I'd tested it out myself once and it was a *weird* experience.

I was positive the hero had the Scout ability, but there was a good reason it hadn't responded to the trio. See, the little girls didn't feel any malice toward the hero—not even a little bit. They just loved playing tricks on people, so all they wanted to do was tease her. In other words, their motives were too simple. That was actually a fairly new piece of info for me, that Scout wouldn't activate unless the enemy truly wanted to hurt me.

Someone like me didn't struggle nearly as much with that sort of thing since I had both Scout and the Maps feature. By using them together, I could easily deal with hostile situations. But the hero didn't have Maps, so she'd never even noticed the wraiths were there, and she could *not* deal with that.

Normally, wraiths transformed into fiendish spirits after death because they'd been super hateful in life, so they held a ton of malice toward the living. Thankfully, that wasn't the case with my little summons. They'd been born as wraiths and had no previous lives to speak of, so there wasn't an ounce of malice in any of them. They just happened to be mischievous little buggers. The hero probably didn't even realize that everything that had happened was their handiwork.

Summoning the wraith sisters had cost me a fair amount of DP. Initially, I'd only planned on going for the normal ones without any special abilities, but unfortunately for my wallet, I'd ended up reading up on the stats of other wraith types in the monster catalog and wasn't able to resist the temptation.

Giving in to my greedy impulse, I'd deliberately blown a good chunk of the DP I'd made hunting with Rir. It was sooo freaking worth it, though. No regrets.

Hmm, yes, I think I'll call this particular dungeon defense strategy "Haunted House Mode." It was a good tactic for driving off invaders. I wanted to think of other tactics to keep in my back pocket too. All of them should be flexible enough to mod depending on the types of enemies. I could have something like a "100% Kill Mode" or a "Destroy Mode"... *Wait, those sound like they'd accomplish the same thing, so maybe not those two.*

All good, no biggie. Things were starting to get fun. I mean, this was the real thrill in playing a tower defense game, right? I couldn't wipe the smirk off my face as I watched the hero fall apart while I thought up one plan after another. Then, Lefi broke me out of my trance. She'd been staring up at me reproachfully ever since the hero got here.

"Yuki... I see you are not only a pedophile, but a sadist as well. There is no saving you."

"Dude, cut it out, will ya? When you say it like that, it *actually* makes me sound like a pervert."

"Yukiki...you'll make me sad if you keep bullying her like that."

Turning away from the screen she'd been watching, Iluna, who was sitting between me and Lefi, gazed at me disapprovingly.

"Aww, c-come on, Iluna, don't say that. She's technically an enemy, you know?"

I jabbed my finger at the screen in protest, but that backfired immediately. In the like three seconds I'd looked away, the hero had become the naughty little girls' full-fledged victim. Her fear-o-meter was clearly maxed out because she was now cowering in a corner of the hall, curled up in the fetal position and sobbing hysterically.

"Shit."

"Yuki..."

"Yukiki..."

“Okay, all right, fine. Damn, don’t look at me like that. I’ll go put a stop to it, so just...just chill.”

I couldn’t take the way they were looking at me, so I stood up and power walked to the door connecting the real throne room to the castle. It may or may not have looked like I was escaping an uncomfortable situation, but it was fine. Totally fine.

Considering how much I’d broken her will to fight, I seriously doubted she’d attack even if I stood right in front of her, but shit, could Miss Hero have given up *any quicker*? I still had tricks up my sleeve that I wanted the wraith sisters to help me pull off. Now *those* might have actually scared her to death. *Man, what a piss-off.*

Kinda fuming now, I made my way deeper into the castle—you know, the castle so massive that it’d be easy to get lost in it. I went down a uselessly gigantic staircase toward the first floor where the hero should have been.

“Hic... Hngh...”

Son of a bitch, what the hell am I supposed to do here? She was bawling uncontrollably, curled up into a tiny ball with her face buried in her knees. “Brave hero” my ass. Who in the Hello Kitten thought it was a good idea to send this *kid* to take me out?

Nope, pump the brakes. Before I got too caught up in being all sympathetic, I had to remember that the humans considered her really strong. *Oh well. I’ll take her over some fight-happy assclown any day of the week.*

“Heeey. Hi there, little lady.”

“Nnn...”

The hero whimpered and curled up even tighter as she heard my voice get closer.

“Come on, you’re fine. Don’t be scared. I’m just a, uhhh...a normal guy? Yeah, that’s it. Just your average, everyday living person.”

My words got her to slowly, fearfully lift her head and inspect me with her red, swollen eyes.

“Wh-Who are you, mister?”

“I’m... You’re probably better off not knowing. For both our sakes.”

Me saying that made her look confused. Not a second later, though, she turned pale and pointed a shaking finger at something behind me.

“Th-Those... B-Behind you...”

“Huh? Oh, them.”

Behind me were three dolls modeled after little girls. I hadn’t even noticed until the hero started stuttering. They floated cheerfully in the air, tumbling around every now and then.



“Thanks, girls. Appreciate the hard work. You can go play over there now if you want.”

I lightly patted their doll heads. They squealed in delight, then drifted away to play. I’d given those dolls to the wraith sisters, figuring they’d like having something they could take possession of.

“Th-Those dolls obeyed you... Th-Then, y-you’re the demon lord?!”

Having come to that conclusion, she unsheathed the beautifully engraved sword on her hip while glaring at me. It wasn’t a particularly dignified scene, though, since her butt was still glued to the floor. According to Analysis, that was her holy sword. I couldn’t get a read on its specific abilities because those details were blocked, but I could tell it was dangerous.

Nah, miss me with that shit. It wouldn’t have surprised me at all if that thing had some sort of suicide attack designed specifically to kill anything demon-related. At the very least, it was probably twice as effective against demon lords. That was par for the course for a *holy* sword, right?

“Ummm... Yeah, guess the cat’s out of the bag. Oh, I wouldn’t use that if I were you. Also, I’m not really in the mood to fight someone who just got done crying her eyes out.”

“I-I wasn’t crying!”

“You really think I’m gonna buy that? Your eyes are all red and puffy.”

Given how exasperated I sounded, the hero had probably figured out that I’d seen her crying.

“Wh-Why would you do something so mean?!” she grumbled. Her cheeks were pretty red, so she must’ve been embarrassed.

“The hell do you mean, ‘why’? If someone barged into *your* house with a weapon, wouldn’t *you* try to get rid of them too? Although I definitely didn’t expect to find my intruder blubbering on the floor.”

Before I’d set the whole thing in motion, I’d told the three sisters not to mess with the hero if she ultimately turned right around and left the way she’d come in. But she hadn’t, so of course shit had escalated.

“Hngh... When you put it like that... A-And I’m not blubbering!”

“All right, sure, have it your way. But scram, okay? Vamoose. I’m in a tight spot now thanks to you.”

I couldn’t help hang the laundry or think of ideas for the castle’s interior design until she left.

“I-I can’t do that! If I leave now, you’ll just attack everyone again!”

Christ on a cracker, this kid’s a pain in the ass.

“What? ‘Again’? You mean when I stormed the town to kill those literal goddamn *criminals*? Oh, maybe you’re talking about when I wiped out *the army that came to kill me*? Let’s make one thing clear: I didn’t start *either* of those fights. It was *you humans* who made the first move both of those times. If you’re gonna come at me armed and dangerous, don’t be surprised when I return the favor.”

Okay, so, I’d *technically* struck first when those soldiers had marched into the forest with me as their target. But like, come on, not my fault they’d stormed in here armed to the teeth. I’d just been proactive is all. That was legitimate self-defense. It totally was, all right?

“Huh? But...”

“I don’t know what you were or weren’t told, but you’re too naive, hero. Don’t just ask ‘how high’ when your superiors tell you to jump. If you *really* want to save someone, that’s not the way to do it. You need to think for yourself and decide for yourself. That goes for me too. Don’t just take my word for it. Actually *think* about it yourself. And one last thing for you to keep in mind: if you humans hadn’t tried to start shit with me, I would’ve just let you do whatever the hell you wanted.”

Despite my epic, self-righteous speech, I would never in a million years be a hero if I had the choice. Even if some bizarre twist of fate *did* turn me into one, I definitely wouldn’t be the typical kind. No, I’d be the kind of hero who chased shitloads of money, status, and glory. I couldn’t care less if that made me a materialist, it was *my* life to live. I’d put it on the line for myself—no one else—and do things however I damn well pleased.

Let me take my argument to the extreme with an example. Remember that time I went to save Iluna? I did it for myself, and I'd do it again for the same reason. Life would suck without her, so I'd always go and rescue her. If something bad happened to her, I'd make it right. In the end, it was all about *me*. I saved people for my own sake, not theirs.

Even for those who *thought* they wanted to save others, that desire ultimately came from within. They really just wanted to help people for their own selfish reasons. But those blowhards liked to cover that up by pretending to be all saintly, reaching out a helping hand while being all “the act was a reward in itself.” That made me sick. Those types would be way cooler if they were straight-up about the whole thing and said they only did shit like that for themselves.

The hero kept quiet.

“Anyway, there you have it. It's not like I'm actively planning on killing humans, but it's another story entirely if your people plan on attacking me. In that case, I have zero qualms about cracking a few skulls. You oughta make that crystal clear to your bosses when you get back.”

With that parting shot, I started heading out—but stopped in my tracks when I heard the hero mutter something.

“...Then why?”

“Why what?”

“Why didn't you kill me even though my mission was to hunt you down...?”

“Cause you're a woman.”

“What...?”

The hero's mouth dropped open in shock at my totally unexpected response.

“You're not even a woman, really. You're just a little girl—a kid. Killing you would be bad for my conscience, and I'm not about that life, so I didn't. That's it.”

“A-A woman... H-Hey, I'm not a kid!”

“Yeah, yeah. My sincerest apologies for offending you, my lady.”

Waving my hand at her carelessly, I turned around to leave again, this time for real. Unfortunately, the hero stopped me again, this time raising her voice.

“H-Hey! W-Wait!”

“Now what?”

“I-I’m still feeling too weak to stand up, so I was wondering if maybe you could help me...?”

I said nothing while considering her request. But the situation had gotten interesting. *Does she have the biggest balls of all time for asking a supposed enemy that? Or is she really just that exhausted?* I guess I’d find out one way or the other.



“Ahhh...”

Submerged in the hot water of the open-air bath, the hero sighed in pleasure as the warmth of the water gradually seeped into her whole body. When she turned her gaze upward, the starry night sky greeted her as if watching over her gently.

It had been some time since she’d had a bath like this. Living at home, she’d never had the opportunity to visit a real bathhouse. During her stay at the Church while undergoing her training, they’d occasionally allowed her to use the one on-site, but it was nowhere near as extravagant as this one. Compared to those few times, this particular bath felt incredibly good and downright luxurious.

Yes, for some reason, Nell was soaking in a hot spring. To her absolute embarrassment, she’d gone so weak in the knees from all the shocking events in the castle that she’d needed that demon lord’s help to stand up. Lending her his shoulder, he’d said, “You might as well stay the night, considering how late it is and how much scarier the monsters outside are around this time.”

Meddlesome man, she’d thought, but those thoughts had fled as they walked behind the castle and she laid her eyes on a building the likes of which she had never seen. The demon lord had led her to said building, and before she even realized it, she’d found herself immersed in the hot spring.

“What a strange person.”

The demon lord she'd met was quite different from the individual she'd been told to expect. According to her superiors' information, the man was a demon lord so evil he could have easily been the villain straight out of a fairy tale. Scores of humans had fallen victim to him. Now that she had actually met him, however, he felt so utterly normal to her.

He reminded her of a regular boy next door, albeit slightly older. Even when she'd realized that he was the demon lord and she'd grabbed her weapon, she still hadn't felt a trace of animosity from him. Her Scout ability hadn't reacted either. The only conclusion she could draw was that he possessed no enmity or bloodlust toward her whatsoever.

I guess this is what it means to think for myself and decide for myself, huh?

The demon lord's words had hit her like a ton of bricks, permanently imprinting into her mind. Nell had lived her whole life as a good girl. Not wanting to bother her endlessly hardworking mother, she'd been obedient and upright, doing whatever her mother asked of her. Even when she'd been selected as a hero, she hadn't changed her docile ways. In order to become the greatest hero as soon as possible, she had obeyed the knights who'd trained her and the priests who'd looked after her. She'd even paid attention to the elderly conjurers' lectures. That was how she had lived until now.

As a result of that way of life, Nell had unknowingly internalized acting the moment someone commanded her to do so. But the demon lord's words finally forced her to acknowledge the fact that she'd become a puppet who didn't think for herself anymore. That was the antithesis of the sort of hero she aspired to be. The heroes she knew acted on their own without needing to be told and brought evil to justice before the evildoers could even blink.

“Where did I go wrong...?” Sitting in a daze in the tub, she muttered quietly to herself. Then, suddenly, the door to the bath opened with a loud rattle. “Ngh!”

Reflexively, Nell rushed to her feet and took up a fighting stance while still inside the tub, her long years of training taking over. Once she realized that a little girl had entered, though, she immediately released the tension in her body.

“Huh? Oh, hi! You’re the one who cried because my big brother Yukiki bullied you!”

“That kind of judgment really hurts, so would you mind not saying that again?! Wait, hold on! You were watching?!” She couldn’t help her defensive reaction to those words, in no small part because she didn’t even know the little girl. But when Nell heard herself and came to her senses, she coughed to cover up the moment, then started another line of questioning. “Ummm... And who are you?”

“I’m Iluna! What about you?”

“My name is Nell. Nice to meet you.”

“Mm-hmm! You too!”

With the introductions out of the way, Iluna, an adorable little girl with golden hair, sat down in front of the washbasin and started cheerfully scrubbing herself. Watching her, Nell decided that she posed no threat and once more sank deep into the tub.

“You...called him your big brother, so are you that man—that demon lord’s little sister?”

“Nope! But Yukiki is my big brother anyway!”



Ohhh, I see. That's just how she thinks of him. Once she understood that, Nell finally asked the burning question on her mind.

"So, um...your big brother... What kind of person is he?"

The young girl beamed broadly and began speaking with a happy expression on her face.

"Let's see! Yukiki is suuuper-duper cool! He always comes to my rescue, and he always plays with me too. What else? Oh, yeah! He can be a little dumb sometimes, but I think that's really cute too!"

"O-Oh, is that right?"

Nell's tone indicated a small measure of discomfort at the unexpectedly passionate answer. It made her wonder what the demon lord had done for this little girl to be so attached to him. Could he have been the kind of unsavory character she'd heard about occasionally who liked small children in an unacceptable way?

"He hasn't done anything strange to you, has he?"

"Strange? Yukiki is always strange, though. Like, he'll start shouting out of nowhere or suddenly run out of the room and stuff."

"I-I see. So he always acts like that, huh?"

I seriously can't figure that demon lord out. The image Nell had in her mind of him started crumbling with a gravelly sound.

"Pray explain yourself, Yuki?"

"Uh, well, I don't think she has any ulterior motives, and I'm pretty sure she doesn't want to fight anymore either. Plus, it's so dark out, y'know? And we've got plenty of room to spare in the inn. I just figured she could stay the night. Oh, and, um, I thought it wouldn't hurt to suss out what's going on with the humans too, just in case. Knowledge is power and all that jazz."

"So you intend to use logic to reason with me as to why you brought another woman into the fold? I will admit that I was the one who goaded you into approaching her, but I do *not* recall telling you to bring her home. To add insult

to injury, I only *now* find out that you summoned those wraith lasses?”

“L-Look, that wasn’t on purpose, okay?! It was a spur-of-the-moment thing! It’s not *my* fault!”

Exiting the bathing area, Nell found herself in a spacious room in the building. There, the demon lord had been forced to kneel seiza-style by a lovely silver-haired girl who looked a bit younger than Nell herself.

“Um...excuse me... I’m done with the bath. Thank you for letting me use it.”

“Hm? Ah, the whimpering hero, I take it?”

“Curses! Is that how I’m going to be known from now on?!”

The hero raised her voice in frustration at being deemed a crybaby by yet another young girl who was a stranger to her. The first to do so, the flaxen-haired little girl, had left not too long ago. When Nell and Iluna had decided to get out of the tub, a woman in a maid outfit had appeared. Her sheep horns indicated she was a part of the demon species. “Oh my, thank you so much for looking after her,” she’d said before taking Iluna away. The little girl had sleepily waved farewell to her with a “Bye-bye!”

Trailing that woman had been another young lady—a beast person also wearing a maid uniform. She’d been unusually agitated, saying, “L-Leila, hurry up! I-It’s too dangerous here!” Nell wondered what was wrong with her.

“Oh, hey, look at that, Lefi. Our guest has arrived, so we need to be hospitable. Come on, where are your manners?”

“Fool. Have Leila handle her. As for you, you will be spending a very long night with me.”

When she’d first met him, Nell had found the demon lord mysterious and inscrutable. Now, she watched that same demon lord being scolded by a girl smaller than himself. *What’s real and what isn’t? I really don’t know*, she thought.

In the end, sensing no danger whatsoever, the hero had fallen into a rejuvenating sleep within a comfortable futon in one of the inn’s rooms. It was

now the next morning.

“All right, hero, I’ve got a bunch of stuff I want to ask you. First and foremost, who gave you the order to come here and what exactly did they tell you?”

The demon lord asked Nell that question with an incredibly drowsy look on his face. *Did the girl lecture him all night long or something?* Having eaten her fill of a delicious breakfast made with foods she’d never seen before, Nell felt simultaneously thankful and confused, wondering what exactly she was doing here at this point.

“Ummm... O-One of the Church’s leaders told me to defeat an evil member of the demon species wh-who had killed many people...”

“That’s it? That’s really all you were told?”

“Th-That’s it...” she replied, curling into herself a bit.

I know it’s too little too late now, but I can’t believe I didn’t even question them. What kind of brainless idiot am I? Nell mentally reprimanded herself.

“You know, it’s not a bad thing to be so purehearted, but it might not hurt for you to learn how to be more suspicious of people.”

“Yes... I’m sorry...”

At a loss for words, she nodded meekly at the demon lord. The two of them were the only ones in the building she’d been guided to the night before, which sat behind the castle. Aside from the sheep-horned maid who’d brought her breakfast, she hadn’t seen anyone else then. She supposed they were all inside the black castle.

“No, it’s fine. You mentioned the Church, but are you sure it wasn’t the military that sent you?”

“I’m sure. I belong to the Church, you see. The person in charge of the order of the holy knights gave me the command. But they didn’t seem too keen on the mission when they told me about it either.”

“Hmm... Interesting...”

Burned into Nell’s memory was the grim look on her superior’s face when they’d relayed the instructions. It had been so different from their usual

dignified expression. She'd suspected that the directive had come from their own superiors, which was most likely why they hadn't been able to turn it down. She clearly remembered the distaste and reluctance in their demeanor when they'd given her the order.

As they'd been talking for some time now, Nell suddenly realized that maybe she shouldn't be telling the demon lord these things. Anxious now, she posed a question to him.

"U-Um, I-I just told you a lot of things, b-but that doesn't mean you're going to p-plan an attack against them now, does it...?"

"That depends entirely on them. If they insist on being a thorn in my side, I'll crush them with all my might to protect my peaceful life. Make sure you tell them that when you go back."

"Eek! O-Okay, I understand."

Somewhat overwhelmed by the demon lord's piercing gaze, Nell nodded emphatically.

"In any case, it's not like slaughtering folks is a hobby of mine. If anything, I'm actually really bad with gore. But if someone comes after me with weapons galore, I have no choice but to grab my own and fight back, right?"

"Right..."

She completely understood the demon lord's reasoning. Last night, when she'd been nestled inside the cozy bedding, she had thought hard about a lot of things. About her life until now and her life moving forward. About this place and the demon lord. Only a day had passed since her arrival here, but after meeting all the women, Nell had realized something important. For some reason or another, all of them seemed to trust the demon lord.

If he truly were the kind of evil demon lord who focused solely on committing atrocities, there wouldn't have been even a smidgen of trust between them. They wouldn't have been having so much fun living with him either. As such, Nell concluded the demon lord's behavior was worthy of earning their trust—perhaps to the point that he acted like the heroes in fairy tales. After all, fairy tale heroes used their powers for the sake of others, winning everyone's trust

and love. Of course, this was all just speculation on her part, but she was almost certain that was how the demon lord had earned theirs. His way of life was so much closer to a hero's than her own. All she'd done was blindly listen to others and let life happen to her.

So what is a demon lord? What is a hero? And what makes a person one or the other? The difference between the two was ostensibly vast, but she didn't yet know what that difference was.

"Hey, why're you spacing out?"

"Huh?! Oh, um, i-it's nothing. Th-That aside, there's s-something I've been wanting to ask you, Mr. Demon Lord..."

"What's up?" the demon lord replied while sipping on a cup of tea the sheep-horned maid had brought a short while ago.

"Are you, you know...one of *those* people? The ones with an abnormal fetish for, uh, for children?"

"Hrng—"

The demon lord spat out his tea with that choked sound.

"Whoa! Ugh, that's disgusting."

"*Cough cough*. The hell—*hack*—else was I s'posed to do when you said that? And why the *fuck* does everyone treat me like I'm some kiddy fiddler?"

"'Kiddy fiddler'?"

"Another word for the freaks who like little kids in the bad way. Let me tell you that I am absolutely, positively, one million percent *not* that. I get that there are a lot of young girls and young-looking women here, but it's not like I was aiming for that, okay? The dramatic events of my life just unfolded the way they did and I ended up surrounded by little kids without my consent. I very much do *not* have that kind of interest. We clear on that?"

"Hmmm... Well, I don't really want to comment on people's hobbies, but it would be awful if you tried something with someone as small as Iluna. You could probably get away with seducing the silver-haired girl, though..."

"Yo, Little Miss Hero. Did you listen to a goddamn thing I just said? I told you

I'm not into little girls like that, didn't I? Besides, Lefi is...you know what, forget her. I'm not touching that with a ten-foot pole. As far as Iluna's concerned, she's my adorable little sister and I'd cut off my own arm before I'd even *think* about laying a hand on her. The hell is wrong with you?!"

"Then that means that—what's her name? Lefi? She's still an option?"

"Rghhh! No! *Fuck* no! That's not even *close* to what I meant! I see her as an equal, so she literally doesn't even need my protection or attention like that!"

Nell giggled, watching the demon lord trying to justify himself in a panic.

He really is overflowing with human emotions.

"You wanna let me in on the joke?"

"Well, it's just that I was so enthusiastic about killing a demon lord yesterday, but today, we're having a conversation like normal people. Life sure is strange, isn't it?"

"Yeah, you're not wrong about that. Definitely *is* weird, huh?"

"About what you said yesterday, Mr. Demon Lord... You were right about everything. You really can't understand something unless you make the effort yourself. That's why I've decided that from now on, I'd think about things on my own and make my own choices."

"I, for one, am totally in favor of that plan. Having my list of enemies get longer just for being a demon lord is a pain in my ass too, you know?"

At his careless shrug and easygoing words, Nell found herself laughing once again.



It was the day after the hero's "invasion." She was a lot more accommodating than I'd imagined, which really worked in my favor. Well, "accommodating" might not be the right word. More like "innocent." Sure, I was the one who'd invited her to stay so I could figure out what the humans were up to, but honestly, I'd been kinda suspicious of her in the beginning. I'd been worried about whether or not she could be trusted, but according to Iluna and the big ol' smile on her face, "It's okay, Yukiki! She's a nice person!"

I had total faith in Iluna's intuition, so her say-so was more than enough to get me to drop my guard entirely. I guessed that she had some kind of instinct or ability that allowed her to decide if people and things were good or evil. There was one time I'd gone out into the forest with her and I hadn't needed to tell her what was dangerous and what wasn't. She seemed to know the difference automatically, so if she said the hero was a good person, then that was that, end of story.

Based on the information the hero had given me, I'd come up with the theory that my real enemy was most likely the nation itself. I had evidence to support my hypothesis too. First, churches were powerful everywhere they existed. The hero's particular church having an order of holy knights—essentially its very own military force—was more than enough proof of its might. In a perfectly normal world, there would be natural constraints on how much power one person could exercise, and yet someone high enough on the political food chain not only forced the Church to act against its own wishes, but also had the power to order a regular military expedition into the forest to attack me. Even so, something felt off about this whole thing. Inconsistent, even.

Despite actually mustering the troops, the scale of the operation had been, frankly speaking, surprisingly small. One possible reason for that was that my opponent—or opponents—had underestimated how strong I was. But then the second time around they sent out a lone hero, though I guess they did think of her as a powerful one. They were clearly more than a little cautious about me, but it was all still kinda fishy.

Thankfully, nothing bad had happened to me and mine since the hero turned out to be a wuss. Although to be honest, if we *had* ended up fighting, there was a decent chance I might have actually lost. My overall stats were better than hers, but the reality was that she'd undergone true combat training. Me? I was still a white belt. I didn't even have any real fighting techniques, for crying out loud. I could humbly acknowledge that my skills had improved to some degree from fighting monsters in the forest, but I sure wasn't so far up my own ass to think I had a shot at winning against a professional.

That was what I kept circling back to—that they'd only dispatched *one* hero. I could see the argument for not sending another army after all the casualties

last time, but if that was their concern, wouldn't their hero being defeated have been an even bigger loss? You know, considering how important heroes were to humans and all.

At the end of the day, I didn't know the reason they were so hell-bent on storming their way into the forest. Assuming things here worked like they did back on Earth and the nation's military policies were public knowledge, I couldn't for the life of me figure out why they were doing all this sneaking around. If the country seriously wanted to retaliate for my attack on that settlement, then the damn government should just summon the troops *and* the heroes for an all-out assault on me. Like, c'mon, brah. Bring it on already.

I had a hunch that whoever was behind everything had a lot of pull in the kingdom, what with commanding both the Church and the military, but unfortunately, nothing was clear about them or this situation as a whole. *I should really take a trip to a human town at least once so I can collect information.* The thought had been in the back of my mind for a while now, and maybe the time had finally come to put it into action. And wouldn't you know it, I had a point of contact now too.

"There you have it, so lead the way, hero."

"Ummm...I have no idea what you're talking about. Where exactly am I taking you?"

She gave me a confused look when I made my sudden declaration.

"You're on your way back now, right? Let me tag along."

"Huh?"

"I've been thinking about visiting a town for a while, and this is the perfect opportunity to do it. So thanks in advance!"

"Huh???"

"Oh, Yuki. I have decided that I shall accompany you as well."

"Wait, for real?"

Lefi's words were so unexpected that I unthinkingly turned my head in her direction. By the way, I forgot to mention that I'd already discussed this plan

with everyone in the dungeon. Lefi hadn't breathed a word of her intentions back then, though. Iluna had wanted to go with me too, but a human settlement was way too dangerous for a little girl who was part of the demon species. Lefi could apparently transform completely into a human and self-defense wasn't a problem for her, so she'd be fine, but Iluna couldn't look after herself.

I would've done my damndest to protect her if shit went sideways, of course, I just wasn't confident that I could hold my own against a pack of humans for a super long time. That went double now that I knew strong ones like Nell existed. There might be decent people out there, different from the ones I'd killed, but that wasn't a risk I was willing to take since humans and demons were basically at war. I couldn't ignore the possibility of Iluna being exposed to danger if her true form was revealed, even if we tried to disguise her.

Instead, I'd asked Iluna to be in charge of our dungeon while I was gone. As far as meals and chores went, Leila and Lew would...well, let's be honest, she really only needed Leila for that.

"Oh? Perhaps you have a good reason I cannot go with you?"

Lefi smirked, daring me to challenge her.

"Nope, not one. In fact, I'm happy about it. I just didn't expect it is all."

With Lefi along for the ride, I've got nothing to worry about on the off chance things actually do go off the rails. I was a liiittle worried about the dungeon's defenses, but I could have Rir handle that while I was gone. I'd also set up a heavy camouflage so that intruders couldn't find the cave that led to the dungeon. If someone *did* find it somehow, though, I had another disguise in place to keep them from finding the door that connected to the meadow. *It'll be fine. I've got everything covered. I think.*

"I-I see. I have made you happy... Ahem, in any case, Yuki, we finally came to the realization that you are even weaker to women than we initially suspected. It would only cause us problems should your return be delayed on account of you becoming infatuated with one. Thusly, it was decided that I would grace you with my presence. I can monitor you easily and nip any such occurrence in

the bud.”

“Since she’s going with you, I don’t have to worry about that either, Yukiki! I’m counting on you, Lady Lefifi!”

“Indeed. You may leave this to me.”

“Aww, what the hell, you guys? C’mon... Wait, Iluna, *that’s* why you wanted to come with? So I wouldn’t pick up women?”

I couldn’t help but smile bitterly as I said that.

“All right, as you ladies wish, then. Leila, Lew, keep an eye on things for me, yeah?”

“Of course, sir!”

“You got it, my lord! We’ll do our dangest to make sure everything’s ship-shape while you’re gone!”

“Okay, now I know we’re screwed.”

“What?! Why?!”

Lew’s shocked expression made me crack up.

“Kidding, kidding. Don’t worry, I trust you. Rir, it’s your job to protect this place while I’m gone. Crush all enemies, okay? No mercy. You too, Shii. Look after everyone.”

Rir nodded in agreement, ready to carry out my orders. Shii jiggled determinedly as if saying, “Yes, boss!” Oh, and in a fun little surprise, the wraith sisters looked down at us in the meadow from one of the castle’s windows. They waved me off happily.

“Okay, here we go. We’ll be back in a week or so.”

“Indeed. Until then, everyone.”

“Bye-byyyy! Be safe!”

“I wish you all a safe journey.”

“See you soon, my lord, my lady!”

“Umm...I still haven’t agreed to this, though...” the hero mumbled under her

breath.

Chapter 3: Attack on Alfiro!

“Hello, boys! I’m baaack!” I shouted triumphantly, pumping both fists into the air.

Some of the humans walking the same road as me and my group laughed under their breath. They probably pegged me as some sort of country bumpkin.

“O-Oh my gosh, Mr. Yuki, will you cut it out? You’re embarrassing us!”

“Whatever, dum-dum. Also, how about saying something a little more original than that? But *also* also, I don’t actually care! Nothing’s gonna stop this impulse roaring inside me from getting out!”

“You can’t be serious...”

“Best to give up, her— Apologies, I mean Nell. There is naught we can do but leave him be whenever his spirits rise like this.”

The hero was so ashamed of having to be near me that she kept trying to shush me. Lefi, on the other hand, just looked on with a bored expression. *You really do get me, Lefi.* After all, there was no way I wouldn’t be pumped about visiting a town in another world. As we were all aware, the first and only time I’d ever gone to one wasn’t exactly on a social call, and sightseeing obviously hadn’t been on the agenda then. If you hadn’t guessed it already, we were indeed in the town I’d attacked. Those majestic defensive walls I’d seen from the air looked even more majestic down here on the ground. They still didn’t hold a candle to my castle walls, though!

“All righty, then! Off we go!”

“O-Oh, wait!”

I frolicked my way toward the city but was stopped just outside the gate by a spear being shoved in my face. Looking down the thing and then at the guy holding it, I saw a soldier who also seemed to double as a gatekeeper.

“Hey, old guy, I wanna head inside. Mind moving that spear?”

“Identification documents.”

“What?”

“Show me your identification documents. You can’t enter the city without them.”

Huh? For real? I need ID? Now that’s some bullshit. The audacity of this world to have such a hard-on for security even though it wasn’t even that civilized—or industrialized, for that matter. Why couldn’t they just charge a gate toll and call it a day? Not that that would’ve gotten me in the door either since I was technically broke.

“Come *on*, old guy. You’re letting all *those* folks just walk through without stopping *them*.”

“Those people have visited countless times, so I know their faces very well. In comparison, I don’t know *you*, which automatically makes you suspect. Also, don’t call me ‘old guy.’ I’m not that old.”

Private Old-Guy stared me down through the slit in his helm. His firm, suspicious gaze was practically burning a hole in me.

N-No, impossible... I definitely hadn’t expected to run into such a massive obstacle.

“Shit. My hopes and dreams, dashed...”

“Ugh, that’s why I told you to wait!”

Rushing over, Nell pulled something out from her armor. It looked like...an official seal? Whatever it was, she showed it to Private Old-Guy.

“I belong to the Church. They’re my companions on my journey. I’ll request proper documents later, so in the interim, please issue temporary identification papers and visitor passes to them.”

“That sigil... Understood. Please wait here.”

The old guy looked kinda surprised when he saw the seal. That almost immediately changed into a serious look, which was a complete one-eighty from how he’d been staring at me. He then headed into what could be called a guardroom.

“Hey, her—Nell, what did you just show him?”

“It’s a special passport issued by the Church. A hero needs to be able to enter and leave the country easily, otherwise there’s not much point being one, right?”

She said that in such a “what are you, stupid?” tone that I couldn’t *not* say something back, so that was exactly what I did.

“Well, color me shocked. Despite being ignorant of the real world, you’re unexpectedly competent in other ways, huh?”

“I *really* don’t appreciate hearing that from you right now. Also, can you *please* be careful with how you address me?”

The reason she had us calling her “Nell” was because she wanted to hide her identity as a hero. She’d made that a condition for guiding us to the town, so she drilled it into our heads every time we almost slipped up by calling her “hero.” I could understand why she was worried since she probably had a bunch of hero crap that she was obligated to deal with. I’d definitely find those responsibilities a pain to deal with if I were in her shoes.

“Okay, okay, I get it, so don’t jump down my throat. That goes for you too, Lefi.”

“Understood. A simple enough request.”

“Sheesh, I sure hope so...”

After a few minutes of waiting in front of the guardroom, the old guy finally walked out. He was carrying two card-sized wooden plates.

“Thank you for waiting. These are for you two. You should be grateful for the holy knight’s presence, else you wouldn’t have been allowed to enter. But if you make trouble while on those temporary papers, I won’t hesitate to cast you out immediately. You have been warned.”

“*Holy knight*”? *Is he talking about the hero?* Interesting. So just being affiliated with the Church had him assuming she was one.

“Roger that. Thanks a bunch, old guy.”

“Indeed. You have my thanks, youngster.”

“...Just so you’re aware, I will *not* be granting entry to either of you next time.”

I didn’t know why the old guy was so ready to burst a blood vessel, but I gave him one last look as we walked past the outer walls and into the city.

At long last, a town in another world spread out before me. Feeling like I’d stumbled into an RPG, I couldn’t help getting excited all over again. I talked to the girls on either side of me without even bothering to hide my enthusiasm.

“Okay! First things first, ladies! Let’s stuff our faces!”

“Hey, Lefi, check it out. That looks delicious.”

“Oh ho, indeed it does, Yuki. This one as well.”

“All right, let’s try both.”

“Ugh...my money’s disappearing so fast...”

Now that we finally had the chance, Lefi and I were hitting up each and every stall lining the main street of the town. At the hero’s expense, of course.

Ooh, this tastes great. I was currently gobbling up grilled meat on skewers, and I could tell it was monster meat. Unlike my noob ass that only knew the bare minimum when it came to cooking, these particular morsels had clearly been made by a professional. The juices, in all the scrumptious glory, wouldn’t stop exploding in my mouth. These things were just as good as the stuff Leila cooked.

That thought had me wondering about her all over again because the sheep-horned girl was still very much an enigma to me. She was great at cooking, not to mention a whiz with chores. I’d peek in on her lessons with Iluna every now and then too, and let me tell you, the way she taught made everything super easy to understand. She was such a good teacher that I’d asked her once if that had been her job in the past, but she said that wasn’t the case. Really, though, I didn’t particularly care what her deal was. For as much as I did sometimes get to wondering about her past, the only thing that mattered to me was that she’d taken a ton of the weight off my shoulders.

As for Lew, she'd been getting better at doing stuff. She still wasn't perfect, obviously, but I could see definite improvement. That was good enough for me.

Right, forgot to mention—I was walking around town all bold-like, not bothering to hide my face, but even so, I was pretty sure nobody here knew who I really was. The last time I was here, my wings had been on display and I'd been terrorizing everyone nearby with the full might of my magic. I figured that the only people who'd actually recognize me as the dude from back then would be anyone who had gotten a good, hard look at my face during the incident, and the only two people I could think of who fit that bill were the mayor of the town and the squadron leader from the forest.

Lefi had hidden her horns and tail, so she also looked like a completely normal human. She'd told me that she always had those parts of her visible because she got anxious when they weren't, and that had made hiding them a bit of an ordeal for her. I could relate, though. I bet I'd feel the same if one of my arms suddenly disappeared. That'd definitely get me jittery too.

Back to the present. We were strolling around, taking everything in and filling our stomachs while the hero trudged along with us. "Hey, can you two ease up a little on the spending?" she asked us from the verge of tears. But just as I was about to respond, we found a group of people.

"Ooh, what're they up to?"

I looked over at what the crowd was focusing on: a street performer putting on a magic show. The scale of the magic wasn't that big, but the execution was precise and delicate. Everyone was obviously having a good time.

Huh. So magic can be used like that too. Lefi was my only point of reference for magic use, so at its core, my magic was basically a scorched-earth, take-no-prisoners type of deal. But watching this performer gave me a new way to think about magic.

"Hmm... I cannot see. Yuki!"

Unable to see past the wall of people, Lefi glanced up at me demandingly.

"Yeah, okay, I gotchu."

I squatted down, thrust my head between her legs, then straightened up

again, lifting her onto my shoulders.



“Yes, this will do nicely.”

“Pleased to be of service, my lady.”

“Wow, you two really get along, huh?”

There was a hint of awe in the hero’s voice when she said that. Then, still watching us, she continued speaking.

“When you’re done watching the theatrics, I want you to come with me to the adventurers’ guild.”

“And what is this guild?”

“The guild basically acts as a middleman for all kinds of jobs, like monster hunting. Also, the folks there don’t dig too deep into people’s backgrounds, so it should be easy to have them create identification documents for you two.”

Well, well. Veeery interesting. An organization like that exists in this world too, eh? I dig it. Definitely adds to the isekai vibe.

“You appear excited, Yuki.”

Lefi’s curious voice drifted down to me from above my head.

“Duh! We’re going to an adventurers’ guild. Why *wouldn’t* I be excited?!”

“Adventurers, hm? Are they not the ones who hunt monsters and other races of people? So would you not consider them your enemies?”

“Yeah, you’re not wrong there. But see, this is, like, every man’s dream, you get me? This is something I’ve always wanted to do in real life.”

“No, I do not ‘get’ you.”

Yup, only another man could understand what I’m talking about. This one’s for the boys. Catching sight of her face above me, I smiled wryly at Lefi’s confused expression while we enjoyed the performance in this other world.



“I must say, a human town is quite fascinating.”

Lefi mumbled that while glancing around at our surroundings. She seemed genuinely interested in the place.

“Wait, you saying you’ve never actually been to one before?”

I directed my question to the dragon girl above me. She seemed to have enjoyed riding on my shoulders so much that she’d decided to stay there even after the show had ended. My money was on her liking the literal feeling of looking down on others. Very fitting for the Supreme Dragon. Sometimes, people would look our way, clearly amused by what we were doing. When that happened, I really, *really* wanted to tell them who she actually was, but of course I bit my tongue.

“Correct. I have only ever visited human settlements to incinerate them; strolling leisurely through one like this is a first for me. Truth be told, I had no interest in doing so until now.”

“Ohhh. Yeah, I get that.”

She’d mentioned that treaty of mutual nonintervention thing before, so it made sense. Plus, I doubted she’d ever actually had a chance to just hang out like this in the past, all things considered. *So wait, does this outing count as violating that treaty? Nah, I don’t think so.* The humans broke it first, so as far as I was concerned, it was no problemo. None whatsoever.

“Oh, Yuki, I have a request. I care not that you are stimulated by my thighs, but do take care to curb your expression. Your thoughts are clear on your face.”

“L-L-Like hell I’m ‘stimulated’!”

“Mr. Yuki...”

Walking next to us, the hero stared at me with some intense disappointment. *Oh, come on! Don’t look at me like that! It was just for a second! I only thought her thighs felt good for a—* I cleared my throat to shut my brain up. Then, pretending absolutely nothing had happened, I spoke to the hero.

“Anyway, Nell, since I don’t know the details, can you fill me in on what exactly adventurers do?”

“Mr. Yuki, don’t think you can fool me just because you suddenly want to have a serious discussion.”

I said nothing. Oh, and about the “Mr. Yuki” thing. The reason she called me

that was because she obviously couldn't call me "demon lord" while we were in town. So, after a whole lot of thinking, that was what she'd settled on. Apparently, I reminded her of an older boy next door or something.

I guess she thinks I'm plain? Can't really say she's wrong. I shouldn't feel bad hearing that; it is what it is. I just need to work harder to get my demon lord vibe right.

Lefi was just "Lefi" to her. At first, the hero had called her Lefifi, but the smile that put on Lefi's face had scared the idea right the hell out of her, so Lefi it was. I'd tried calling her Lefifi once too. Wanna know how that worked out for me? She punched me in the face, that's how. And my dear reader, I cannot even begin to find the words to describe how excruciatingly painful it was.

"Well, whatever. Mr. Yuki, let's set aside the topic of your *special inclinations* and get back to adventurers, yes? I guess an adventurer's primary job is to defeat monsters. They also act as escorts and procure materials such as valuable medicinal herbs. Oh, and they *don't* do what Lefi said and go around killing other races."

Neat, my guesses about an adventurer's life were spot-on, then.

"Oh? Are you certain of that? You understand that there were countless adventurers who attacked me, do you not?"

"They probably thought you were a monster or something."

You are the terrifying Supreme Dragon, after all.

"I will brook no more of your impertinence, Yuki. What say you to being erased from existence?"

"I don't know why they attacked you, but it would be great if you didn't do that, Lefi," the hero chimed in.

After some time, the three of us had steadily pushed our way through the crowds and finally reached a building.

"Nice. So this is the adventurers' guild HQ, huh?"

The building itself was totally normal, but the way people were going in and

out nonstop made it feel really energetic.

“Okay, let’s hop to it!”

“You’re not a particularly timid person, are you, Mr. Yuki?”

“You have the right of it. It is because he is an obtuse imbecile.”

“Keep talking, dummy. ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me’ and whatever.”

With that parting shot, I practically bounced my way toward the wide-open doors and into the building. The moment I stepped inside, I was surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the place. It was lively and noisy but welcoming nonetheless. *This feels nice. I like it.*

For a moment, everyone’s attention turned to us—Lefi, who still looked like a young girl; Nell, the hero who seemed only a few years older than her but was still solidly in the “girl” category; and me, the young man with them. But they lost interest just as quickly and went back to their conversations, some pouring each other cups of what looked like booze. Seemed like the building was attached to a pub or restaurant or something, which explained why there were so many people here right now. It *was* lunchtime, after all. We headed straight through the assembly hall and stopped at the counter at the back of it.

“Welcome! How can I help you today?”

“I’d like to register them as adventurers, please,” the hero replied to the unexpectedly polite receptionist lady manning the counter.

“Ummm...these two, yes? Forgive me if this is a rude question, but you’re certain about the young lady as well?”

The woman looked perplexed as she watched Lefi climb down from my shoulders and stand next to me. I could see where she was coming from since Lefi didn’t quite look the part of an adventurer, appearance-or age-wise. Seriously, the only thing remotely unobjectionable about Lefi was the fact that she looked like a beautiful young girl. The *only* thing.

“Do you have something you would like to say, Yuki?”

“Nope, not a single thing.”

As Lefi and I exchanged those words, the hero continued her conversation with the receptionist.

“That’s right. I can assure you of their backgrounds.”

She showed the receptionist the seal she’d used earlier with the gatekeeper.

“That’s... Understood. Well, then, please fill out these forms with the necessary information. Please also let me know if you would like me to fill out the paperwork on your behalf instead.”

“Do you know how to write, Lefi?”

I asked Lefi, next to me, with the parchment in front of us. I could read and speak easily thanks to my Polyglot ability, but I still didn’t actually know what this world’s writing system was.

“Hmm... I can write using the ancient language, but my skill with this age’s human language is questionable. I believe I can do it, but I admittedly have no confidence in my execution.”

“Mm... And how about you, Nell?”

“Yes, I can write. I’ll fill out the forms for both of you.”

“Great, thanks.”

After I handed the papers and quill to Nell, she walked over to a table nearby, laid everything out, and then sat down. Lefi and I followed suit.

“Ummm...let’s start with your names. Oh, I just realized I don’t know either of your full names.”

“I’m just plain ol’ Yuki.”

“My full name is Lefisios.”

“Oh, so Lefi’s a pet name. Yuki and Lefisios, got it. Next, your classes. What should I put for those?”

What, indeed. That’s the question of the century. I was a Demon Lord of Judgment while Lefi was the one and only Supreme Dragon. Neither of those was something we could just sweep under the rug. If these people found out, it’d be mission failed, game over, they just declared war on us.

“Excuse me, ma’am. Can you provide more details about this ‘class’ field?”
the hero asked the receptionist.

“Of course. A class is the role the applicant fulfills in battle. You can use the fighting class shown by either the Analysis skill or an evaluation crystal. Naturally, there are also individuals without a fighting class, so we don’t have a problem with applicants self-reporting their class. Oh, but if you’d like to view your true class, the guild has its own evaluation crystal. Would you care to use it?”

“O-Oh, no, we’re fine, thank you.”

Hmm... Now that I know a magical tool like that exists, it might be a good idea for me to learn how to hide my stats like Lefi does.

“Lefi, what do you think my class should be?”

“Would you care to be a dockworker? Frankly speaking, Yuki, your combat prowess is still quite low.”

“I freaking *hate* it when you’re this honest, and I hate it even more that you’re right. Fine, dockworker it is.”

“I can’t tell if the two of you are serious or not, but let me make it clear that ‘dockworker’ isn’t considered a combat job.”

Ya don’t say.

“Then you can put me down as a swordsman. That sounds reasonable enough, even if I can’t actually use a sword all that well. Lefi, you’re good with being a conjurer, right?”

“Hmm, do you believe that to be best? I would not mind something else.”

“Look, I know you *can* be anything you want what with you being, well, *you*, but there’s no way anybody would take you seriously as a warrior when you look the way you do.”

“If you say so, Yuki. A conjurer I shall be, then.”

“...I have so much I want to say, but I also know we wouldn’t get anywhere if I did, so I’m just going to shut my mouth. Okay, so a swordsman and a conjurer, right? Now, the last thing is...any special skills? I think this section is most likely

related to offensive abilities.”

“Offensive abilities, eh? Magic for me, I’d say.”

“Aren’t you a swordsman?”

“Yeppers peppers.”

“O-Oh, okay, then I’ll update your class to ‘magic swordsman.’”

“Magic swordsman, huh? Got a nice ring to it. Makes me sound cool.”

“And you, Lefi?”

“Hmm... My Breath, I think.”

“Your Breath?”

Lefi nodded in response to my question.

“Yes, I attack using a beam of light fired from my mouth. It destroys the entire surrounding area.”

“Whoa, seriously? I so wanna see that.”

A beam of light, you say? You can shoot out a beam? Like, for real?

“This entire town would be wiped off the map were I to use it here, but I will show it to you should we get the chance some other time.”

“U-Um, I-I’ll just list ‘magic’ as your special ability too, then, Lefi. That works, right?”

“Hmm, I suppose so. I *am* quite adept at it, after all.”

Paperwork complete, Nell got up and headed back to the receptionist’s counter. The woman looked kinda dumbstruck since she’d heard every word we’d said, but she got herself together as Nell made her way over so that she could keep the process moving.

“Y-Yes, thank you very much. Everything seems to be in order, so I’ll file your registrations accordingly. In the meantime, if you two would please position yourselves in front of one of the magical tools over there and place one hand on top.”

The lady pointed to a group of large, sturdy-looking magical machines made

of metal that were on a corner of the counter. Lefi and I each picked one and put a hand on the flat surface of our chosen device. When we did, the equipment whirred like one of those big printers. *Hold up, did it suck up some of my magic?* The minute I had that thought, something plank-like shot out of the tool with a *whoosh*.

I picked it up and looked it over. It was the same size and shape as the temporary IDs we'd gotten earlier, this one was just a tan color. There was some kind of pattern carved into the front of it too. Water, maybe? Waves? At least, that was the impression I got.

"Your registration is now complete. Those plates will serve as official identification for you both, so please make sure not to lose them."

"Well, that was easy."

"Yes, indeed. In the past, the process was extremely complicated. Many prospective adventurers were unable to meet the minimum requirements, which meant that their numbers didn't increase very much. As a result of that, the process was overhauled into what we use now."

"Wow, interesting..."

After providing that bit of background, the receptionist gave us a general overview of the rules and regulations that governed the adventurer system. Once she finished her little spiel, the adventurer registration was finally over.

"Hey, Lefi, we're done."

Lefi had flown off to dreamland at some point during the lecture, so I shook her awake.

"Hngh..."

I smiled ruefully at how cute she looked when she rubbed her eyes all sleepily. Then, I turned my gaze back to my new ID. I could feel a huge grin making its way onto my face. Didn't matter how old you got, something like this would always make you happy. Do me a solid and don't start thinking I'm immature 'cause of this.

"All right, you now have official documentation to come and go from the

town whenever you want. We'll return the temporary papers later."

"Sounds good, Nell. Thanks again. You really saved our hides."

Thus, our demon lord, now a full-fledged adventurer, sets out on another adventure. This is his exciting tale, with heart-pounding mysteries and wonders galore! Come witness the newest chapter of his incredible story! And, scene! Fin! Thank you so much, beloved readers!

"Oh, one more question, miss. You mentioned earlier that the guild buys monster drops?"

"Correct. If you have anything you'd like to sell, please let me know."

It would be really shitty of me to keep mooching off the hero, so I figured I could sell off some of my monster corpses. Just as I was opening up Inventory like I always did, though, I suddenly stopped and changed my mind.

"Uhhh... Nell, how do humans use Inventory?"

"You mean the magical method for storage? Those who have the aptitude for it can use it, so it's considered an unusual ability, but not a particularly strange one."

Sick. Since I didn't have to worry about using it, I opened the rift in the air and dug around for a few monster corpses. *Let's see, let's see.* I was definitely gonna hang on to the bodies of the super strong MFs that I couldn't take down without Rir's help. Why? Because their meat was hella tasty. That left...the monsters I'd one-shotted on my solo hunts. I could stand to off-load a few of those. I pulled out the corpses I wanted and started dropping them in the designated location one by one.

"Wh-Whoa. Is that an actual horned tiger?"

"And that's a bloody bear!"

"There's even a malmodontis!"

A few people had apparently been watching us for a while now. Their shocked cries drew the attention of others, who also ended up shouting out their two cents. I wasn't concerned with that, though; I just kept piling up the corpses. Before I even realized it, more than half of the folks in the building had

gathered around me, oohing and aahing as they watched my every move closely.

“Hmph.”

Finished with the monster dump, I turned toward the circle of humans, folded my arms, and grunted with a triumphant smirk.

Damn, do I feel good. What say you, plebs?! Tremble before me and succumb to the overwhelming difference in power between us! Mwa ha ha ha ha ha ha!

“Yuki, that is quite enough of the blatantly foolish expression. Finish your task.”

“Hey, c’mon, Miss Lefi. I’m soaking in some seriously good vibes right now. Just let me have this for a while, will ya? Jeez.”

“Fine. Do as you will, but do so with haste. I tire of this place.”

Now that Lefi had completely taken the wind out of my sails, I reluctantly turned back to the receptionist lady so we could finish up the sale. She sat there frozen, her eyes wide with shock, but quickly shook herself out of her stupor.

“Th-Thank you for your patience. Here is your payment.”

“Much obliged.”

“W-We look forward to doing business with you again.”

With a last glance at the woman, we left the guild’s HQ.

“Nell, catch.”

“Huh? H-Hey!”

As soon as we left the building, I divvied up my earnings. One half went straight into Inventory, and I tossed the other half, still in the bag the lady gave me, to Nell.

“What is this...?”

“For treating us.”

“What?! Th-There’s way too much here! There’s no way I can take all this!”

The hero did a double take when she saw what was in the bag.

“I don’t really have anything I need to use all that money for, though. You taught us a lot too, so think of it as payment for services rendered.”

“A-Are you sure? Like, *really* sure? You’d better be, because I won’t give it back later even if you ask.”

“Like I even would.”

The hero looked sorta panicked. She was clearly trying to think of what to do with the money. Poor girl had zero imagination when it came to buying stuff. If she was as strong as I suspected, she could easily defeat the same monsters I could and make piles of cash, so her reaction made me think that she might’ve had money troubles in the past.

“Anyway, Nell, what’s this?”

I pointed at the pattern carved into the ID card I’d gotten from the guild.

“That? Oh, it’s a ripple that indicates a person’s magic. I vaguely recall them being called ‘magic crests.’ Everyone’s pattern is different, so it’s a good way to identify a person. Try using your magic on it.”

Fastening the money bag to her waist seemed to calm the hero down enough for her to respond normally. I followed her instructions and pushed a little magic into the card. When I did, a dim light started radiating from the grooves.

“If someone else tried the same thing with your card, it wouldn’t glow like that. That’s why it’s so easy to catch people with fake documents.”

“Woow, that’s actually really clever. But what about people who don’t have magic?”

“What do you mean?” the hero asked, looking confused. “People like that don’t exist. There *are* people who can’t use their magic well, but they can get a special identification document.”

Ah, I see. So that’s the kind of world this is. Still, this system was a lot more put-together than I thought it would be. I might have underestimated the people here.

My admiration disappeared when Nell mentioned that this particular method

had only been implemented in two places in this country: the royal capital and this town. The management of verification systems everywhere else was shabby at best, apparently. In other words, the old dude we'd met—the town mayor or whoever—was the kind of guy who got shit done.

“Also, does the pattern have some kind of meaning?”

“It's said that the pattern represents the individual's magical specialty. But as you can see, the patterns aren't always clear, so there's still a lot we don't know about them.”

That made sense given that I was best at water magic. It was no wonder the design made you think of water and rivers and stuff like that.

“Lefi, what kind of design is carved into yours?”

“Mine? Here, see for yourself.”

Lefi pulled her ID card out of...seemingly nowhere. Maybe her own Inventory? In any case, she took it out and showed it to me.

“This is...fire, huh?”

“Indeed. I have not shown you much of my abilities, but I can tell you with certainty that I specialize in fire.”

“Wow, really? You're right. I haven't seen much of your fire magic now that I think about it.”

“Truth be told, fire is not particularly versatile. It only burns, after all. In addition, your powers are decidedly inclined toward water and earth, so I thought it best to teach you different magics as well as different ways to use them. Ergo, I have not oft used my own fire magic.”

Lefi said all that with a slightly bitter expression. She must've been too caught up in helping me learn magic to have used her own.

“Well, I think fire magic is super cool regardless. Plus, it fits your personality to a T since you're a fiery woman and all that. Heh.”

“Truly?”

“Yeah. I bet your fire feels nice and warm.”

She smiled a little at my words, then took just one step closer to me.

The three of us had been walking for a while now.

“Ugh. This is gonna be a pain in the ass, isn’t it?”

We’d been on our way back toward the main road that led to the town gate. We were headed that way so we could return our temporary IDs like the hero wanted, but I’d stopped when we got close to a deserted back alley.

“I do believe you’re right.”

The hero had seen the same thing I had, and she sounded kinda nervous about it. Either way, though, she took up a fighting stance, clearly ready to draw her sword at the drop of a hat. Lefi was the only one who kept her cool, but only because that was just how she rolled.

A group of men had slithered their way out of the alley and stood in front of us, stopping us in our tracks. They fanned out, three in front, three behind, effectively blocking us in. Each of them had a weapon pointed at us and a gross-ass leer that made their faces *super* punchable. I was preeeeetty sure they weren’t inviting us to a “getting to know you” tea party.

Okay, this whole thing may have *seemed* sudden, but I’d actually known they were tailing us since basically right after we’d headed out since Maps had warned me about hostiles in the area. I guess I’d taken too long deciding what to do about them because they had us surrounded like flies on shit.

“Hey, we were kinda hoping to use that shortcut, so be nice and let us through, all right? Oh, and just in case you didn’t know, the dangerous parts of your swords are pointed our way. Didn’t anyone teach you that it’s wrong to do that?”

“Geh heh. Real sorry, kid. Can’t help ourselves since none of us was exactly raised in the lap a’ luxury. So you could say we didn’t have no one to teach us otherwise, yeah?”

A guy—a freaking massive one—who seemed to be the leader of this little boys’ club took a step forward. He had a nasty sneer going. He also happened to be the only one not holding a weapon.

“If ya don’t wanna get hurt, ya better give us all yer money. We know yer a rich feller.”

“Oh, so you saw me making those trades earlier? And not once did you think I must be pretty goddamn strong if I could kill that many monsters?”

“Ya gonna sell me a bridge too while yer at it? Like hell a scrawny punk like you could take down them big catches. My money’s on you stealin’ all a’ them corpses from somebody ya snuck up on ’n sucker punched.”

Riiight. “Big catches” my ass. Good joke.

Name: Dorga

Race: Human

Class: Advanced Axe Fighter

Level: 37

HP: 1,601 / 1,601

MP: 198 / 198

Strength: 350

Stamina: 402

Agility: 210

Magic: 91

Dexterity: 132

Luck: 111

Abilities: Axe-Wielding 4, Danger Detection 3

Title: Murderer, Rapist, Burglar, Berserker

Big man must have felt pretty good having so much power. I mean, I couldn’t deny that being powerful was a great thing, so he had me there. Anyway, he might have been strong for a human, but he was still small potatoes to me. The others were even weaker; they had less than half his stats.

A normal person would probably be shitting bricks in this kind of situation. Not me, though. Since Analysis showed the clear and vast difference in our abilities, I was totally chill. *Huh. Is this how people born into powerful dynasties feel?* It made sense to me now. On top of the food chain one generation after another—no wonder they'd get conceited once power was firmly within their grasp.

There *was* a bit of an annoying hitch in this whole thing, though, and that was that it'd suck hard if I got us kicked out of the town because I made a scene. I mean, we still had a bunch of sightseeing to do. The thought of just killing them all and tossing their corpses into Inventory *did* cross my mind for a second, but it felt like a waste of time and energy. Also, it would've been aggravating as hell if someone happened to see me do the deed. Definitely not a problem I wanted.

I stood there in silence as I thought over my options, which had the group's numbskull leader assuming that he had the upper hand. He was dead wrong, of course. *Dude's stats are even lower than Nell's, for cripes' sake. Gimme a freaking break.* The only thing he had going for him was that he was an absolute freaking unit. Naturally, the dumbass's mouth was as big as he was, and he just couldn't resist opening it.

"Oy. I know the scrawny twerp's a human, but you 'n that li'l silver-haired lady... Yer demons, aintcha?"

"You think so? How come?"

"Dontcha know that we got magical tools that tell us who's human and who ain't? Too bad for you, I used one 'n found ya out."

He sure wasn't wrong about Lefi or me being nonhuman, which means that's that. Case closed, folks. Scoopy and the gang solved the mystery.

Hmm... That receptionist did mention that the guild has evaluation crystals. I'd dropped my guard because I'd assumed that not many humans had the Analysis ability. Then, after learning about magical equipment like the evaluation crystal, I'd also assumed that those kinds of tools weren't all too easy to get your hands on. *Guess that saying about "when you assume" is right.* I felt like an idiot. I should have planned better before I left the dungeon.

“Let’s say we *are* demons. What do you plan on doing then?”

“Geh heh. Since demons’re humans’ enemies, nobody’ll give a rat’s ass about ya no matter what we do to ya. And if ya even try to lay a finger on us, why, alls I gots to do is sound the alarm and the sentinels’ll be all over ya. So if ya don’t want me to do that, be a good little boy ’n give us all yer money. I’ll take that sweet li’l demon lady too. She might still be a brat, but she don’t look half bad. We’ll make ya feel reeeal good, missy. I bet you’ll feel so good that ya won’t be able to live without us!”

While dickweed and his band of merry idiots were busy laughing their asses off, I made my move.

“Wanna run that by me again?”

“Huh? Hrgh!”

I’d closed the gap between me and the disgusting giant in a single step, then grabbed him by the neck with one hand and lifted him into the air.

“Ah! Guh— Hngh!”

“I gotta tell ya, there are some things you can say out loud and some things you can’t. So how ’bout you do me a favor and *not* joke around like that. Cool? Cool. Then let’s try this again. *What* was it you said you were gonna do to *my woman*? Don’t think I heard right the first time.”

“B-Bastard!”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of the lackeys trying to rush me with his sword, so I chunked the big guy right at him. They crashed into each other, got all tangled up, and zoomed through the air until they slammed hard into the wall of a building behind them.

“You son of a bitch!”

“You cum rags really need to work on expanding your vocabulary. Pay attention in your language arts class next time.”

One of the others tried to slash at me, but I twisted myself out of the way just right, dodging the attack and slamming my foot into his guts in one fluid motion. It felt like a move you’d have seen a pro wrestler use back in the day.

Anyway, this third guy went flying just like the first two had, except instead of a building, he smashed headfirst into the ground. Blood started flowing from his wound, and it didn't take him long to stop moving.

“Regretfully, I’m also unable to defend you lot.”

I looked back when I heard Nell’s voice. The three men who’d cut us off from behind had been blindsided by what had just happened, and by the time they’d come back to their senses and tried to attack me, the hero was ready and waiting. They made their move a second too late; she knocked two of them out with one swing of her sword, which was still sheathed, and used some sort of flowy move thing to put the third to sleep too.

Daaamn. Hero’s got skills, I see.

It all happened crazy fast, but Nell and I were the only ones left standing.

“Goddammit!”

That dumbfuck was still conscious? The big, bad leader dragged himself back to his feet, shaking his head to clear it. Scowling at us now, he reached one hand behind him and grabbed the weapon strapped to his back. It was an axe that was shaped like something an executioner would use. There were carvings of skeletons and bones all over it. The thing looked sinister as hell. At the same time, I felt a surge of magic crackling around us. When I looked with my Demon Eyes ability, it pinpointed the axe as the source.

“Yer gonna regret makin’ me use this!”

Name: Dorga

Race: Human

Class: Advanced Axe Fighter

Level: 37

HP: 1,502 1,891 (1,601 1,601)

MP: 456 456 (198 198)

Strength: 552 (350)

Stamina: 681 (402)

Agility: 429 (210)

Magic: 211 (91)

Dexterity: 132

Luck: 111

Abilities: Axe-Wielding 4, Danger Detection 3

Title: Murderer, Rapist, Burglar, Berserker

Time out. How are his stats so stupidly buffed compared to earlier? Goddamn, dude, this is some bullshit.

Enraged Axe of Hate: Kill, kill, kill. Having bathed in the blood, anger, and hatred of all those it has killed, this weapon has absorbed their rage and hatred as its own. Induces Madness in its owner and amplifies their stats tremendously. Quality: A+.

Mm, so it's the axe's doing. Gotcha. I stared at him, now in his so-called "Madness state." That was probably why his eyes had turned dark red. I could see veins running through them too. *Good god, that's so gross.*

"That's... That's a magic blade!" the hero shouted in a panic.

"A magic blade?"

"It's the term for weapons that possess some kind of magical property. My holy sword is a type of magic blade...but this is the first time I've ever seen one with such intense negative energy!"

A bead of cold sweat rolled down her cheek.

"Geh heh. If ya'd just listened to me, I wouldn't have to kill ya."

With a crazed grin on his face, the psychotic hulk swung his weapon at us.

"Wh-What should we do? That thing is dangerous."

“Take it easy, hero. Haste makes waste, you know. Care for a spot of tea to calm your nerves, guv’nor?”

“Shall I pour, then?”

“Why are you two so calm?!”

I shrugged playfully at the shocked hero, but I did still dial back the jokes. Then I created a rift in the air and grabbed what I wanted from Inventory.

It’s fine, right?

If my opponent was gonna use something so crazy, that meant I could whip out my own weapon. This was the perfect opportunity for me to test my newest creation, see how strong it actually was, so I pulled out a magnificent, jet-black greatsword.

The hilt was black, and so was the incredibly sharp double-edged blade, which looked like it could even cut right through stone. Seriously, the blade was so dark that it sucked up all the light that hit it. Just completely and totally black. And it was so damn heavy that I needed every ounce of strength in my demon lord body just to wield it. A heft so stupendous that it was almost like my entire demon lord castle had been transformed into this sword.

Hasai: A jet-black greatsword of Yuki’s creation. So extremely heavy that no ordinary person could ever hope to lift it. Quality, A+.

The concept behind Hasai was incredibly simple: tough, sharp, and heavy. That meant I hadn’t used Sorcerer’s Grant on it, though. Okay, more like I couldn’t, which I assumed was because I’d poured a ton of magic into the sword itself during the creation process. As a result, there most likely hadn’t been enough leeway to implement a sorcerous circuit, which was why I couldn’t use Grant on it. On the flip side, though, its performance was outstanding. It was the toughest, sharpest, and heaviest sword I’d ever made, and that included the failures.

I held the thing all casual-like and taunted the dumbass in front of me, a shit-

eating grin on my face the whole time.

“Bring it, you needlessly massive bag of dicks. I don’t know what a magic blade is, and I honestly don’t care. I’mma still show you just how far beneath me you are.”



“You better watch the way ya talk to me!”

With that, he made full use of his roided-out body and rushed at me as fast as a rocket. A monstrous roar came from his mouth as he swung his axe at my head. But I wasn't bothered. Not even a little bit. The monsters in the forest attacked way faster than this guy did.

I planted my feet to solidify my stance, then counterattacked by hoisting my greatsword so that it clashed with his axe, which was still swinging toward my noggin. The impact hammered my arms, and the loud clanging of our blades echoed all over. There was a *whoosh* of air as our weapons slammed together. We pushed back on each other's weapons with all our strength until finally, his axe gave in.

“Wha—?!”

This gorilla seriously never thought he'd lose, huh? He probably figured that his specially enhanced body would give him a leg up in a contest of power. He had an advantage with his overhead swings and brute-force fighting style too, so his shocked expression was kinda hysterical. *Sorry, dude*. Not his fault I was really good at dealing with powerful opponents—something I can tell you from experience that he most certainly wasn't.

“Awww, is the poor baby tired already? Well, suck it up!”

“Gaaah!”

I spun my body around while swinging my greatsword, using the centrifugal force to give my second blow more power. The giant rushed to defend himself with his axe, but he couldn't deflect in time because of his unsteady stance. My sword found its mark, and when it did, blood started spraying everywhere.

“Y-You piece of shit...!”

I kept slashing at him with my super-heavyweight-class greatsword. Actually, no. I couldn't even call what I was doing “slashing” anymore. It was more like I was pounding into him as he desperately tried to counter with his axe. Every hit caused an ear-splitting roar.

Our weapons whaled on each other over and over again, but the chucklefuck

finally realized the situation was only getting worse for him because he grabbed something from near his waist and tossed it at me while I was swinging away at him. Reflexively, I slashed at whatever it was—which I shouldn't have because when I did, thick white smoke filled the air, making it impossible for me to see.

"A smoke screen, huh?"

Literally everything around me was white. I couldn't even see my hand in front of my face. *Fucking classic. But, well, it worked, I guess. Is he a goddamn ninja now too?* I couldn't sense him near me anymore. I couldn't make out his silhouette either, so he'd probably put some distance between us. Maybe he was planning to regroup and charge again? It was an unexpectedly strategic move. A surprising one too. I'd have to remember that he could use his noodle even in his Madness state.

"Go to hell!"

Oops, I almost forgot to care. I'm invincible, baby!

"Too bad, so sad."

I was already facing his general direction and ready to intercept his attack, so when the axe's blade suddenly reappeared inches from my face, I used my greatsword to fend it off. Just because my regular eyes were useless didn't mean my Demon Eyes were too. As long as my opponent had magic, I could easily find them that way. Needless to say, I could see both the magic big man was using and the magic that was in the axe itself. Basically, I could tell where the weapon was headed without actually *seeing* it.

"The hell—"

Homeboy had used up all his energy on that final blow, meaning he was completely defenseless. I took advantage of that, of course, and stabbed my sword through his torso. I felt his flesh tear and bones shatter. Anyone could tell from a single glance that this dude was toast. Blood splattered all around us as the part of my sword that was sticking out of his back glinted. He made a gurgling sound as he spoke, coughing up more blood.

"H-How...could I...lose..."

"Because you're weak."

When I yanked my sword out of the ape, his legs folded underneath him and he collapsed. His eyes went back to their normal color, and he finally stopped moving. His axe slipped from his hands, landing on the paving stone with a *clang*.

I shook the clumps of blood and flesh off Hasai, tossed it back into Inventory, and looked down. The magical axe was just so damn interesting. Even without using my abilities, I could tell that it had some sort of disgusting power swirling around inside it. I couldn't stop staring at the thing.

"...Hey, Lefi. If I lose my mind, will you stop me? Even if it means you have to cut off my arms to do it?"

"I will."

"H-Huh?! Wait, what are you planning to do?!"

Watching me look at the weapon, Lefi knew right away what I was thinking. She nodded at me, and I could feel that she was determined to do whatever was necessary if the situation called for it. *Reliable as ever, Miss Lefi*.

"O-Oh, no! *Please* don't tell me you're going to touch it! You know it's dangerous, right?!"

Once she figured out what I was planning, the hero tried to talk me out of it. I ignored her, though, and stretched my hand toward the axe. As soon as I grazed it, a wave of spite and angry wails slammed into my brain. It was a direct assault on my mind.

There was so much hate and wrath, and it was aimed at everyone and everything. It wanted to destroy, kill, and then absorb the dead into its own being, seeking to increase its power. A hopeless, endless negative feedback loop. The dead buried within the axe clamored to drag me into its vicious cycle.

Shut. The hell. Up.

With my tremendous supply of magical power, I pushed back hard against the miserable screaming that was trying to drive me insane. I forced it to surrender to *my* will.

I don't give a rat's ass how you bastards died. You all belong to me now. As my

property, you will keep your goddamn mouths shut, and I will use you however I damn well please. Then and only then will I give you the chance to be born again, free from the hell you're trapped in.

I repeated that over and over again, overpowering the miserable cries like I was domesticating a wild animal. Gradually, the shrieks coming from the weapon quieted down to the point that they were just whispers.

"Hah."

Since the axe was obedient now, I stuffed it into Inventory. You might be wondering why, so let me give you a little refresher. See, a weapon made by yours truly couldn't be refined through Weapon Enhancement, but a weapon that someone *else* had made could. If it was something that could accept magic, I could use Weapon Enhancement on it. In other words, I had plans for this bad boy once I got back to the dungeon. I wanted to remove the restraints from this pissed-off monstrosity and transform it into a truly awesome weapon of my own design.

"Phew, finally done with that bullshit. But son of a *bitch* that was a goddamn hassle."

"A-Are... Are you all right? Your body hasn't changed in a weird way or anything?"

"I'm good. Fit as a fiddle, even. Did you forget I'm a demon lord? You could say I specialize in dealing with negative vibes like this."

"N-No, actually, I think me and my comrades are the ones who specialize in that..."

Hm, fair point. After all, she was technically with the Church, and they *were* supposed to be old hands when it came to evil shit.

"The curse has not devoured him, thus we can consider this ending to be a happy one. With that settled, Yuki, I have a bone to pick with you. 'My woman,' was it? Explain yourself."

"Say what?"

"Oh, so you were unaware when you spoke? '*What* was it you said you were

gonna do to *my woman*?' I believe those were your exact words. I must say, though, I have not seen you so angry since the last time we were here in this very town."

Lefi stared up at me with a smirk. *Whoa, what? Rewind the tape. Is she for real?*

"I-I seriously said that?!"

"Well...yes, as a matter of fact, you did. And so passionately too."

The thought of it had me flustered, so I'd asked the hero standing next to me to confirm it and gotten that slightly astonished reply. *Sh-Shiiit. I swear on all the powers that be, I had no idea I did that. It was absolutely, positively not on purpose.*

"O-Oh, okay. W-Well, sorry, I guess. I, uh, I don't know, I probably, um, meant to say something like, I don't know, my companion who's a woman. But if that bothered youmpf—"

My attempt at apologizing wasn't going great since everything was just coming out as incoherent babbling, but Lefi cut me off halfway through by squishing my face between her hands. The cool, refreshing touch of her palms felt really nice. Her gentle gaze hooked me as our eyes met.

"Do not apologize. It made me happy when you uttered those words, Yuki."

As she spoke, a somewhat embarrassed smile came to her face.

"So...why don't we get back on our way now?"

"Huh?! R-Right, yeah. Totally. We wasted too much time on this moron and his goons considering that we've still got stuff to do."

I'd snapped out of the stupid-ass trance Lefi's face had put me in and taken a few quick steps away from her. Then, I'd replied to the hero after running back her question in my head.

"Yes, indeed, I do agree. I very much have a hankering for more of those skewered meats."

Lefi sounded relaxed. She was already back to her usual self as if nothing had happened. *Shit. Shitty shit shit.* There was something about the way she got me

all hot and bothered—in more ways than one—that just did *not* sit right with me. I couldn't explain it, but I also knew that if I said anything, I'd just be digging my own grave. So for once in my life, I'd keep my mouth shut.

Just like that, we started walking down the path again. And just like *that*, we hit a roadblock again.

"We are members of the town's garrison! If you don't come peacefully, we will consider your behavior hostile and attack accordingly!"

Farther up on the road, several loud, imposing guardsmen were heading toward us. *Welp. We really screwed the pooch on this one.* I'd taken too long dealing with those small-time clowns. I really, *really* didn't want to be banished from the town. As I was trying to decide what my next step was, I abruptly realized that the man leading the others looked very familiar.

"Wait a sec... Old man? It *is* you, isn't it?"

"Ngh! You're that de—"

"Preeetty sure you don't want to finish that sentence. For both our sakes."

Knowing what was coming, I cut the guy off before he could keep talking. Yup, it was the same old man from when I'd snuck into the enemy camp and the only human I met back then—the commanding officer.

"Why are you here?"

I could hear tension in his voice.

"Hmmm, why *am* I here? That's a good question. Weeell, I had some business to take care of, so I wanted to see that other old man, the head of this town."

"Huh...? Mr. Yuki, that was your real objective?"

"Yeah. You could say he and I are acquaintances."

"And what about these fallen men?"

I shrugged at the grim-faced man.

"No idea. They came at us out of nowhere, so we just defended ourselves and turned the tables on 'em."

"Commander, these men all have prior convictions. Considering that they

clearly used their weapons, I find the young man's claim of assault quite credible."

Another soldier standing next to the old man whispered into his ear.

"All right, men, I'll leave it to you all to process the scene. In any case, it seems that as residents of our town, they were clearly in the wrong. Legally, it's my responsibility to ascertain all the details, but...since you say you have business with the lord of Alfiro, I'll guide you to his office. Please follow me."

Though he was still a little nervous, the old man sheathed his weapon as he spoke. *Huh, interesting. He's willing to lead the way even though he still has his guard up?* No, wait. He'd offered *because* he was still suspicious of us. This way, he could keep an eye on us. Eh, whatever. I had no complaints if he was gonna do us a solid by taking us to the chief administrator. I snuck a glance at Nell and Lefi to make sure they didn't have any objections. Since they didn't seem particularly worried, I nodded at him and said, "Thanks, ready when you are."

"But I wished to eat more skewered meats..."

Correction: one member of our pack had objections. *I'll buy some later to make it up to you, then.*



"What up, chief old man? Been a while."

"So...you *did* return..."

Lefi and I were back in the parlor room we'd been in last time, with Nell being a new addition, of course. Sitting on a sofa across from us was the chief administrator. *What's his name again? Releaux, I think. Yeah, sounds right.* Thanks, Analysis. Except that compared to our last visit, it looked like his hair had thinned a bit? I felt like he had more wrinkles too. He must have been hella tired thanks to this stressful society. *I feel ya, old man.*

"Well, then. I presume you're here to retaliate?"

"Huh?"

"I understand. Though I said I would enforce the policy that forbade entry into the Demonic Forest, I was unable to keep my word and the situation ultimately

deteriorated. Please, I ask that you grant me one boon. Take *my* life. These old bones aren't worth much, but I beg you to spare the citizens."

"Wh-Whoa, hey, take it easy. Calm down, old man. Don't jump to conclusions like that. Besides, I have no intention of doing any of those things. I only came here to talk to you."

Damn, did I really seem like that kind of person to him? He really thought I liked to go around and randomly kill people? Not gonna lie, his impression of me actually hurt.

"So...you're not here to take revenge?"

"Dude, I said I'm not."

At my words, his face got way less tense and he breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"Is that so...? My apologies for losing my composure, then."

"I appreciate it, but first things first, I wanna make it clear that slaughtering people *isn't* a hobby of mine. With that out of the way, I'll cut to the chase. Something's been bugging me about this whole situation for a while, and for my —no, not just mine. For *our* peace, for my *family's* safety, I've been thinking that I need to know who the enemy actually is. Give it to me straight, old man. It's the country itself, isn't it? The government's been the one coming after us, right?"

"...Would you please tell me how you arrived at this conclusion?"

"One, an entire army was mobilized against me. And two, an organization as powerful as the Church was pressured into sending one of its heroes. Only one thing has the power and influence to make both of those happen, and that's the nation itself."

"A hero, you say?"

Hmm?

"Wait, you didn't know? Nell, time for your debut."

"I *really* wish you wouldn't use me in situations like these..."

She glared at me, then turned to face the town's lord.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Lord Rulouvia. I belong to the Faldienne Order of Holy Knights. I’m a hero of the current generation.”

“You’re wha— Beg pardon, that was rude of me.”

After cutting himself off, he stared at the hero. If I remembered right, this old man possessed Analysis too, so he was probably using it to verify Nell’s identity. There was no privacy to be had with the ability, after all, and I guessed that he usually didn’t take advantage of it out of consideration for others.

“Ah, so it’s true. Then, lady hero, might I ask why you’re with the demon lord?”

“It’s a bit complicated... To make a long story short, when I went on my mission to his dwelling, he won and I lost. But we had a lot of opportunities to talk afterward, and I found out that there were too many inconsistencies in the information I’d been given prior to my directive. So when I’d decided to return here to ferret out the truth, Mr. Yu—I mean, the demon lord said he wanted to come as well.”

“I see. I’m sure the ordeal must have been quite difficult for you, hm?”

“Yes. And you don’t even know the half of it.”

The chief administrator’s sympathy got an energetic nod out of Nell. *Okay, seriously, what is with you two? You saying that the dungeon squad is exhausting to be around? Well, screw you and screw that.*

“Nevertheless, involving a hero in such a foolish endeavor is absolutely outrageous. Heroes are only to be mobilized during national emergencies! What in the hell were those godforsaken curs thinking?!”

Releaux suddenly slammed his hand down on the table. He looked pissed. Must’ve been a little off his rocker ’cause of all the stress or something.

“Hey, again, calm down, old man. We’re not gonna get anywhere with our discussion at this rate.”

“Forgive me.”

He let out a deep breath, forcing himself to cool off. *Man, how’d I end up being the peacemaker here?*

“All right, so who deployed the army and her?”

“I...can’t tell you.”

“Say what now?”

I unleashed my magic, directing a huge blast of it right at the chief administrator.

“Hngh—”

Lefi, bless her heart, didn’t really react at all, but I couldn’t say the same about the hero sitting next to me. She immediately jumped up from the sofa and sprinted as far away as she could get while keeping herself limber and ready to draw her holy sword at any moment. The chief administrator shot the hero a single glance before returning his attention to me. He started talking as a cold sweat ran down his forehead.

“I... I belong to this country too. No matter how much something or someone within it vexes me, I *cannot* provide any information that would cause harm to my motherland.”

“Even if, say, I said I’d destroy this town?”

“That is correct.”

There was some serious determination in his nod. This was the same man who’d said he’d give his life for the townsfolk just a few minutes ago. The room was quiet for a while after that.

“...Fine.”

With a small sigh, I reined in my magic and shrugged my shoulders in defeat.

“Thanks for having us. Lefi, we’re outta here.”

“Hm? Finished already? Are you certain?”

“Yup. You said you wanted grilled meat, right? The skewered stuff? Let’s go chow down.”

“What a fine proposal. I duly accept it.”

“You... You won’t do anything else?”

Dumbfounded by the U-turn in my attitude, the old man couldn't help asking me that question.

"Nope. You made it pretty clear that you're not gonna break no matter what I do, so I'll take the L. Lefi and I are gonna do some more sightseeing, then we'll head home. Nell, what about you?"

"Huh? U-Umm, I-I think I'll stay here and speak to the chief administrator for a bit longer."

"Yeah? Then why don't we meet up in front of this building tomorrow? I want you to show me a few more things around town."

"Oh, s-sure, that's fine. See you then."

With that, Lefi and I walked out of the room.

"He was as calm as you please when he left. He really meant what he said, didn't he?"

"That demon lord is quite the strange one," Nell said with a bitter smile as she watched the man she spoke of exit through the parlor door. For just a moment, she'd held her weapon in apprehension, overwhelmed by his power. Luckily, though, she hadn't needed to use it, which relieved her from the very bottom of her heat.

Seeing the demon lord fight on the road had been an awe-inspiring sight. He had reminded her of a powerful storm. It had literally stunned her speechless when he had overpowered an opponent whose strength was amplified by a magic blade. She had some confidence in her own fighting ability, as her victories in combat training with the other knights recently began to outnumber her losses, but she couldn't imagine any scenario where she could win against a behemoth like that. Even if she could damage him, ultimately, she was sure that the sheer difference in their power would lead to her defeat.

And besides...no matter what they say, I don't hate those two. The demon lord and Lefi teased her endlessly, but being with them was noisy and, most of all, fun. Nell had realized that she unwittingly found herself smiling quite a lot whenever she was with them.

“I... I don’t think he’s evil. Not in the least. Just like me, he fights for the people he wants to protect.”

The chief administrator nodded deeply in agreement. Then, after glancing about to confirm no one else was in the vicinity, he spoke with purpose.

“I believe it’s safe to reveal this information to you, lady hero. The one who dispatched both the army and you against the demon lord did so in order to expand our nation’s territory into the Demonic Forest. It was none other than the crown prince, His Highness Lute.”

“His Highness...?”

Together with a priest of the Church, Nell had only ever met the crown prince once in her life. Her impression had been that he was a serious young man, but she remembered him having an abrasive personality.

“He speculates that because the Forest has been left untouched for so long, it’s rich in natural resources. He thinks that by incorporating it into the country’s domain, he can profit significantly. Several nobles have joined his venture, lending him their influence, so they’ve managed to create a powerful cabal amongst themselves.”

“And the king?”

“Our king is a kind, wonderful individual. But to be frank, he is an ordinary man, so I’m almost certain he’s unaware of these nefarious goings-on. I’ve been to the royal palace on multiple occasions in attempts to report to the throne, but have unfortunately been hindered from doing so every time. As the throne wasn’t an open avenue, I decided to go directly to the top military command to warn them of what was happening. Instead, they ridiculed and dismissed me completely, remarking that I was much too afraid of the ‘enemy.’ Goddammit! Why won’t anyone realize that these warmongers are leading our nation to its doom?!”

Releaux ground his teeth in frustration.

“I... When I return to the Church, I’m planning on discussing this situation with the commander of our order as well as the head priest. I don’t know what all I will be able to do, but I want to try.”

“I’m in your debt. Just hearing those words eases the weight on my heart. I pray that the people of the Church will make the right decision so that our country doesn’t fall to ruin.”

“Hmmm... Fascinating. The crown prince, eh?”

I muttered that to myself as I listened to the discussion the chief administrator and the hero had had. I heard every word they’d said thanks to the thing resting on my palm, which had ear-shaped wings that made it look sort of like a butterfly. It had found its way back to me not long after I’d left the parlor, and as soon as I had heard everything, I stuffed it back into Inventory.

“Did you hear what you were hoping to, Yuki?”

“You know it.”

The “thing” in question was an Evil Ear, the inanimate counterpart to the Evil Eye. Both were dungeon summons that were essentially golems. As you could probably guess by the name, an Evil Ear was a listening device, and it could pick up any sounds within a ten-meter radius to deliver them to me. Normally, the dungeon’s golem summons couldn’t be used outside of its territory, but luckily for me, this baby was top-notch—a few grades above the average golem. As long as I could charge it with my magic, I could use it anywhere. Also, bonus! It had level 4 Stealth and level 3 Magic Intercept, so it could sneak around like nobody’s business. Unless you had extra sharp senses, you couldn’t even detect any weirdness in the air that it being nearby caused. Even someone like Solid Serpent would be surprised by what an Evil Ear could do. It didn’t work on Lefi, but that’s hardly a surprise.

The sticker shock was *real*, though. Because of its super-high performance, it had a super-high DP cost. I could have built a second inn for the price of just one of these things. The fact that it was rechargeable was another issue. On a single charge, it could only operate for a little over ten minutes. If I forgot to order it back to me on time, it would stop moving when its battery ran out. And not only that, but all of its skills would deactivate too, meaning it wouldn’t be invisible or undetectable anymore.

Oh, yeah, speaking of recharging, the damn thing sucked up a whole hell of a

lot of magic. That one ten-minute charge took a whole tenth of my magic reserves. But still, for all its disadvantages, Evil Ears were especially useful in situations like this. Before I'd left the parlor, I'd had the thought that maybe the old man would talk to the hero about whatever asswipe was trying to horn in on my territory, so just in case, I'd left an Evil Ear behind.

Sorry, you two, but it's not like I came here to have fun. The sightseeing didn't count. I'd definitely be doing more of that.

"Honestly, Yuki, you do possess the oddest things."

"Shows what you know! I've got twenty-seven secret gadgets!"

"Yes, yes. How lovely for you."

Lefi's bored response went in one ear and out the other as we continued strolling around the town. I was still deep in thought. *A prince is the enemy?* My rock-solid policy was to destroy anyone who disrupted my peaceful life, but... I dunno, I felt like it'd be sorta dicey to just storm the royal palace. The only way to successfully execute that kind of hard-line, take-no-prisoners strategy was with good timing and overwhelming power.

It was a given that a palace would have the tightest security, not to mention that the odds of it having people with hero-level strength inside were pretty good. I could maybe take on one or two of them, but a whole bunch of them? Even I wasn't cocky enough to think I had a chance of winning by attacking them head-on. For the sake of argument, let's say I *did* manage to kill the prince. In that case, when everyone found out that I was the perp, I had no doubt that I'd end up in a war against the whole-ass country. Hard pass on that one, thank you very much.

I knew I wouldn't lose if I had Lefi by my side, but for starters, it chapped my ass just thinking about having her as an integral part of the plan. Not that I was even a fan of the idea of putting that kind of burden on her in the first place. I just... I'd like it way better if she just vegged out in the dungeon. That was all I wanted.

Right, I almost forgot, the whole reason I'm here is to fuck up whoever was getting in the way of us Dungeon Corp. employees spending our days relaxing in our own little slice of heaven. It had been a big mistake on my part to even think

about taking Lefi away from that chill life just so I could use her as a tool of war. Like, holy shit, what the hell was wrong with me? I'd take down the enemy with my power alone. For my sake and no one else's.

"Ugh, what to do, what to do..."

It ain't always easy getting shit done.



The next day.

"Ahhh. That was a great inn, huh?"

"I much prefer our home."

"Well, now that you've gone and said it, it's not like I can disagree with you."

I smiled wryly as I spoke, but hearing Lefi call the demon lord castle "our home" made me secretly happy.

The inn we'd stayed at for the one night was a little on the pricey side. Because of that, we were able to get a room right away even as first-time guests. The service was pretty good, and the dinner had really hit the spot. It included a lot of tasty dishes I'd never seen—ones that were clearly characteristic of this world.

Our room was beautiful too, not to mention more than big enough for the two of us. There was just one small miscalculation on my part: I hadn't counted on the bed being one double instead of two twins. It hadn't been a big deal, though, since we were used to living together anyway. Plus, Lefi had a habit of barging in on me in the bath and demanding that I wash her hair, so it had been way too late to be worrying about stuff like that. The only real downside had been the way all the employees had stared at me. They'd looked kinda skeeved out.

Then there was that scumbag prince. Actually, I'd given up on thinking about him. You could say I'd had it up to here with his whole deal. I mean, I *had* accomplished my original goal of finding out the enemy's true identity, which meant I was free to play tourist for the rest of our visit. I was gonna have my fill of this otherworldly town, and *then* I'd focus on the dickweed.

Which brought us back to now, with me and Lefi heading for the chief administrator's manor. The plan was to meet Nell there so she could be our tour guide today.

"Op! There she is! Yo, Nell! What's— Huh? Why're you here, old man?"

The hero and the chief administrator were standing together outside the guy's place.

"What's the matter, dude? And why do both of you look so sleepy?"

"Whose fault do you... Never mind, it's fine. In any case, the chief administrator wants to ask you something."

"He does?"

"Nell mentioned that you encountered a cursed magic blade. I would like to hear more details about the incident."

"Cursed"? Oh, he's talking about the axe, isn't he? I did remember Lefi saying something about me not being devoured by the curse after I picked it up, so that had to be it. Thinking about it now, "cursed" was the perfect way to describe the damned thing. Nothing else came to mind, especially after what I'd experienced.

"This, right?"

I pulled the totally submissive weapon in question out of Inventory and showed it to the chief administrator.

"Wha—"

A split second later, the guards stationed at the manor gate all drew their weapons and turned toward me.

"Halt! Lower your weapons! I apologize for my subordinates. But, well...you're fine touching that?"

"Yeah. I broke it in, so to speak."

The chief administrator must not have liked how uncaring I sounded because his face twitched.

"You...broke in a cursed magic blade...? I-I see. Well, then, would you kindly

put that away now? If I'm being honest, merely looking at it makes me feel awful."

"Whoa. You telling me it's *that* strong?"

"Indeed. So you can imagine my surprise at watching you handling it with such ease."

You don't say... I'd been joking when I'd told the hero that I specialized in dealing with negative vibes, but it turned out to be the truth. Wild. But wait, maybe the simpler explanation was the huge gap between my stats and his? Like, even though Nell could tell that the axe was dangerous, she didn't seem particularly fazed by it.

As for Lefi, I'd handed it over to her when she said she wanted to touch it yesterday at the inn. What had ended up happening was that the thing was scared so shitless that it pretended to be just a normal axe. It went so still and so quiet that I felt like it was trying to fly under the radar so that it didn't cause any problems. It didn't make a single peep. A part of me had thought it was sorta cute reacting like that. *Charming in a creepy way, I guess.*

Then, of course, Lefi had gotten bored of it being obedient, so she'd started threatening it. She was all, "Oy, what say you to hexing me?" I'd started to feel bad for the thing by that point, so that had been my cue to step in and put a stop to the madness.

Anyway, once I'd put the axe away again, the town's chief let out a sigh of relief.

"I know well enough by now that you're a strange individual, so I won't pry further into why you're unaffected. Instead, I would like you to tell me more about the man who wielded that weapon—specifically about his behavior."

"That sounded a lot like a diss...but whatever. So, you wanna know about the axe guy, do ya? Well, his physical abilities got a huge boost when he held the thing, but he was pretty strong for a thug even when he wasn't all hopped-up on curse juice."

With that much power, he could have made a decent living as something other than a criminal. Or maybe him getting jacked came *after* he got his hands

on the magic axe. *He totally power leveled, didn't he?*

I did learn something from actually touching it, though, and that was the fact that he hadn't had the weapon for very long. If he'd been using it a lot and for a long time, he would have turned into a violent lunatic with nothing on his mind except terrorizing people. He wouldn't have had even the little bit of brainpower he'd shown during our fight. That was what this weapon could do.

Looking at the axe's performance alone, just holding it was enough to boost every major stat by more than two hundred points. That was what'd happened to me when I'd held it, so I should know. This was the kind of world where even a ten-point stat difference would make or break a fight, so only losing a little bit of sanity in exchange for a literal overwhelming surge of power seemed like too small of a trade-off. I mean, this was a *cursed magic blade*, for crying out loud. It shouldn't have been that simple. Something smelled fishy to me, and when I told the chief administrator about it, he frowned and started thinking really hard.

"What's on your mind?"

"Hmm... Oh, please don't mind me. Just a few matters I find concerning. In any case, I apologize for keeping you. Candidly speaking, I would much rather have you both return to the Demonic Forest, but I have no further objections should you wish to stay in town a while longer. I only ask that you not cause any trouble."

"Check you out, old man, being all straight with me, no-holds-barred. I dig it."

"I merely felt that the direct approach would work best with you."

Though I could tell that he was exhausted, the chief administrator smiled boldly at me as he replied. *Well, he ain't wrong.* I wasn't a fan of beating around the bush, but I also didn't want him digging too deep into my inner thoughts. The old man may have seemed sophisticated, but I had a hunch that me and him were on the same page about keeping our cards close to our chests.

"Relax, my guy. The only things left on my agenda are sightseeing, sightseeing, and more sightseeing. Once I have my fun, we'll head back home, nice and quiet-like. Right, Lefi?"

“Yes, indeed. The food here is delicious, so even if an incident were to occur, I have already decided that I shall refrain from destroying this town.”

“Well, I certainly never anticipated a day when I would be grateful for the delicious fare we offer.”

Grinning and waving at the muttering old man, Lefi and I set out for a day on the town with the hero.

“Oh, hey, I just thought of something. Might be too late, especially coming from me, but are you sure it’s cool for you to tag along with us? You know, with us being enemies and all. You’re not gonna get in trouble or anything, are you?”

I asked that question to the hero, who was walking next to me as we strolled our way among the crowds.

“Took your time mulling that one over, didn’t you? Regardless, it is what it is. Leaving you two to your own devices would be much scarier, wouldn’t you say? I thought it’d be safer for all of us if I accompanied you.”

Rude much? It’s not like I’m the one going around picking fights here, jeez.

“One more thing. Just so you’re aware, I’m not actually from this town, so I don’t know much about its layout or anything like that.”

“But you know more than us, right?”

“I guess that’s true... Then, where do you want to go?”

“I wanna hit up an arms dealer and a bookstore. Lefi, you jonesing to see anything in particular?”

I tilted my head back and directed the question above it: Her Majesty, who was once again riding on my shoulders. Her arms were folded and she looked super happy.

“Somewhere with scrumptious meals. If there is a sweets shop, I would very much like to go there.”

“You’re kidding, right? You and that monstrous appetite of yours traumatized the staff this morning when you ate the inn dry.”

Breakfast at the inn had been buffet-style, but it had been a terrible time for everyone except Lefi since she devoured everything and then some. At first, there had only been a few employees in the dining room, but more and more of them had filed in as Lefi cleaned one plate after another. They had desperately tried to clean up while also replacing the empty dishes as fast as they could. The horrified looks on their faces were practically screaming “Sh-She’s still eating...” I’d felt god-awful for them. No doubt in my mind that the inn was in the red today.

“Hmph. You are sorely mistaken if you believe that was enough to satiate me.”

Oh, yeah?

“There you have it, Nell. Food, weapons, and books.”

“Hmm, all right. Since it’s the closest, we’ll head to the arms dealer first.”

And that was how we ended up at a weapons shop. The walls were jam-packed with all kinds of weapons, and there were a bunch of barrels with cheap stuff for sale. A few other customers were looking around the place. A mean-looking old man who may or may not have been the owner gave us a hard glance when we came in, but he lost interest pretty quickly and went back to polishing some weapon. *Bitchin’. Hell to the yes. Now this is what I’m talkin’ about. I’m getting excited!*

I’d been super pumped the whole time we’d been in town, and one of my goals for this trip had been to go to a weapons shop. Of course, part of it had to do with fulfilling every man’s dream, but the rest of it was about seeing what real professionals could make. I didn’t plan on making more normal swords anytime soon since I couldn’t use them all that well, but I still thought it was important to research other people’s works. I needed some inspiration for if and when I decided to get my creative juices flowing again. No output without input, na mean? If I was gonna make my own weapons, visiting a smithy at least once as a frame of reference felt like the smart thing to do.

“Wow. Pretty sweet lineup of stuff here.”

“This shop *does* service the knights’ armory, so it’s only to be expected. I’ve only been here once before, when I was allowed to join an expedition

spearheaded by our order.”

The hero looked all around the store while she replied to me. As an amateur, I wasn't sure just how good the weapons here were—but only without my secret weapon. By using Analysis, I could see that most of what was hanging on the wall was rated between A+ and B-in terms of quality. The discount stuff in the barrels went anywhere from C+ down to E-. When we had been at the adventurers' guild, the highest-rated weapon I'd seen an adventurer carrying was around C+, so this place definitely had a good selection.

Hey, what's this? Something caught my eye while I was mindlessly flicking through the junk in one of the barrels, so I reached in and pulled it out. The blade was jagged and rusty, and both the handle and the pattern on it had very plain designs. Anyone looking at the thing would assume it was a total dud. But not me.

Sword of the Ancient Hero: A long, long time ago, a hero, whose name has been lost to the annals of history, took up this sword, killing countless powerful enemies in order to protect others. At present, most of its powers have faded.
Quality: Indeterminable.

Well, ain't that something. Looks like I found myself a diamond in the rough. This little fella sounded a lot like one of those ancient stone thingamajigs from Creature Hunter where the weapon's power would return after you successfully fortified it.

“Oh? It would seem you have found something intriguing, Yuki.”

“Yup.”

Lefi sounded interested. She'd been busy checking out the shop's other items, but now, her eyes were latched onto the sword in my hands.

I just had a crazy idea. What if I used this sword and the murder axe as materials to reforge them into something new using Weapon Enhancement? My initial plan of converting the axe into another greatsword had hit a snag when I'd realized that the axe by itself wouldn't be enough for a finished

product. Here's the thing, though: the Weapon Enhancement ability didn't have a one-ingredient limit. As long as what I was using for materials could be shaped by magic, I could fuse as many of them as I wanted. Other stuff was probably necessary to make complicated weapons, but outside of that, it was definitely possible to make something incredible.

This sword is a work of art, humans. Whoa, *mama*, did they know how to make a man pop a fantasy boner. I hated to admit it, but they'd won this round. Well played, whoever made this kick-ass sword.

"Aight, I'm buying it. Anything you want in here, Lefi? It's on me."

"That is not necessary. There are some unusual items, certainly, but nothing in particular I desire. Instead, you will buy me food afterward."

"Yeah, yeah. Copy that. Ooh, the quality sucks, but this design is dope. Hey, it's a pavise! Heh heh, nice. Might buy this too, then."

How cool would it be if I slammed this thing into the ground and yelled, "Manifest yourself, Lord Camelod!"? I'd look like a badass, right? We just won't talk about the fact that I'd never actually use a shield like this.

"We both know you will not use it regardless. Furthermore, it would be trivial for you to create one yourself."

I understood why Lefi looked annoyed, but what *she* needed to understand was that something like this was a *collector's item*. Just because it was for sure gonna end up collecting dust in Inventory didn't mean I didn't still *want* it.

"In any case, there is no need to squander your coin on such a frivolous thing. Purchase what you need and let us be off. We have other places to go, do we not?"

"Mm, when you're right, you're right. Okay, then. Nell, it's time to hit up... Nell?"

When I found the hero, she was staring at a longsword on the wall. She was so focused on the thing that I could have sworn her eyes were going to devour it.

"You *do* know you already have an amazing sword, right?"

A holy sword, a weapon so amazing that I was pretty sure there were only a few in existence. What a shame the thing had some sort of special magic on it that blocked me from seeing any of its details even with Analysis. The more I thought about it, though, the more I felt like maybe there actually *were* quite a few holy swords around. This was another world, after all. And I mean, this clumsy crybaby of a hero had one, so it was entirely possible that there *hadn't* been a limited production run of holy swords. They might not be as rare as I'd initially thought.

"Huh? Oh, u-um, right. You're right. B-But this is totally different. You understand, don't you?"

Yeah, okay, I get it. How could I not? I'd been super hyped this whole time—and still was, honestly. I guess I just assumed a shop like this would only appeal to guys and that women would react like Lefi had and not care even a little bit. But hey, I was glad to know I was wrong, what with Nell looking like she was enjoying herself. Who was I to rain on her parade?

After that, I couldn't stop grinning. I was so stoked about the great stuff I'd been able to buy. The hero, who was supposed to be our tour guide, had been glued to the longsword she'd been staring at like a little kid at a toy store's window display. I'd had to literally drag her away from it—while she screamed "W-Wait! J-Just a little longer! Please!"—when it was time for her to take us to our next stop. She'd led us to the bookstore, but she hadn't exactly been happy about it.

Right now, I was alone. Lefi had refused to stop whining about being hungry, so I'd shoved the bag of money at the hero and told them to go eat themselves into a coma and that we'd regroup later.

I tugged on the door handle and the door to the bookstore creaked open. When I walked inside, I was surrounded by the smell of old pages. It was super quiet and kinda dark, and there weren't a lot of customers. I'd been wondering what a bookstore would be like in another world. Turned out to not be all that different from present-day stores on Earth. It felt just like a mom-and-pop used book store.

All the books were organized neatly by genre, so it was easy to find whatever you were looking for. In a lot of fantasy stories, books were considered quite precious, but this shop looked just like a normal bookstore and had a ton of books on display. Despite books being more expensive than usual daily necessities, it looked like the printing business in this world was chugging along quite well.

“Welcome...”

I headed deeper into the store as the woman gave me that half-hearted greeting. I could see her sitting at the counter with her chin in her hands. I’d been wanting to visit a bookstore because I wanted to buy a book or two on sorcery—specifically about sorcerous circuits—since I had that Sorcerer’s Grant ability that let me install sorcerous circuits in things.

The problem, though, was the extremely small number of circuits I *could* create. I knew that I’d be able to make more of them if I just leveled up the skill, but I was itching to create a weapon with special effects. Paralysis plus Poison plus Burn plus Sleep plus Freeze equals profit??? Just kidding. But not really, because those were some of the effects I had in mind for a weapon. Any of those sound familiar, by the way? Kid who’s gonna be the very best and his yellow mouse partner? Wink wink nudge nudge.

Anyway, I’d realized that I needed to study hard if I wanted to make a weapon so fantastically fatal.

“Hm... Ah ha! Found it.”

During my search of the store’s shelves, I stumbled upon a trilogy titled “Understanding Sorcery: Sorcerous Circuits.” Volume 1 was elementary-level knowledge, volume 2 was intermediate-level, and volume 3 was advanced-level. I grabbed the first one and flipped through it to make sure these were what I wanted.

“Whoa, what the hell’s this?”

I don’t understand any of this. Not a single freaking thing. Let me give you an analogy to explain just how much of it I didn’t understand. You know when your teacher would give you reference data and tell you to write a report with it but that data might as well have been gibberish because you couldn’t make heads

or tails of it? That was how I felt right now.

Reading the words was easy peasy thanks to my Polyglot ability. I was super literate in that sense; no issues there. No, it was the content itself that was the problem. There was just so much specialized jargon that even the elementary-level book made absolutely zero sense to me. *Ugh. I seriously doubt they have any other books on sorcerous circuits, though...*

I was out of options. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do to make his manly dreams come true, so I'd just have to find a way to grind through obstacles like this one. It was a test. A test to see how strong my passion for one of my wildest dreams was. And I was gonna pass with flying freaking colors. I was gonna make this godforsaken test my bitch because I refused to call it quits when the hurdle was this low. Just watch.

I bought those three volumes and a few more books on magic, plus a bunch of picture books Iluna would like, then left the store. *All right, time to find Lefi and Nell.* I opened up Maps and looked at the flashing "allies" dots to confirm their location. *Huh, they're not that far.* About a hundred meters, give or take. I immediately started walking in their direction.

"C'mon, sweet things, it's our treat. Let's get some grub together, yeah?"

"U-Um...we're fine, thank you."

"Hey, hey, don't be so shy. You too, silver-haired girlie. Join us, why dontcha?"

"Yeah, you don't gotta be so formal with us. Relax. Let's have a little fun, 'kay?"

Lefi stayed quiet.

"Oh, uh...I'm sorry, but we're waiting for someone, so..."

From far away, I saw my two party members being hit on by three men. They were both beautiful girls, so I wasn't particularly surprised. That said, they were both stupid powerful, so they were hardly normal girls.

As I watched, Lefi ignored the men completely. She was focused on devouring

the meat in her hands. Which meant that the hero was left to fend them off by herself. She was having a rough go of it, though. They didn't seem like actual bad guys, so she clearly didn't know what to do. *You can just tell dinguses like that to get lost, hero. You're too nice for your own freaking good.*

"Scuse me, but those two are with me. How 'bout you go find someone else to put the moves on?"

"Oh, Mr. Yuki!"

The hero shouted and let out a small sigh of relief when I got involved. The sight of a demon lord *probably* shouldn't have made Miss Hero happy, though.

"Hmph, I see you have finally deigned to grace us with your presence. Here, Yuki. Your portion of the meat."

"Thaaanks, that's actually surprisingly decent of you, Lefi."

"I did not care for its taste."

"You little... Whatever, I'll still eat it. Let's go, Nell."

"Oh! R-Right, yeah."

"H-Hey, now, whaddya think—"

Just as I was about to take my two companions and leave, the man closest to the hero reached out and tried to grab her shoulder. But before he could get his creepy little fingers on her, I caught his arm and squeezed down hard.

"You still have something to say?"

"Nh... U-Uh, no, it's nothing. Nothing at all. W-We're leaving."

I'd shoved my face right in his and asked him that with a toothy smile. It made him flinch, and after taking one last look at the girls, he and his two buddies walked away. There wasn't a snowball's chance in hell that he wasn't upset about letting go of these two stunners, but those idiots should have been grateful to me. They didn't realize that I'd just saved them from a money-draining freeloader. As long as Lefi was around, bankruptcy was definitely a possibility.

"Th-Thank you, Mr. Yuki."

“Don’t take those kinds of guys seriously. They’re the type to take advantage of nice girls like you and push their luck.”

“G-Got it. I’ll be careful from now on. By the way, I noticed you handled them so easily, almost like you’re used to situations like that.”

“Uh, yeah, well...”

In my past life... Let’s just say stuff happened and leave it at that. It wasn’t relevant to my life now.

“Aaanyway, I’m starving. Nell, lead us to a good restaurant.”

“Yes, Nell. At once.”

“Um, Mr. Yuki aside, Lefi, you haven’t stopped eating all day...”

“What of it? Think you those paltry amounts were enough to satisfy me?”

“But you’ve eaten more than twice as much as I have so far...”

Oh, hero, you sweet summer child. Lefi could eat double what I did and still have plenty of room to spare. Out-eating someone like the hero, who obviously had a small stomach, was a piece of cake for the dragon girl. Although, really, Lefi’s stomach *looked* smaller than Nell’s, size-and appearance-wise.

After that, the hero took us to a popular restaurant on the main street. The place was pretty big, and it was run by a solidly built woman who was clearly the owner. It had to have been doing good business given all the people here. The lively atmosphere made me think it might be the town’s favorite watering hole.

A cheerful, refined young lady who I guessed was the owner’s daughter was also hard at work. Judging from the looks on a bunch of the men’s faces, a lot of them were probably regulars who came here specifically for her. I wouldn’t have been surprised if they fantasized about marrying her or whatever.

“Wow... You two sure can put it away.”

Nell sounded amazed as she watched me and Lefi from her seat at the circular table we’d been shown to.

“You know, now that I think about it, I’ve definitely been eating way more since we hit this town.”

“Okay, but why are *you* the one surprised to learn that, Mr. Yuki?”

“Cause I never ate this much in the dungeon.”

I usually never even felt that hungry, so one portion used to be more than enough. Except now, I could eat enough for two people and still want more. For some reason, I’d been feeling like a bottomless pit ever since getting to Alfiro.

“The mana here is extremely thin compared to that forest, so your natural recovery rate is not enough to sustain you. Thus, your food consumption has increased dramatically. It is your body’s manner of compensating for the shortage of energy you require.”

Lefi’s cheeks puffed adorably as she spoke. The amount of spaghetti with mountains of meat she was stuffing into her mouth made her look like a squirrel. At that moment, the owner walked past us on her way to serve another table. Catching sight of Lefi, the older woman let out a laugh and said, “Well, now, I sure do like seeing little ladies with big appetites!” I gave her a slight nod in response, then turned to Lefi.

“Is the difference in mana really that huge? I honestly can’t tell.”

“You are simply too dense, Yuki.”

I opened my mouth to make a comeback but closed it again when I realized I didn’t have one. It frosted my balls that I couldn’t even say she was wrong. I wished she hadn’t said it out loud, though. But at least now I understood what was going on with this hunger business. If I couldn’t get my fill even after eating so much, that meant this body of mine was a massive glutton, huh? Good to know that a demon lord’s body required that much energy for maintenance.

“Oh, yeah, Nell, about the magic axe. Why was the old man so worried?”

I asked the hero while I chowed down on meat that looked like teriyaki chicken wrapped in a plant that was kinda similar to lettuce, on top of which rested an ingredient that resembled a tomato, which itself was crowned with a metric fuckton of a cheese-like substance, all sandwiched between two slices of what I assumed was bread to create some approximation of a burger. I had no

idea what the foods in this world were called, so I wasn't sure what any of the parts actually were. Regardless, the whole thing was freaking delicious.

"Well, I guess there's no need to hide this information from you, so telling you shouldn't be a problem. Umm, how should I put this? The truth is, there have been other incidents similar to the one we found ourselves in."

"Really?"

I stopped eating and faced the hero.

"So you're telling me that there are more people out there with cursed magic blades?"

"No. That man we encountered seems to have been the only one in possession of such a weapon. But the other incidents have to do with individuals who suddenly turned savage and killed people even though they were normal, upstanding citizens before the change. There are also reports of residents becoming violent due to the influence of strange drugs. So these kinds of bizarre occurrences are cropping up around town."

"And you don't think these are just coincidences?"

"At first, that's what the chief administrator thought too, but earlier this month, the number of episodes began increasing dramatically. And then, Mr. Yuki, we ended up running into that man."

"Yeah."

"It should have been virtually impossible for a cursed magical weapon that powerful to have found its way into the hands of a commoner, so the town's garrison interrogated all those remaining men who attacked us. They learned that the man you defeated had received the weapon from someone else."

"Gotcha. I'm starting to see the big picture now."

Basically, there was someone working behind closed doors to give that sort of dangerous, mind-altering weapon to the townspeople.

"So *that's* why there are so many guards stationed throughout the town."

"You got it."

I glanced through one of the restaurant's windows and saw a trio of three fully armored guards passing by on patrol. When we first landed here, I'd thought the heavy defense was normal, but now I knew that wasn't the case at all. The town was essentially in a state of emergency.

"Is someone targeting this settlement?"

"Currently, the chief administrator and his people don't have any suspects besides you two."

"Just to be clear, it's not us."

"I know. You wouldn't take such an indirect approach, Mr. Yuki."

Damn right I wouldn't. If I were serious about destroying this town, I'd have stormed in with an assload of dungeon summons. Violence in numbers—no joke. Might not work against the forest's monsters, but it'd be more than enough for human enemies, aka the weaklings.

"At any rate, that's what's going on, so I suggest you be careful while sightseeing. I know you can handle yourself, Mr. Yuki, but it would be dangerous for Lefi to run into something like that axe man alone."

"Huh? Uh, sure..."

That's right. She doesn't know what Lefi actually is.

"You heard that, right, Lefi? She said we need to be careful."

"Hm? Careful of what? Overeating, perchance?"

"Oh, yeah, you *should* watch out for that, actually. Don't come crying to me later if all that food doesn't digest right."

"Fool. My stomach is not as fragile as you think. I will have you know that I once ingested the flesh of a monarch poisonous serpent without suffering any ill effects. Though I admit that it tasted horrendous. I would never eat another one."

"I can tell what kind of monster that was just from the name, but humor me anyway. What in the hell made you wanna eat something like that in the first place?"

“Its flesh was a vibrant hue that looked delicious to me, so I instinctively made a meal of it.”

“All right, let me give you a quick lesson in case you don’t know. If a creature is all flashy or pretty-colored, that’s what’s called ‘warning coloration.’ It’s basically telling you straight-up that it’s dangerous and you should stay away. Most of them are poisonous or venomous, so there’s no way they’d taste good. But you should have known from its name alone that it was toxic, so again, what the hell were you thinking?”

“Indeed, I have since made it a personal policy to never eat something so gaudy again, regardless of the depth of my hunger.”

“Um, I’m not actually concerned about you overeating, though? Also, why has the conversation suddenly gone in such a random direction?”

Nell looked utterly baffled as she spoke. *It’s all good, hero. You’ve got nothing to worry about when it comes to Miss Lefi. I guarantee that she’s hundreds of times stronger than you think.*

“But it’s fine, I guess. So, what shall we do after this? Is there anywhere else you two want to go?”

“Hmm, let me think... Nothing really comes to mind. You know any good tourist attractions?”

“You know, I don’t think there’s anything like that here. Since Alfiro is a remote border town, many adventurers and soldiers come and go, but this isn’t exactly a place people come for leisure.”

“Yeah, that’s the impression I got too.”

There were a bunch of restaurants, general stores, and weapons shops in town, plus what seemed to be a red-light district, but beyond that, there weren’t any particularly noteworthy spots here. The best way I could describe this town was “practical.” In the beginning, I’d just been super stoked about being in an isekai town, but even I had to admit that the shine had worn off pretty fast. Now, it was just like any other town.

“Oh, I have an idea! Why don’t we take on a commission at the adventurers’ guild? We registered you two just to get you identification cards, but since you

have them anyway, we might as well try our hand at a request or two. I think it'd be fun! Or at least interesting."

"I'm down. Definitely sounds like a good time. What do you think, Lefi?"

"Hm... I often nap after lunch, but I am not averse to a change in my regular habits. We are here, after all, so we may as well enjoy this settlement's amenities to the fullest."

"Everyone's on board, then. Hitting up the guild after we finish eating it is."



It was afternoon now, and we had already left the town after accepting a request from the adventurers' guild. The settlement was surrounded by plains, but it was only a short walk through them to some woods, which we were currently marching through. By the way, these woods weren't a part of the Demonic Forest. They were situated in another location entirely.

I'd received two hunting bills, one for orcs and the other for giant claw spiders. The jobs would be considered complete once I'd killed five orcs and three giant claw spiders. Both species were often seen in the same area, and both were weaker than the monsters in the southern part of the Demonic Forest. That was where the weakest monsters in the Forest lived, so as long as I didn't get cocky, this mission would be done and dusted in a few hours and without anyone getting hurt. Couldn't risk anything happening to Lefi or Nell.

"So, um...are you sure about this? I know you're a demon lord and all, Mr. Yuki, and Lefi isn't human either, so she's most likely much stronger than I assumed, but orcs and giant claw spiders are both Human-class monsters."

"Human-class... That's, er, third from the bottom in the monster hierarchy, right? Then yeah, we should be fine. Even you could take one of them on all by yourself, right?"

Let me see if I remembered the classes correctly. Pretty sure the order was Harmless, Hazardous, Human, War, Disaster, Catastrophe, and Calamity.

"In a one-on-one battle, I think so, yes. But these two species move in groups, so I'm not confident I could best them like that."

Nell sounded anxious. *Hmm, how can I get her to not be scared?*

“My dear Lady Lefi, heed you the words our illustrious champion utters? Thus, I beg of thee, show her your true power and dispel her terror.”

“Yuki, I am sickened by your manner of speech, so I bid you to never use it again.”

“Oh, my! I sincerely beg your pardon, then— Wait! Wait, wait, wait! I’m sorry! Don’t punch me! Anything but that! Your punches are no joke, okay?!”

Lefi was nice enough to always pull her punches, but that didn’t mean diddly-freaking-squat when even “holding back” took away a third of my HP. *Please, not today, not right now.* I regretted knowing that since it had hurt like a bitch to learn it. If I’d been a run-of-the-mill monster, that hit would have wiped me clean out of existence. I was a million percent positive about that.

“Hmph. Fine, I will overlook your impertinence this once and oblige your request. It seems we have ourselves a perfect target as well.”

“What? Oh, so we do. You could tell from this far, huh?”

Deeper into the woods, Lefi and Nell had spotted a handful of goblins peering at us from the shadows. I could tell from the greedy glares in their eyes that they saw us as prey. The monsters in the Demonic Forest either ran away or hid whenever Lefi was nearby, but these guys apparently didn’t know any better. They were gonna learn, though, and they were gonna learn *real* quick. They were the perfect fodder for Lefi to show Nell just how strong she really was.

“Goblins, huh? Eh, good enough. Lefi, can you do the thing?”

“Understood.”

Lefi nodded, then produced a fireball on her palm.

“No! Jesus! Not that, you nimrod! That’s the magic you used when you went on a rampage against my miniatures, isn’t it?! Forget that noise! You’ll burn this whole damn forest to the ground if you launch that spell!”

Though the fireball was only about the size of a golf ball, I’d seen the destruction it could cause up close and personal. That little bastard was *stupid* powerful. It would’ve been okay if she used that magic in an open space, but in

the middle of this forest? *Hell* no.

There was just as much kaboom in that tiny little ball of flames as there was in several dozen sticks of dynamite. Hence why I was freaking out. Well, I'd never actually *seen* a stick of dynamite blow up, so I couldn't tell you exactly how powerful one was, but whatever. Still a reasonable comparison, methinks. What I *could* tell you was how hot one of her fireballs was. Not as hot as the sun, but maybe as hot as magma. Yeah, that sounded right to me. But man, if Lefi ever got serious with her fireballs, I could totally see it as being powerful as a pseudo-sun.

"Hmm... I concede your point. Then I will use this instead."

She made the fireball disappear with a small *whoosh* before conjuring up what looked like a water ball on her palm. It was also golf ball-sized, give or take.

"I guess I'll ask just to make sure, but what kind of magic is that?"

"A high-pressure water ball. You may think of it as similar to the water dragons you create."

Huh. I guess that'll work. Deciding that my silence meant I had no further objections, Lefi raised her arm and shot the water ball toward the hidden goblins at high speed. Despite being made of water, when it found its mark, it exploded violently, the sound practically shattering our eardrums. Dirt kicked up all over the place too. After a few minutes, the dust cloud settled and we saw, well, a whole lotta nothing. There was no sign that anything had ever lived in that area. All that was left was a lifeless crater where trees once were.

"So, heeey, can you tell me exactly *how* that's the same as my water dragons? And how in the *world* did you make *water explode*?"

"I merely compressed the high-speed currents flowing within using a vast amount of pressure. An external impact releases that pressure, causing an explosion. Simple."

"Oookay, mind-blowing magic confirmed. Gonna have to make a note of that one."

Cheese and crackers, how many years will it take before I can use magic like

that? I might need decades.

Legit dumbstruck by what she'd just seen, the hero's brain finally started rebooting. She wasn't fully over the shock of it all, so her face spasmed a little while she spoke.

"Has... Has Lefi always been such a powerful conjurer?"

"It isn't just her magic. Her physical abilities are out of this world too. But actually, magic might be more her forte?"

"Indeed. If I were to choose, I would say that magic is my primary talent. Although I can destroy human nations even without the use of my magic."

She must've been talking about her dragon form, where she could do whatever the hell she wanted, including raining hellfire on entire countries. Like one of those God Fighters from *Mausicaä*.

"H-Hey, Lefi, can I ask what your race is?"

"It is Ancient Dragon."

"Ancient Dragon... Wait, are you for real?! Lefi, you're a dragon?! And oh my gosh, aren't Ancient Dragons the strongest ones?!"

"But wait, there's more! Wouldn't you know it, Lefi's the Supreme Dragon, which means she's at literally the very tippity top of the food chain. Can you believe it? *This* kid-looking thing. And with her personality... Mm, well, there *is* that."

"Oh, is that so, Yuki? I am quite interested in learning more about 'that,' so please, do elaborate."

"No, no, no. You've got it all wrong, Lefi. Your natural virtue is beyond compare. There are no words to express your nobility. I just didn't think there was a need to say it so explicitly, but really, that's all I meant. Seriously."

"Always so exceedingly glib, Yuki. Perhaps sewing your mouth shut might teach you not to spout such insufferable drivel again."

"Hold on... 'Supreme Dragon'? You mean *that* Supreme Dragon?"

I nodded affirmatively at Nell's dazed question.

“I don’t know what other dragons are around, but she is most definitely *that* Supreme Dragon.”

“I... I have a lot I want to say, but judging by your attitude, I can tell you’re telling the truth...”

“Look at you, talking all sensibly. Guess you’re not that shocked after all, are you?”

“No, I’m absolutely, positively astounded. The shock just keeps coming back full circle every time I think about it, is all.”

With a strained smile, Nell continued speaking.

“Then...I have another question. Why is Lefi the Supreme Dragon together with Yuki the Demon Lord?”

“Hm... There are profound reasons for that.”

“I lured her in with candy. The end.”

“Yuki. You should know very well by now that I have my dignity and pride to consider as the Supreme Dragon.”

“Relax, Lefi. Your dignity or whatever disappeared ages ago, so you’ve got nothing to worry about.”

“As you wish, Yuki. Since you seem intent on provoking me into war, a war you shall have. I am all too happy to oblige.”

Whoopsie, better take it down a notch. I didn’t even want to think about how scary her counterattack would be if I pushed her any further. This felt like a good stopping point, so I raised both hands in surrender at Lefi, who stared up at me with a smile that triple-dragon-dared me to fuck around and find out. Then, I turned to the hero standing next to me and spoke.

“And now you know, Nell. No matter what happens or which creatures come out, we’ve got the one being who stands at the peak of the monster—no, the living-thing hierarchy right here with us. You literally have nothing to worry about.”

“He has the right of it. You may be at ease, for I can handle nearly all opponents. But I will not protect you, Yuki, so you had best see to your own

safety.”

“Mistwess Wefi, pwееееase don’t be sho heartwess!”

“Imbecile! You disgust me with that voice!”

“Heh heh... Okay, then, I understand. It doesn’t matter who either of you really is; Lefi will always be Lefi and Mr. Yuki will always be Mr. Yuki. I guess I’ll lean on you both.”

“Aye, aye, cap’n. You can count on us. We’ll show you nothing but the full extent of our family’s combat prowess.”

“You refer to *my* combat prowess, yes? What right do you have to act so arrogantly, then?”

Ignoring Lefi’s hate-filled glare, I started walking again, practically skipping because I was in such high spirits.

We’d been wandering the forest for about four hours now, but nothing had shown up. Not one thing. The entire freaking time.

“Screw you, Lefi! This is all your fault! All the monsters around here are too afraid to show themselves because *you’re* too goddamn strong!”

“Why, I never!”

It was actually my bad for forgetting the fact that Lefi was the Supreme Dragon. Goblins had shit for brains, so they wouldn’t have recognized the difference in power between her and them—which was exactly why they’d tried to attack her. But Human-class monsters were a different breed entirely. They understood her might and acted accordingly.

Zip. Zilch. Nada. Not even a peep out of the Scout ability. Sometimes, I’d sense a creature’s presence, but whenever I looked in its direction, it was just more thickheaded goblins that weren’t afraid of Lefi, ready to pounce. *I wonder how many of those distractions she’s turned to ash so far. Hmm.*

So, uh, remember how I’d bragged about monsters in our forest running away at the sight of Lefi and how these monsters would learn a hard lesson today? If you could pretend that never happened, that would be *great*. I wanted to crawl

into a hole and die thinking about how cocky that was. My brain had enough ridges to think about something silly like that, but apparently not enough to consider the possibility that Lefi showing off her power would make our targets peace the hell out.

Sure, we'd be fine no matter what happened or showed up as long as Lefi was around. Except that *nothing* happened and *nothing* showed up. What were we supposed to do now?

The sun was more than halfway to setting. With night coming up so quick, there was no way we could continue our search.

"Urgh! I know this is my doing, but I can't believe I forgot that she's as dependable in some ways as she is unreliable in others! I screwed up so bad!"

"Th-This is not my fault! The monsters avoid us of their own accord! You have quite the gall to continue to place the blame on my head, Yuki!"

"I-It's okay, you two. Calm down. In the end, nothing came out, but that's fine. I enjoyed going on this walk with you guys. Oh, and all the interesting stories I got to hear!"

"We didn't come out here to take a dumbass stroll through this dumbass forest! We came here to hunt some freaking monsters! Now, we're gonna pay for breach of contract on the stupid commissions! If I'd known this was gonna happen, I would've just left your ass back at the inn to nap!"

"Y-You certainly know how to run your mouth, Yuki! Especially when it was *you* who was reliant on *my* power!"

"I was like half joking when I said that! More than half, okay! I mean, yeah, I totally would have asked you for help if shit went sideways, but I was totally planning on handling things myself otherwise!"

"Pfft."

As Lefi and I went in circles in our verbal battle, the hero tried and failed to stifle a small laugh.

"What the shit, Nell? You wanna share with the class what you think's so funny?"

“No, I was just thinking that you two get along really well. I’m a little jealous, truth be told.”

“Huh? I don’t see anything here to be jealous of, though?”

“Of course you don’t. You’re in the center of it, so you wouldn’t understand. Heh heh, I truly did enjoy spending time with you both today.”

Lefi and I both were literally stunned speechless by the suddenly grinning hero.

“...Wanna head back?”

“...That would be best.”

And that was how we failed our first job as adventurers.

Chapter 4: The Town at Dusk

Situated in an underground room was a simple chamber furnished with only a table and lighting so low it made the space quite gloomy. Within that gloominess was a group of five people whose all-black outfits seemed to make them melt into the dark. It was impossible to differentiate between them, as the hoods pulled over their heads left only their eyes visible.

“Let’s discuss our first order of business. The magic blade was too powerful; we need to revise our strategy.”

A man, seemingly their leader, stood facing the other four members and spoke.

“What? Did the chief administrator interfere again?”

“No, it wasn’t him. Dazzled by the prospect of coin, the man we brainwashed attacked a tourist in town and was killed. It would seem said tourist has taken possession of the magic blade.”

The leader’s words caused the group to stir.

“He was killed despite having the magic blade? Was he too weak, then? Or was this tourist simply that powerful?”

“Regardless, we erred in our choice of personnel, yes? I suppose a thug is but a thug, right up until the bitter end.”

“Our options were heavily limited. Those able to withstand the magic blade’s power without having their spirit broken are few and far between. What’s done is done.”

Within the black-clad quintet, one individual continued directing questions at the leader.

“And what of the person who snatched the magic blade? Are they a candidate for brainwashing?”

“Unfortunately, no. Based on the information I received, more than just

retaining their sanity, they were completely resistant to the curse. I'm unsure if we should even risk recovering the blade, as that individual was able to overpower and slay our thug in spite of his unnaturally enhanced physical abilities. We may have a chance if we take them by surprise, but the risk is too high as there is too much uncertainty involved. We should consider the magic blade lost."

The leader allowed a moment of silence before holding forth again in a stern voice.

"We spent too much time experimenting on other subjects in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of the brainwashing. In hindsight, we should have utilized the technique much sooner to guarantee that we reached our goal, even with the lower efficacy. In any case, our mission *must* be accomplished."

"And what of your plan to use the brainwashed magic blade wielders to attack the lord's estate?"

"I've decided not to go through with it. For now, at least. It pains me, but this change in plan is unavoidable. Instead, we will prolong the confusion occurring in town. The chief administrator being who he is, he will realize quickly that there are powers working behind the curtains, so I don't plan to hold back any longer."

"You mean to use the monstrous spirits of the dead?!"

"If necessary, yes. I see no reason to hoard those resources. Are there any objections?"

When the others remained silent, the leader nodded to himself, then continued speaking again with a determined glint in his eyes.

"We will now commence our operation. Make mounds of your neighbors' corpses. Step over your comrades' lifeless bodies. Throw away your own lives. For we do this for the sake of our homeland."

"For the sake of our homeland," the other four repeated in unison.

None remained in that room after that.



It was evening now. The sun was disappearing on one side of the sky, and the moon was just starting to poke up on the other. It was that special moment when dusk turned into night. Everything felt more relaxed now that there were fewer people wandering around outside and the noise of the crowd was fading into the background. Before our eyes, the town shifted from its lively daytime atmosphere, weaving a fantastical nighttime scene as the setting sun stretched our shadows out endlessly.

Lefi and I were on our way back to the inn we were staying at. We'd already split off from the hero, promising to meet up again tomorrow morning in front of the chief administrator's estate. Seemed like she was being totally honest when she'd said she enjoyed being with us. Her "See you tomorrow!" had sounded super genuine, and she didn't say it because I'd said it first or anything either. If I had to guess, I'd say she never got to take breathers like this from her mega-rigorous daily training. *If she ever decides to visit our dungeon again, we'll have to make extra sure to be great hosts.*

"I must say, I find myself rather disappointed that the other members of our household could not be here with us."

"Ditto. With them around, it would've been even rowdier. Way more fun too."

I could totally imagine Iluna running around town all excitedly, Lew freaking out and chasing after her, and Leila grinning while she kept an eye on them from behind. As for Rir and Shii, the only thing I could imagine was the town in an uproar because of them. Same deal for the wraith sisters. I snickered thinking about it.

"Oh?"

"Nah, it's nothing. Just never thought you'd say something like that, so I'm a little surprised."

"You may be right. I certainly never anticipated a day I would feel forlorn at another's absence."

Lefi looked like she was confused by her own behavior. I shrugged at her before replying.

“Well, I like this too, us strolling along without a care in the world. Plus, it’s been a while since the last time it was just the two of us.”

“Heh heh, is that so? What a peculiar sensation, albeit not an unpleasant one. Though half a year has not yet passed since we met, I feel as if it has been decades.”

“It probably only feels like that because you hang out in the dungeon all day and don’t actually *do* anything.”

“In my previous nest, it was quite the norm for me to spend an entire day asleep.”

“So you’re saying life is better now?”

“Indeed. You may not believe it, but I have been exerting quite a lot of effort even as I am now. It should be no wonder that I cannot help with the household chores.”

“That makes no freaking sense, woman.”

I laughed in response to her teasing smile. She was way too good at pulling my leg.

Just then, like silk tearing, a woman’s scream echoed down the street.

That came from nearby. Without thinking, I turned my head toward the source of the scream, and said woman came tumbling out of a back alley. Her clothes clearly pegged her as someone in a, shall we say, *nightly* line of work. Behind her—chasing her—was a man with a crazed look in his eyes. That alone told me that he’d already gone off the deep end. The bloody knife in his hand was just more proof.

“Ah—ahhh—nghhh—aaahhh—”

He let out a demented groan as he lurched after the woman. *Fuckin’ A, dude, what a load of crap. I was in such a good mood too.*

“Thanks for killing my vibe, asshole!”

I picked up a rock and hurled it at his head. It whooshed through the air and, thanks to my fantastic aim, hit him square in the side of the head with a hard *thwack*. He immediately started gushing blood, but uh-oh. *Houston, we have a*

problem.

“Christ on a bike, what’s up with this guy?”

The surprise attack had knocked him down, but he was slowly dragging himself back to his feet. The disgusting, bone-chilling way he moved reminded me of a jiangshi, those reanimated corpses from Chinese folklore. Like, for real, he should’ve been as dead as a doornail because I had *not* held back when I’d shot that rock at his skull. But no, this rat bastard wasn’t even unconscious. In fact, he had the *audacity* to get up like everything was hunky-freakin’-dory.

“Hmm... Yuki, use your Demon Eyes on him.”

“Huh? O-Okay.”

I did what Lefi said and activated my Demon Eyes. *Holy shit, what? Is... Is his entire body bound by magic?*

“Do you understand now? This man is already dead. That fact will become even clearer should you use Analysis.”

Once again, I followed Lefi’s instructions. *Well, butter my butt and call me a biscuit. She’s right.* His HP was sitting at a big fat zero.

“Damn, Lefi, how’d you know that?”

“Long ago, I battled someone who utilized the spirits of the deceased. The ghouls they put to use were bound by magic in the same manner, so their movements were unnatural. I am almost certain this situation is similar.”

“Gotcha.”

So, basically, he’s a zombie. Only difference was that instead of a virus being the thing making him move, it was magic, just like what that cursed blade had been doing with that big SOB. Basically, this guy’s existence was being controlled by magic. I’d mentioned earlier that he *reminded* me of a jiangshi, but in reality, that’s exactly what he was. Which meant there should have been someone both literally and figuratively pulling his strings...if not for the fact that for some strange reason, Scout wasn’t picking up on any hostile presences in the area. There was nothing when I checked Maps either. They must not’ve been around here, then.

Screw it, I'll deal with that later. I had to take care of this monstrosity first. If it had been a virus or something that had turned him into a zombie, I could have bashed his brains in or cut his head off. Sadly for me, though, magic was the source of his zombification, so I was pretty sure he'd keep moving even if I decapitated him.

"Lefi, how did you defeat those spirits you mentioned?"

"By burning them and their master to ash."

"F-Figured."

Disinfect the filth, right? The problem was that I couldn't really use fire magic anymore, and telling Lefi to use hers was just *asking* for trouble. Wouldn't have been surprised if she burned this whole block to the ground if she did.

Hold on a sec, though. Since magic was controlling him, maybe I could overwrite it with *my* magic? As I tried to think of a plan, the zombie changed targets to me since I was the one who'd attacked him. He twisted toward me in a super creepy way and started trudging my way to take me out. When he got close enough, I hooked his leg to trip him, then grabbed his head while the rest of him was still on the ground. I started using magic right away, then forcefully poured it into the dude's skull through my palm. The second I did, I felt the magic controlling him push back hard—but it was too weak to stop me.

"Urgh—ahhh—ahhhhh..."

The man's body started spasming as my magic circulated inside him. Once I had complete control, though, his body suddenly stopped moving.

"Hooo, boy... Seriously, what the hell even *was* this guy?"

The lady he'd attacked bowed her head to thank me before taking off. I watched her leave, then looked back down at the goddamn zombie.

"I could not sense the true mastermind either. Regardless, however, all who practice necromancy are reprehensible characters, so it is very likely that whoever did this used forbidden magic to control this man from afar. Else, the engineer could have lost control entirely."

"You sure don't mince words."

“I find it incredibly repulsive to toy with those who have passed, and that is to say nothing of the notion of using them as tools of combat. It fills me with a visceral disgust. You do not think the same, Yuki?”

“Yup. I’m right there with you, a thousand percent.”

After agreeing with her, I figured I should look for someone in the town garrison to help us figure out what to do with this guy’s corpse. Right then, though, a bell started to toll, its clangs echoing across the entire town. Up until now, a few passersby surrounding us at a distance had kept an eye on the situation, but that sound got them hustling. A sense of tension suddenly filled the air.

“What the...? Hey, sorry, but can you tell me why that bell’s ringing?”

“Are you two outsiders?! That was the official signal to evacuate! I don’t know what’s happening, but the last time the bell rang was when the dragons attacked our town! Something equally dangerous must be occurring right now! You both need to hurry and escape too!”

I’d asked a random guy who happened to be nearby. He stopped for just long enough to give me that panicky answer before skedaddling.

“If it’s not one thing, it’s damn sure another...”

Who’re the asswipes that’re doing this? I wanted the names, addresses, and contact info of the cocksuckers that were trying to ruin our vacation. *Assholes are tryna play me. Nuh-uh, miss me with that shit.* Why did something have to go down while we were here? If I ever found who was behind this, I sure as hell planned on dulling my greatsword with their flesh.

“It seems even human settlements have their own troubles, hm?”

“Yeah, no kidding. I’m gonna check out the situation from the sky. I’ll be right back, so wait here for a bit, will you?”

She nodded, then watched me head behind the alley until I disappeared. I made sure no one was back here before activating Stealth to make myself invisible. Then, I busted out my wings and flew off into the twilit sky.



“Hyah!”

Drawing her holy sword from its scabbard and sheathing it just as quickly, Nell cut down her opponent with a flash. While his head flew off, the thug who’d been attacking a mother and her child dropped to the ground. She gave his body a kick for good measure, but even headless, he refused to stop moving and slowly rose back up. Nell wasn’t having it, though, so she drew her sword once more and rammed it through his torso, forcing his body back to the ground.

“Get away from here! Hurry!”

“Y-Yes! Thank you so much!”

Once Nell saw that the woman had safely escaped with her young daughter clutched in her arms, she turned her attention back to the headless man. He had grasped her blade as he struggled to return to his feet. She began chanting immediately.

“O raving abomination! I bid thee return to thy final resting place! Undead Away!”



The minute she finished casting her spell, a strong light enveloped the headless man.

“Gah—ahhh—ngh...”

After the light dissipated, Nell made certain that the man had stopped moving for good before running headlong toward the next enemy.

The outbreak had occurred without warning. After parting ways with the demon lord and Lefi, Nell had been heading to the church she was lodging at when she'd encountered the first violent ruffian. She had immediately rushed to subjugate him and thought herself successful when he'd fallen to the ground under her assault. Accepting his would-be victims' profuse thanks, she had waited for the garrison to arrive so she could turn him over to them, but something unimaginable had happened.

Nell had initially delivered a blow so intense to his solar plexus that even a much larger man would have writhed in agony. The hoodlum should have been unable to move after her strike, but instead, he had stood up again as if nothing at all had transpired. He'd tried to attack her again, but she, having been taken completely by surprise, had reflexively unsheathed her sword and sliced him.

Covered in a cold sweat, she'd cried out abjectly when she realized what she'd done. Yet in the next moment, every hair on her body had stood on end at the horror before her eyes. Her slash had torn his torso open such that his entrails were dripping out, but he'd moved as if he were whole.

One had been disemboweled and another decapitated, but that had not impeded the movements of the men Nell had fought. She knew now what she hadn't then: that they had died long before she'd come across them. They had been able to move precisely *because* they were no longer alive.

They had become Undead, which were those burning with envy for the living, swarming like insects toward the light of life. Though they could never return to the world of the living, they relentlessly hunted and consumed the flesh of those who still breathed, driven by their desperation to cling to life. Truly, they were miserable creatures.

Following the first attack, similar incidents had begun cropping up all over the town, and in the blink of an eye, the town had been overrun by ghouls.

The very existence of the Undead presented a dangerous, thorny problem. Though they lacked significant offensive power and moved sluggishly, the crux of the issue was that they were different from normal monsters. Most of them were originally human, which meant that their victims still saw vestiges of their former friends or family members in them despite knowing that they had become something else entirely. Thus, unable to attack their loved ones, it was not uncommon for many to die as a result of the Undead's attacks.

It was rumored that the Undead were resurrected when mana reacted to the remnants of their intense attachment to and obsession with life. No one was certain if that was the truth or merely still a theory, however, so details of the change were decidedly scarce. Instances of the Undead appearing were far more frequent at former battlefields and places with high concentrations of mana, but this town fulfilled neither of those conditions.

Humans must be behind this, Nell decided after defeating another of the Undead. That there was such a large number of them was bizarre—and also her first piece of evidence. Based on her observations, she speculated that many who couldn't be saved from the Undead had themselves been transformed into the obscenities because it was normally impossible for them to be “born” in such a short time. If it were so easy to revive the Undead, cemeteries the world over would have resembled scenes straight from hell. As such, rather than having been created via their usual processes, these Undead were almost assuredly man-made. She didn't have conclusive proof of it, but she was certain that something strange was afoot.

Nell remained silent, but a thought crossed her mind unbidden. *If only those two were with me right now*. She pictured a slyly grinning young man with a young girl standing next to him who, though clearly exasperated with him, nevertheless gazed at him affectionately. Nell had a feeling those two would have laughed off her worries and found a solution to the problem while she stared on in amazement.

No. I can't just rely on them forever. She needed to think for herself and act accordingly. The most important thing for her to do now was to save as many

people as she could. Brandishing her holy sword and using her holy magic unstintingly, she made her way toward the heart of the town with a do-or-die spirit, shrieks and roars resounding from all around her.

“Hold the line! Don’t let a single Undead break through!”

“Aye!”

The commanding officer Yuki called “old man,” Gamdia, roared at his subordinates, who responded just as aggressively.

Thirty minutes had elapsed since the discovery of the Undead outbreak. The town’s garrison had moved quickly to deal with the situation and was now encamped before the gates of the chief administrator’s estate. Many wielded great shields, clustered together in a battle formation known as a phalanx to hinder the trespass of the Undead invaders.

There, local mages and adventurers were also lending their aid to the resistance effort. They worked to force the Undead out of action while simultaneously protecting the citizens who sought refuge. Adventurers were normally rough-around-the-edges characters who often found themselves in the garrison’s custody for one reason or another, but at the end of the day, both groups shared a love for their town. Furthermore, for the adventurers to not exercise their powers at a time like this would have been wasteful, so they were all single-mindedly committed to the Undead’s extermination.

Leading this ragtag band of troops was none other than Gamdia Lawston. Although he had only just recently taken up his post as the garrison’s commanding officer, he had already won the respect of both his men and the townsfolk. In this meritocratic town, his honest character, brilliant leadership, and proven mettle made him a trustworthy figure.

“Haaa—”

In the thick of it all, swinging his sword right alongside adventurers and soldiers was the town’s lord himself, Releaux Rulouvia. He had ignored his subordinates’ desperate attempts to stop him as well as their cries of “Sir, it’s too dangerous! Please stand back!” The chief administrator’s estate had become one of the town’s safe havens, so he was also fighting valiantly at its

gates, eliminating enemies one after another.

“Sir Gamdia! Apprise me of the situation!”

“The Undead’s attacks are weakening. I believe we will regain control of this area shortly.”

“Understood. Once we have completed evacuating the residents to safety here, then, I bid we initiate an offensive strike of our own. It seems the town center is under considerable strain. I will accompany you as well, of course.”

“Are you absolutely certain of that?”

“I, too, am originally a man of the battlefield. I may have long since retired, but for the sake of my people, I can still wield a sword. Moreover, my blood is boiling.”

Releaux’s words brought a meaningful smile to Gamdia’s face. After a simple salute to the other man, Gamdia returned to directing his troops.

This is, without a doubt, the doing of someone connected to the kingdom.

While assisting in evacuation efforts, Releaux continued to mull over the current circumstances. The Undead were drawn to the living and attacked them out of darkest envy, but it was also said that they didn’t arise in places where the light of life was the strongest—where human activity thrived. This led him to conclude that such high numbers were a likely result of some villain’s heinous scheme.

From the outset, Releaux’s town had always had quite a few enemies. Because Releaux himself had risen through the ranks on his own merit as displayed in countless battles, he had long been shunned by the nobles as a plebeian upstart. Additionally, due to the town’s location in a particularly remote area of the kingdom, many of the nearby regions were inhabited by a variety of monsters. These monsters prompted adventurers and soldiers alike to gather in the settlement, both of exceedingly high quality.

Since his appointment as the town’s chief administrator, Releaux had appropriately and effectively used all of its assets, including its adventurers’ and soldiers’ combat prowess. He had successfully managed the town’s affairs not only in times of peace, but also in times of crisis. Consequently, many were

jealous of his lasting accomplishments. These same hostile factions warily regarded Alfiro as an enemy, fearing that it would rise in rebellion due to all the fighting power it commanded.

Another sticking point was Releaux's opposition to the previous expedition. From the perspective of the aristocrats who had lost their armies lock, stock, and barrel in the failed mission, there was no one they envied more than Releaux. His refusal to participate in the venture had saved him lives and resources.

When the young hero had asked him some time ago about the strange occurrences in Alfiro, Releaux had jokingly misled her by saying, "I can only think of the demon lord." He hadn't wanted to tell her the truth about the sordid cabals and intrigues rampant throughout their nation. Taking all of those elements into account, there were, unfortunately, plenty of enemies who hungered for the destruction of the town.

Despite the demon lord's presence in town, he was not the type to engage in such indirect dealings. Releaux was well aware of that. If he truly wanted to destroy Alfiro, his overwhelming strength alone would be more than enough to get the job done. On top of that, the abnormal episodes had been occurring since before the demon lord's arrival. He had no evidence to support his supposition, but he was certain that those recent events and the situation today were connected.

So be it. Strictly speaking, he was no less a member of the aristocracy by dint of his position. If they wanted a fight, they would have one.

His resolve steeled, Releaux inhaled slowly and deeply.

"Hear me well!"

Drawn from the depths of his diaphragm, his voice carried so far that it was audible to everyone.

"This town has suffered through countless hardships! Whether it was hordes of monsters, roving mobs of bandits, or foreign powers, we nonetheless prevailed! Our town did not fall!"

Everyone paid close attention to Releaux's words, from the civilians who had

fled to the fighters still brandishing their weapons in combat.

“We will do the same this time as well! We will not let Alfiro, our home, perish! Not against something like this! Ready your weapons! Raise your voices! It is time we take our town back from these ghouls!”

“Aaayyyeee!!!”

It almost felt as if the ground itself shook at their resounding bellow. With renewed hope, Releaux smiled unwittingly.



“Holy yikes. This is awful.”

The town was in complete and utter chaos. There were zombies attacking humans everywhere, just like the scumbag Lefi and I had taken down. Stuff was on fire all over the settlement, to the point that the sky looked lit up even though the sun had set a long time ago. It was a straight-up zombie panic.

I’d loved zombie movies back on Earth, but those were fun because they were *fiction*. The real thing was so, so, so nasty. I literally couldn’t think of anything more disgusting. I wanted to throw up just from watching them walk around like nothing was wrong while their guts were hanging out of their bodies. I wasn’t sure how much longer I could stand to look at it.

As I hovered over the town, I realized that this wasn’t just a one-sided massacre of humans. I couldn’t tell if they were adventurers or what, but there were a good number of people with weapons putting up a hell of a fight. It looked like they’d also come up with a strategy for handling the resurrected corpses, which was to chop off their arms and legs. Once the zombies couldn’t move anymore, the fighters forcefully held their bodies down while shoving some kind of liquid down their throats. I guessed the liquid had some special properties because any zombies they forced to swallow it convulsed violently before going completely motionless. It was probably something like holy water.

All the fighters’ movements seemed practiced to me. No wonder adventurers were so useful in combat situations like this. At this rate, it was a matter of when and not if they could retake control of the town.

And yet, I couldn’t figure out why all this was happening. According to Lefi,

this entire disaster had to have been instigated by humans. She said that the dead were definitely being manipulated by a necromancer, if not multiple. In other words, someone was after Alfiro for some reason—but the attack felt half-assed as hell to me.

I had a suspicion that the current strategy was specifically designed to cause confusion. Throw the enemy into turmoil, then go for a direct assault while the chain of command was paralyzed and *bam*, total control. I'd loved playing real-time strategy games back in my old life, and one of the most common tactics was very similar to what was going down right now. I was almost positive that I was right. The next step would usually be to dispatch a unit to a vital location and establish dominance, except...from my aerial position, it was just zombies attacking the town. I couldn't spot any covert operators no matter where I looked.

The enemy clearly wanted to turn Alfiro into a madhouse, but they showed no intention of capturing the town itself. What was the goal of this plan, then? To buy time, maybe? But in that case, what in Lucifer's name did they *actually* want to accomplish if they were going to such extreme lengths to buy time? I was anything but an expert in military affairs, though, so I could be way off the mark here. I dunno, man. I just don't know.

Damn. It was all just too murky. I'd be able to get to the bottom of this at Mach speed if I could catch the dickless bastards behind the havoc, but no dice. No matter how hard I worked both Scout and Maps, nothing suspicious revealed itself.

Hold up. I've been thinking about this all wrong. I'd been too shortsighted. It was human nature to alter a strategy and see what the new outcome would be, right? So once a plan was already in motion, there was no way the mastermind *wouldn't* want to verify its results. That *had* to mean the enemy wasn't too far away from the town.

I had been convinced that the bad guys were definitely somewhere *in* Alfiro itself, but on second thought, it was totally possible that they weren't controlling the zombies directly. And if I was right about them not wanting to attack the town itself, then they had no reason to hang out in it while it was all screwy. Nope, all they needed was a good vantage point to monitor their little

experiment. Once I had that figured out, I directed my super-acute demon lord eyesight away from the town.

Gotcha.

I'd found a hill-like place outside Alfiro. On the surface, it looked like a normal hill, but my Demon Eyes told me otherwise. They made out human figures with magic swirling around them, situated on a section of the hilly thing. They had to have been using Stealth or some sort of spell or something to hide themselves.

I have no obligation to help this town. None whatsoever. I was kinda steamed, though. I mean, how could I not be? Whoever these buttmunchers were, they had ruined my long-awaited "do all the touristy things" vacation. Not to mention getting in the way of my hanging out with Lefi. I couldn't just let them get away without opening up a big ol' can of whoop-ass. *After all, a demon lord does whatever the fuck he wants.* They had screwed with the wrong dude, and they only had themselves to blame for the fact that I was about to make them regret it.

Just as I was about to race off and crack a skull, I suddenly caught sight of a familiar figure in the town below.

"Nell?"

Definitely the hero.

"Oh, for fuck's sake! What is she thinking?!"

Hella zombies swarmed her as she tried to fight them off alone. With her abilities, though, she should totally have been able to slice her way through that siege and get away. *Wait a second. What's that behind her? A church?* She was fighting to protect it so that they wouldn't get inside. I opened Maps to confirm why. *Ahhh, makes sense.* The church had been turned into a safe haven.

Okay, let's take a detour. I knew where the real enemy was, which meant I could deal with them later. I wasn't a fan of the idea of her dying, so my top priority now was making the hero owe me one. It sure would be fun to collect on that debt in the near future. After making sure she was still all right, I pulled Hasai from Inventory and jetted off in the sky right above her location. With a *fwip*, my wings disappeared, and with a *whoosh*, I swooped down.

“Huh?! Whoa!”

“Cowabunga!”

I free-fell smack into the zombie swarm. A huge cloud of dust kicked up and a shock wave ripped through my whole body from my not-so-smooth landing, but as soon as I hit solid ground, I swung Hasai as hard as I could. The zombies within range of my landing point were absolutely decimated by my attack, bursting apart with their flesh flying everywhere like confetti.

“M-Mr. Yuki?!”

“Blegh, gross. Zombie gunk got on my face. Anyway, what’s up, buttercup?”

Standing upright at the center of the explosion, I casually asked the hero that while peeling human flesh off my grinning mug. She looked at me in shock before shouting at me.

“Ugh, honestly! Don’t surprise me like that!”

“My...*bad!*”

I held my greatsword like a baseball bat and gleefully walloped the tar out of the zombies coming at us as I spoke. Not to pat myself on the back or anything, but it sure got me going to see so many get blown away in one swing. *That’s what I call a home run, baby.*

“Here, Nell. Drink up.”

There was some space around us now, giving us just enough of a break in the action for me to grab a Super Mana Potion from Inventory and toss it her way. When I’d seen her stats with Analysis, I’d noticed that she was almost out of MP. I figured she must’ve been blasting some kind of uber-effective holy magic at the zombies for it to have gotten that low.

“O-Oh, thank y—wait, is this a Super Mana Potion?! This is an incredibly high-quality item!”

“Shock and awe later, drink now. Did you forget we’re in the middle of something crazy here?”

“R-Right, yeah. You’re totally right. Okay, then. Cheers.”

The hero had been holding the bottle like she was scared of it, but at my words, she immediately downed the whole thing. Her whole face puckered and she muttered, “Ugh, so bitter...” No surprise there since potions were technically considered medicines, but in exchange, its effectiveness was really high. I could see her MP gradually recovering.

“Okey dokey, you should be all set now. I think I found the culprit behind all this, so I’m off to take ‘em out. Do your best, ‘kay?”

“Oh my gosh, way to bury the lede! I should go with you too—”

“Don’t you have to protect this place?”

I pointed to the church behind her. Based on Maps’s information, there was a decent-sized crowd inside, mostly kids and injured folks who’d been just a tad too slow in escaping. If she hadn’t been here, they would’ve ended up either inside the zombies’ guts or resurrected as their friends.

“Nh...you’re right again. I can’t leave. Mr. Yuki, please, I’ll do anything, so end this quick—”

“Ohhh, reaaally? ‘Anything,’ you say?”

“Um...yes?”

“I’m not just hearing things, right? I’ll take you up on that later, so you best be ready.”

“Huh? U-Uh, um, I—”

“What’s that? You’re denying it, then? Going back on your word even though you’re a hero?”

“Ughhh... O-Okay, I understand. I’ll listen to any request you have. B-But, promise me one thing? I-It can’t be too...lewd.”

I smirked at the hero’s almost tearful face.

“Whatchu talkin’ ‘bout, Willis?”

“...Pardon?”

“The only thing I planned on asking you to do was to be our tour guide again once this whole sitch was done and dusted. What the heck were you imagining,

hm? Hmmm? Tell your ol' pal Mr. Yuki."

When the hero finally realized I'd taken her for a ride, her face went beet red. She looked like she wanted to kill me. Acted like it too, because she started waving her holy sword at me threateningly.

"Arrrggghhh! Stupid idiot! I hate you!"

"Mwa ha ha ha ha! Oh, yeah, I'll let Lefi know to pop by here! If things get dicey, don't be afraid to lean on her for help!"

I nimbly dodged the tip of her sword, laughing my ass off the whole time. Then, I sprung up toward the sky.

"I hope you rot, you imbecile! Go away already!"

I flew back to where I'd left Lefi and, while still in the air, shouted down to her.

"Lefi! Head west and you'll find Nell! She's in a pickle and damn near crying! Lend her a hand, would you?! I'ma go take out the bad guys in the meantime!"

After she gave me an aggressive thumbs-up in acknowledgment, I flapped my second pair of wings and headed in the enemy's direction. When I did that, my flight speed increased dramatically, wind pressure hammering my whole body. The scenery whizzed past as I flew, crossing the town center, then the outer walls, and at long last, those stupid dillholes came back into my line of sight.

Two, three...five, huh? Fewer than I'd expected. Not that it mattered, though, because they were all dead where they stood.

"Haaa—"

My Stealth ability was active as I soared through the air, skimming within a few inches of the ground now. I didn't slow down at all. In fact, my plan was to attack at my current speed. I was getting close to their location, so I raised Hasai, and as I zoomed invisibly into their ranks, I struck. I felt resistance as my weapon found its target.

Hasai's blade scraped at the ground with a grinding noise as I made my landing. The second my feet touched the earth, I spun around and struck again,

causing blood to spray everywhere like a disgusting scarlet shower. Four of the five had never even noticed my presence by the time their upper and lower halves went their separate ways, but the last one sensed me right before my attack. He dodged my slash by leaping away a fair distance.

“Ngh! Bastard, you’re a demon!”

Whatever magic this scumbag had been using to conceal himself vanished in that same instant. He seemed to ooze out of the darkness like some sort of freak, his creepy, all-black outfit screaming, “I’m so totally shady!” Hearing his shaking voice, I was clearly busted too. One of the downsides to Stealth was that it deactivated without warning whenever I made violent, sudden movements.

“Nice job dodging, asshole! That’s the one and only compliment you’ll ever get from me! Now die!”

I closed the gap between us in one lunge, then swung Hasai once more.

“Tch...!”

Probably because he realized he was no match for me in the strength department, the man quickly shifted into a defensive stance and blocked my attack with a dagger he drew from his waist. Undaunted, I continued pushing down on him with my greatsword, managing to cut into the top of his shoulder. Blood started spattering from the wound, but it was too shallow to be fatal. The black-wearing blowhard managed to create some distance between us before facing me head-on.

“Why is a demon interfering with our plans?!”

“Hyah! Ask *yourself* that question, you filthy snake!”

Hasai in my hands, I moved toward him again—but dipstick was one step ahead of me.

“Come to me, phantoms of the underworld!”

As he shouted, a pale summoning circle suddenly appeared on the ground, glowing eerily. The circle flashed brightly for a second, almost blinding me, then dimmed just as fast. When it finally disappeared, there were an assload of

animal zombies sitting there. I had to admit that the variety of species was astounding—he'd summoned everything from a wolf zombie to a bear zombie to even something that looked like a dinosaur zombie.

They all had the same dead eyes, the sparkle of life long gone from them. And though their bodies were decomposing right in front of me, their movements were smoother than those of the human zombies in town, if nothing else. That clued me in on the fact they had probably retained some semblance of power.

"They're twice—nay, thrice as strong as the Undead ravaging the town! Behold the sight before you, as it is the last you will see! You meet your death here, demon!"

"Ya know, I think I finally understand what Lefi meant when she said all y'all necromancers are human garbage."

These monsters must have the worst luck imaginable if they're being used by a revolting skid mark like this guy. Don't worry, I'll send every last one of you back to the big sleep.

"Time for a smackdown, you godforsaken zombies!"

I went on the offensive, charging right through the pack of undead monsters. Target one: wolf zombie. I sent it flying with a kick as it tried to snap me up in its jaws, then I cut it while it was in midair. The bear zombie attacked from my other side at the same time, but I sidestepped its claws and countered by lopping its head off. After stomping to re-death a who-knows-what-kind-of-animal zombie that tried to grab my leg, I avoided a charge by a triceratops-looking undead beast. That, too, met its maker again when my greatsword smashed into the back of its neck.

And so it went. Hack, slam, kick, dismember. Shove, blast, smash, demolish. They might have been stronger than the zombies in town, but they were still only zombies. Lacking the brilliance of life, their movements were vaguely stiff. So my demon-lord body would kick my ass if these opponents actually made me fight for the win because I sure as sugar wasn't that weak. *Though I will concede it would have been too close to call if you ding-dongs were actually, you know, alive.*

"Tch. I've had enough, demonic fiend."

“Try me, dickhead!”

I rushed toward the goth glue-eater to stop him from summoning more zombies, but he just sneered at me.

“Brainless fool! Have you no talents other than reckless atta—what?!”

“Could you *be* more obvious, you baby back bitch?!”

This freaking guy had planted some kind of magical trap on the ground while I’d been distracted by the animal zombies. I disrupted it easily as I passed through it by slamming my own magical energy against it. I called this move “Dispel Magic,” and as you could tell by its name, it was magic designed to destroy other magic.

The method itself was actually really simple. All I did was scatter a huge amount of my own magical energy into the atmosphere so that it interfered with the composition of my opponent’s magic by warping it. Why? Because that distortion prevented their magic from materializing.

Lefi had taught me about this, and though it basically fell into the “spell” category, I’d really call it a “technique” more than anything. It was a power move that could only be used by someone who was super good with magic. On top of that, Dispel Magic required a huge amount of magical energy up front to work. It got the job done and then some, though, so it was well worth that lump sum of mana. And let’s not forget that my Demon Eyes showed me exactly what kind of magic my opponent would try to use against me. Didn’t matter what it was, I would always know, just like I’d known about this loser’s trap. So I’d really love it if these clowns would stop thinking they could catch me off guard with magic.

“Why you—”

“Too late!”

As soon as the emo eyesore realized that his trap had failed, he hurried to get away from me. Sucked for him that he’d been slow to get going because of the momentary shock. Before he could get anywhere, my greatsword plunged clean through him.





“Lefi! Why would you burn down the house too?!”

“Bah, I-I only singed it a bit. Moreover, I extinguished the flames appropriately, did I not?”

“Do you mean the *deluge of water* you blasted at the fire?! Are you talking about the torrent so strong that it destroyed the house next door?! The one that wasn’t even on fire?! You call that ‘appropriately’?!”

“Well... Ah ha. You might say I was being proactive such that the fire would not spread?”

“If that’s true, then I wish you would have been *proactive* about controlling your power in the first place!”

With the bad guy tucked under my arm, I’d flown back to the hero’s location, where I found her and Lefi in the middle of a two-woman comedy act.

“Um, what are you two doing?”

“Oh, Mr. Yuki! Take a look at this, will you?!”

When I turned my head toward where she was pointing, I saw the charred—and weirdly water-damaged—remains of a crumbling house.

“Mm. I don’t really want to know, but I guess I should ask anyway, so...what happened here?”

“Lefi’s magic, that’s what! The problem wasn’t the fact that she used her fire magic to defeat the Undead. No, it was that she burned down the house behind them too! And then, she destroyed the house next door when she panicked and used her water magic to mitigate the damage!”

Arms folded, the hero gave the silver-haired girl next to her an angry scowl. She should’ve been pissed at *me* for teasing her earlier, but it seemed she had somewhere else to direct her fury now. Gotta appreciate the little things in life.

“Ah, w-well, you must understand that such a degree of firepower was necessary to engulf the dead. So it would be quite reasonable to consider such damage unavoidable, yes? Yes, indeed.”

“Are you seriously trying to pull the wool over my eyes now?! You don’t think I heard you say, ‘Oh, dear...’ when this whole debacle started?!”

That accusation made Lefi turn away from Nell in a huff. *Okay, hero, here’s the thing: you’re probably not wrong, but also, this is just how Lefi is.*

“Incidentally, Yuki, is that the aforementioned dunce you are toting?”

I couldn’t hold back my rueful laugh at their bickering. Lefi took advantage of that, though, and used it to forcefully change the subject by asking me that question. I’d bet both real and dungeon money that she was just trying to escape the hero girl’s tongue-lashing.

“Bingo. This is the necrophiliac headass of a zombie master who ruined our sightseeing adventure.”

With that, I let go of the black-clad worm and he hit the ground with a *thud*. I hadn’t exactly been treating him like precious cargo after I’d stabbed him, but I still wasn’t getting so much as a twitch out of him. Probably ‘cause he was knocked out cold. Not that it would’ve made a difference if he woke up, though. It wasn’t like he’d be able to move or anything with the chains digging into him.

I’d ended up skewering this rat without meaning to since I’d let myself get caught up in the momentum of killing so many animal zombies. Guess I’d gotten a little *too* carried away with it all. I’d managed to return to my senses in the nick of time, though, when a thought sprung into my head. I was like, “Wait, shit, what did I just do? This guy’s the only one who’s still alive. We need to interrogate him, so he can’t die just yet.” In a panic because he was on the verge of death, I’d whipped out a Super Potion from Inventory and poured it down his throat. A few more seconds and he would’ve been saying goodbye to his mortal coil. To be honest, I wouldn’t have cared if he *had* died. But he’d managed to escape the sweet embrace of death thanks to the Super Potion’s effectiveness, so he got to live to see another day.

Watching the medicine work had been an absolute freaking nightmare, though. I’d put a massive hole in his guts with my stab, and seeing his flesh and bones and organs all stitch themselves back together so quickly and, like, *squishily* had felt like watching a video in fast-forward. It was so indescribably disgusting that I’d gotten goosebumps. The bad kind, you know?

As for the chains literally digging into him, well, that was kinda my bad. While his body was fixing itself, I'd wrapped him up with chains I'd pulled from Inventory. Thing was, I hadn't counted on the chains being *absorbed into his flesh* during the process. Taking them out would mean slicing his stomach open again, and I didn't think he'd appreciate that. He couldn't get away, though, so it was fine. *Welp, looks like he'll have to live the rest of his miserable life with the chains being a part of him.* Oh well. No skin off my nose. He should just be grateful he was still alive.

"Hmm... I take it he is an eccentric sort with, shall we say, *particular interests?*"

Lefi muttered to herself after seeing the chains wrapped around him, probably assuming they were his own doing since necromancers were supposedly degens and shit. I wondered if I should tell her that *I* was the one responsible for them.

"Is he the culprit behind all this?"

The hero's eyes narrowed as she gazed at him.

"There were a few others too. But he used what I'm guessing was necromancy, so at the very least, I know he's involved. I kiiinda killed his buddies, though."

"I see. Then it was thanks to you that the Undead's activities suddenly ceased, Mr. Yuki."

"Oh, snap. The zombies stopped moving, did they?"

She gave me a rundown of the reports she'd received. According to her, the zombies attacking people throughout town had stopped moving right around the time I'd defeated this goth piece of crap and the rest of his weird-ass cult. Basically, the Undead were back to being normal dead. Before coming back here, I'd also taken the chance to destroy a summoning circle they'd drawn at their location, one they had clearly tried to keep hidden with magic. *Guess that was the right move, huh?*

While the ladies and I were talking, some kind of commotion made its way into my ears from the main street. It was getting louder too. Whatever it was, it

was making its way toward us.

“What on earth...?”

It was a group of people, both adventurers and members of the town’s garrison. They were obviously on a mission to take down zombies and whatever else, judging by the way they had their weapons ready. Their watchful gazes and wary attitudes told me that they weren’t taking any chances—except that they looked confused as all hell as they surveyed the area. I think I knew why, though. They’d been fired up to put the “dead” back in “Undead,” but they’d found a whole lotta nothing, so they had no idea what to do anymore.

The leader of this little pack, holding a weapon of his own, was the town’s lord. Don’t ask, ’cause I don’t know either.

“Whoa, what are you doing here, old man? Should you even *be* here, considering you’re the chief administrator and all?”

“Oh, it’s you. Well, it certainly wouldn’t do for me to relax at my manor while the town is under attack. Now, pray tell why *you* are here? Don’t tell me you fought off the hordes for us?”

“Heh, yeah. Had to. They tried coming after us too. Oh, right, here. The mastermind.”

I kicked the all-black dickhead his way. He rolled like a log before coming to a stop at the old man’s feet.

“Is he now...?”

“Yeah, he was skulking like a creep on the outskirts of town, trying to be invisible. He wasn’t alone, but I killed the rest of ’em. If you could just double-check later, that’d be great.”

“I see. I’ll send a few of my subordinates later to do just that, then. Does this mean we can take him into our custody?”

“Yup. Not like I’ve got a reason to hold on to him. But I’d appreciate it if you could tell me what you find out from him.”

I wanted to question him myself, but I had no idea how real interrogations worked, especially if torture was involved. It was common knowledge that I

couldn't handle anything gory. Also, I was super fed up with all this. I just wanted to be a tourist, man, not get dragged into bullshit. The mayor looked like he knew how to handle interrogations and whatever else, so handing him the bad guy was the best choice. Plus, I seriously doubted the old man would be stingy with any info he got out of the clown seeing as I was the one who'd caught him.

"Indeed. You are the one who captured him, after all. Thus, I swear to relay any information I glean from him to you. Moreover, I would wager that your actions saved our town."

He spoke while inspecting the silent, motionless zombies lying all over the place around us. A wry smile crossed his face as he looked at the buildings Lefi had destroyed. He sent a questioning glance my way. *Bruh, it wasn't me, okay?*

"Everyone! The threat has seemingly passed! However, that doesn't mean we can let our guard down! We must start the rebuilding efforts right away, so muster all your energy!"

Up until now, the soldiers and adventurers had been unable to keep up with everything that was happening, so they'd still seemed confused. But the chief administrator's words made them start to accept that the danger was over. A few of them let out happy cheers, then more joined in. In no time flat, their shouts combined into a roar that echoed throughout the town, almost shaking the air itself.



The town's restoration was moving faster than I'd expected. It had spent a long time being the victim of a lot of problems, so everyone who lived here was pretty used to doing this sort of work quickly and efficiently. In a jiff, they'd used magic to remove the wreckage of the houses Lefi had incinerated and then flooded, and had even already started construction on their replacements. I was super relieved—and grateful—that they hadn't come after me to have me pay for the damages.

It wasn't like the zombies had gone around destroying homes and stuff. What the residents had to rebuild were homes and buildings burned by secondary fires, plus the ones Lefi had ruined. Since the damage wasn't too extensive, the

recovery was more or less done by the next night. All the reanimated dead had been reburied too, which was a nice gesture. Now, it was evening on the day after that, and the town was basically holding a festival. They were feasting and living it up, labeling the whole thing as a way of honoring the dead. There was so much eating and drinking and noise wherever you went that everywhere felt like party central.

In the midst of all the rowdiness, Lefi and I had parked our butts in the center of town. We were sitting on a bench near a roaring campfire in a huge public square and chowing down on a bunch of goodies we'd bought at various food stalls. I snuck a glance at her, the dancing flames illuminating her face as she munched on something that reminded me of grilled squid. That glow emphasized her mysterious beauty. *Hmm... Feels like one of those times where you wanna be in a yukata.*

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing. Not a single thing."

"Stare all you like, for I will not hand this morsel over to you."

"Damn. Gonna cry myself to sleep tonight, then."

With a rueful smile, I turned my head away from her and faced forward again. I could see street performers putting on a show in the middle of the plaza. The townsfolk were laughing, so it must've been a good performance.

Seeing so many people enjoying themselves like this was kinda nice. Even just watching from the sidelines raised my spirits a little too. My sole reason for eliminating those asswipes was revenge for ruining my tourist trip, but it had ended up paying off, so all good.

Oh, yeah, speaking of the recent nefarious circumstances, I still didn't know all the details, but apparently, the chief old-man-istrator was *not* holding back with his interrogation of that all-black freak. I'd find out everything the minute he did, according to him. *RIP, you ding-dong dumbass.* I was pretty sure what he was being put through was worse than death, so I could be generous and forgive him for ruining our vacation.

When I'd pawned the bad guy off on the old man and told him everything I

knew, he'd believed everything I'd said, no questions asked. I couldn't help asking him how he was sure I wasn't behind the shenanigans, and he'd laughed and responded with, "As if you would resort to such tedious methods when you could easily annihilate this town with your powers." The dude had cojones, I'd give him that.

We definitely wanted to know the results of his investigation, but Lefi and I had decided we'd head back to the dungeon first. Everyone back home would get worried if we didn't at least show them we were still alive and kicking. Of course, our lodgings here were nice and the town itself was fun, but at the end of the day, our home was number one, no contest. I had every intention of diving headfirst into my futon the minute we got back.

Even with us not in town, the hero could just come to the dungeon to give us all the information, which meant that little problem was solved regardless. When I'd asked her if it was past time for her to return to the holy order she belonged to in the royal capital, she'd replied that she couldn't just leave with things still unsettled in Alfiro. She was such a stickler about being a Goody Two-shoes.

"Ah, right, Lefi."

She looked at me questioningly.

"Here."

I opened Inventory, took something out, and handed it to her.

"Hm? A ring?"

"Yeah. 'Cause, uh, you know. I thought it'd look good on you, so I bought it."

Feeling awkward for some reason, I nervously rubbed my head while I responded. I'd found this ring at a street vendor when I was exploring the town on my own before all the ruckus. The second I'd spotted it, I'd known it would suit her. I hadn't even realized I'd bought it until the deed was done.

The ring was made of silver, with a pale green line running through the middle of it. That line formed a cross at one spot, and in the center of that cross was a small but pretty, transparent red jewel that was full of magical power. I liked it because the design matched Lefi's beautiful silver hair, but I liked it even more

because of its ability.

Flexible Ring: Ring size automatically adjusts to the wearer's finger. Quality: A+.

Just like Rir's flexible collar, it had an automatic size control feature, so I figured that even if Lefi turned back into her original dragon form, the ring wouldn't break. Not gonna lie, it had been kinda embarrassing actually giving it to her, but that kinda thing had to be done ASAP, like ripping off a bandage. The longer you waited, the harder it would be, and some people might even end up deciding not to do it at all. For me, abandoning ship would have been a complete waste after going to the trouble of buying it.

Lefi put her food down on the plate in her lap before taking the ring from me. She then held it up high with both hands and gave it a good, long look. After a little while, for who-knows-what reason, she let out a stifled laugh.

"Wh-What? You got a problem?"

"Not particularly, no. But Yuki, is it not the norm for the giver of a ring to place it on the recipient's finger?"

"Huh? Um, yeah, you're right, it is. Th-Then I guess I'll do just that."

Lefi had stretched her left hand toward me, so I grabbed one of her slim, pale fingers without thinking. Her ring finger. Couldn't say I'd seen that coming, but okay. Hiding the pounding of my heart, I took the ring from her with my other hand and slipped it on her finger, the velvety texture of her skin tempting me to never let go.

Once the ring was snugly in place, Lefi lifted her hand again, this time toward the campfire. She stared as it glinted in the flickering light. When, at long last, she seemed to have gotten her fill, she turned to look at me again.

"I am happy, Yuki. Thank you."

The fire cast a brilliant shine on her soft smile—and against my will, my heart continued to slam against my chest. It was thumping so loudly that I was afraid everyone could hear it.

Chapter 5: Our Home Really Is the Best

“Ahhh. Man, is it good to be back. Love me that ‘home sweet home’ vibe after so long.”

I couldn’t help blurting all that out now that we were finally back in the cave that led to our dungeon.

“Indeed. Though I enjoyed myself well enough in the humans’ town, I would much prefer to while away my days atop my futon.”

“Dude, you lazed around plenty on the inn’s bed. And have you forgotten how many times you kicked me off of said bed?”

“Hmph. Be honored that you have had the pleasure of sharing bedding with me.”

“Get off your high horse, would you? You ruining my sleep has been the norm for *ages* now. How many times do you think I’ve woken up groggy and tired only to find out that it’s because your foot was in my face all night? Hell, sometimes it’s because of you *rolling on top of me* in your sleep.”

Oh ho, can’t even look me in the eyes now, can ya, Lady Supreme Dragon?

“Whatever, no biggie. Anyway, I wanna check in on Rir, so we’re hitting up the meadow first.”

“Mm, as you wish.”

After declaring my intention, I opened the door that connected this cave to the field.

A flock of monsters was there to greet me. There were a hundred of the things—probably more—from a ton of different species. They were lounging around acting like they owned the place, but our sudden appearance put them on their guards and they growled threateningly at us.

“Kh!”

Instantly, the worst possible scenario ran through my head. *Fuck, something*

bad must've happened to Iluna and the others. At that thought, I immediately pulled Hasai from Inventory.

“Grrrr!”

As I got ready to attack, I heard a sound I recognized coming from the castle grounds.

“Rir?”

Our family pet, Fluffrir, was walking over. That single snarl from him made the monsters jump up fearfully. They created a path for him to traverse, parting like the sea.

“Uhhh...you wanna tell me what's going on here, bud?”

“Observe more closely, Yuki.”

I just realized that Lefi had been as cool as a cucumber this whole time. I was still confused, obviously, but I did what I was told, relaxing my fighting stance and activating Analysis.

The Wolf King's Follower: The Wolf King Fluffrir's subordinate. Terrified of his power, this monster prostrates itself before him in absolute devotion.

Every last monster camped out in the field had that title. *Wait, what...the hell is this?* Were they really all Rir's followers?

“Grr...”

Having rushed through the crowd to reach me, Rir now looked at me apologetically.

“Hey, c'mon, it's okay. Don't worry, I'm not mad or anything. But, uh, who are these guys?”



Based on what he “told” me, during his many hunts in the Demonic Forest, there would occasionally be monsters begging him not to attack, saying they’d become his devotees. Whenever he’d spared them, they’d decided to tag along after him. He’d been kinda worried that maybe he *should* have hunted them down after all, but he ultimately couldn’t disrespect the clear admiration they had for his strength. So my boy had his own crew.

On top of that, he apparently hadn’t wanted to do anything about the situation on his own because he was my dungeon summon, so he had initially decided to just leave them be. That was a problem, though, because before he’d even realized what was happening, there were loads of them. Plus, when they’d found out that he’d been put on guard duty while we were out, they’d pleaded with him, saying, “We’re at your service!” In other words, they’d gate-crashed their way into the dungeon, which is how we got here.

I couldn’t say I was all that surprised considering that Rir’s stats had surpassed mine ages ago. Dude was *stupid* strong. Like, remember how the strongest monsters were in the western part of the Forest? Yeah, well, Rir was strong enough now to give ‘em a run for their money in a fight, if not just straight-up beat them. No wonder all these monsters had pledged their loyalty to him. I’d be scared too if I were them.

“S-Seriously, you don’t have to apologize. I mean, I was the one who told you to live your best life. You gotta do that however you want, and you should keep at it. Just make sure you do a good job looking after them.”

When I said that to Rir, who still seemed regretful, he bowed his head gratefully as if to say, “Much obliged.” Then, he roared commandingly at the monsters behind him. They all bowed their heads deeply toward me and Lefi, practically kneeling on the ground.

Be nice to them, big guy.

“Still, though, that was wild, eh?”

“Well, he is a legendary creature, after all. Therefore, he has the capacity to lead others. It is inevitable that the strong attract admirers.”

Lefi said that very matter-of-factly. *I see, I see...* You could say Rir's followers had discovered a secret to succeeding in life. By throwing in their lots with someone as strong as him, they were increasing their likelihood of survival. See, it wasn't like monsters were living without a care in the world. Every day for them was another desperate struggle to stay alive, so choosing to submit to a more powerful creature probably wasn't a terrible way to live. If I was being honest, I thought that was actually pretty damn smart of them.

While I thought the whole thing over, Lefi and I headed to one of a few doors I'd installed within the castle that connected to the real throne room. I'd visit the wraith sisters by myself later. If I went with Lefi, I was almost positive they would hide because they were scared of her. Shii had been afraid of her in the beginning too, which made it clear to me that monsters had some kind of sixth sense that told them how strong she really was. *I think it'll take a while longer for them to get used to her.*

"We're hooome!"

"We have returned."

"Oh! Welcome back!"

When I clicked the door open, our golden-haired little girl, Iluna, greeted us excitedly. She raced over on her little legs and leaped at me, so I caught her in midair.

"Whoa! Ha ha, didja miss me?"

"Ah, my lord, Lady Lefi! Welcome back!"

"Thanks. Where's Leila?"

"She's outside taking care of laundry. I'll tell her you're here!"

"Nah, it's fine. I don't wanna get in her way."

The moment I responded, a dry smile on my face, I felt someone cling to me.

"Weco baaa!"

"Thanks. Glad to *be*...back...?"

Stop. Who in God's name just said that to me? Iluna was still in my arms,

rubbing her head happily against my chest. Lew was further inside, and Leila was definitely not here. As I went over the options, I slowly looked down.

Standing there was a transparent, light blue little girl who looked scarily like Iluna. Before you ask, I wasn't talking about her hair or anything. She was quite literally a see-through pale blue color, as in, I could look *through* her and see the floor. I couldn't get a single word out as I stood there frozen, my mouth hanging open and my eyes fixated on her.

And then, even though I'd never seen this girl before in my life, I felt an affinity toward her for some reason. *I... I've met this kid.* No, not just "met." This was the same feeling I had for Iluna and Lefi. *A familiar feeling toward something blue and transparent in our family...* Only one answer came to mind.

"Holy shit. Shii, is that you?!"

"Yah! It me!"

The light blue girl—Shii—bounced joyously.



"Well, now. This appearance looks to suit your inclinations, Yuki."

Lefi murmured that as she studied Shii, staring at it while poking its cheek.

"I think we need to correct your mental image of me right the heck now. But ugh, what's the deal here? Like, how did Shii even get like this?"

"I'll tell you! Umm, Shii told me that it could probably do it, so I said to try, and then it did it! That's how!"

"Dat how!"

Back down on the ground, Iluna responded with a huge grin on her face as she looked at Shii. *So cute.* They were both super adorable, but her explanation had done jack squat to make me less confused. Despite being totally baffled by the situation, I had a proper discussion with Iluna afterward. She told me a bunch of random things in addition to what I needed to know, but I guess I should have seen that coming since she was a little kid. From her chatter, though, I eventually managed to cobble together an explanation, which was that Shii had undergone a race evolution.

Not too long ago, Iluna had fallen while playing and hurt herself. When Shii had bounced over to her and seen how painful the wound looked, it had touched it while chanting “Heal! Heal!” in its voiceless way. Its body had suddenly started glowing, and before Iluna knew it, her injury had disappeared. That was most likely the moment of its evolution. As far as it looking like a little girl went, Shii had felt like it could do more things once it transformed, so with Iluna’s encouragement, it had attempted the change. That was how it had taken on a human form.

What I had also discovered from my talk with Iluna was that she’d been communicating with Shii even when it had been a regular old slime. I’d have to circle back to that later, though. There was just too much crazy stuff going on right now. In any case, I still wasn’t totally sure about my conclusion, but I had nothing else to go on. Your guess was as good as mine at this point.

Name: Shii

Race: Healing Slime

Class: Healer

Level: 11

HP: 130 / 130

MP: 572 / 572

Strength: 21

Stamina: 51

Agility: 32

Magic: 256

Dexterity: 64

Luck: 114

Special Abilities: Body Modification

Abilities: Predation 3, Regeneration 3, Restorative Magic

Title: Demon Lord's Subordinate, Soothing Slime

Daaang. Shii had gotten a lot stronger without me noticing. Hell, its Magic stat alone was several times higher than that of most of the humans in Alfiro.

This whole thing was kinda weird, though. I'd only ever taken it outside when we went on walks in the Forest, so it shouldn't have had any real opportunities to level up like this. "How?" was truly the question of the hour.

Race evolution, huh? Well, Leila *had* mentioned a while back that it was something monsters experienced fairly quickly. I guess I could force myself to accept its level-up since it had already happened and, frankly, would probably happen again— *Wait, wait, wait. Shii has Predation.*

My memory was garbage when it came to details, but I could recall the important bits and pieces about that ability in particular. Predation allowed the user to absorb not only whatever it ate, but any magic within whatever it ate as well. It could then use both the physical and magical components to nourish itself. Something like that, anyway.

Shii had always happily eaten anything and everything. I would know since I'd fed it all sorts of random crap as snacks and whatnot during our time together. So maybe it had evolved because that "food" had increased the magical energy within its body? *Hmm... That still feels like waaay too much of an upgrade, though.*

If that was all it took to level up, much less evolve racially, then it would've been happening to the carnivores living in the Forest all the time. They ate other monsters every day, so even without Predation, they would still get stronger since their food was full of magical energy. Same went for herbivores, actually. I knew from my Demon Eyes that fruits and plants and stuff had magic flowing through them too. If all monsters were capable of evolving as quickly and easily as Shii had just by eating, it would've been game over for humans a long time ago, which meant I was back to square one with trying to figure this out.

"Hmm..."

That quiet sound came from Lefi, who was next to me.

“What, you have an idea, Lefi?”

“No. Well...perhaps it was because I fed it my magic.”

“You did that?”

“Indeed. I knew it absorbed the magic of anything it consumed, so I often asked if it desired to ingest my magic as well.”

“Lefifi magic yummy! Like it!”

Shii smiled ecstatically while it spoke, although its words weren't totally clear since it wasn't used to speaking yet. *So cute*. Back to its evolution, though, I could totally buy into Lefi's explanation. From my own experience of having it poured into me, I knew that Lefi's magic was insanely dense. Even when she just copied what I was doing, there was a world of difference in the results.

In simple terms, if I used X amount of magical fuel as input, the output would be X. But if Lefi used the same X amount of fuel, *her* output would be 10X. Realistically, it was very possible that the magic swirling around inside her human-form body was too much for her to handle. Might've been too much even in her dragon form. Essentially, the gap between magic inside her and us was absolutely staggering.

Take when Lefi had destroyed that house when she'd attacked a bunch of zombies for example. That had happened because of her ridiculous strength. For someone like her, using magic on a small scale required *extreme* precision. Factor in her lazy personality, though, and there wasn't a chance she could be assed to keep track of how much magic she was using. That, of course, meant that she always used way more power than she needed to.

It was no goddamn wonder Shii had evolved that quickly when it had been eating something on that level as a freaking *snack*. I now understood why its Magic in particular was over the top compared to its other stats too. Lefi's magic was basically a steroid, and Shii had been doping on it. It was a lot like those Rare Confection items trainers gave their creatures to make them stronger real quick. You know, from that game series.

So, Shii's a healing slime now, eh? All's well that ends well, I guess. Shii's existence was comforting to begin with, but now, it could soothe emotional *and*

physical pain. Brilliant. And its look being mostly inspired by Iluna but with a tiny bit of Lefi mixed in was probably the result of it still learning its newly acquired Body Modification skill. Rir had that same ability, but unlike him, Shii had never actually had a defined form, so it was trying its best to understand that aspect of life. Maybe that meant Shii had a lot more transformation possibilities than Rir, especially considering biological sex wasn't a thing for slimes.

"Yes, I see..."

As I muttered to myself, I patted Shii's head. At first, I'd been way more surprised by Shii's growth than anything else. As I connected the dots mentally, though, I could feel joy bubbling up inside me like I was a fizzy drink.

"Hn? Masser happy Shii ebob?"

"Yup, I'm super-duper happy. You're growing up, aren't you, Shii?"

I was so full of emotion that my heart felt like it was going to burst. This had to have been how actual parents felt watching their kids grow up. Shii beamed up at me as I continued stroking its head.

"Shii look like everyone now! Shii happy too!"

Holy freakin' crap, can this cutie get any cuter? I think not.

"Yuki, you have not stopped smiling for some time now."

"Sh-Shut up. Besides, that's the pot calling the kettle black if I've ever seen it. You've been cheeing too."

"Wh-Why, I will have you know that I am merely sneering at your pathetic behavior."

Quit while you're ahead. You're just making it weirder for all of us, ya dummy.

"Oh, right. Iluna, you understood what Shii was saying even when it was a slime?"

"Yup, yup! 'Course I did! We're friends, and that's what friends do!"

"We fwends!"

Duh, silly me for even asking. They were so darn adorable that the science or

whatever of this whole thing could just stuff it. *Shii's cuteness is good enough for me.*



“Okay, next word! This is an *apple*!”

“A-pu!”

“No, no. A-pu/! Say it with me. ‘A-pul’!”

“A-pu...l!”

“That’s it!”

The two little girls squealed cheerfully. *Too freakin’ cute*. It felt like “cute” was starting to lose its meaning since I was using it so much, but how could I not when that was exactly what they were? Even right now, Iluna was having a grand ol’ time playing teacher and helping Shii learn how to speak properly. And Shii, who had apparently grown pseudo vocal cords during its human transformation, was having a bit of a hard time vocalizing things. What else could I call them if not “cute”?

After things had calmed down yesterday, I’d handed out souvenirs to everyone. Then, we’d talked a lot over dinner. They’d given me the lowdown on everything that had happened in the dungeon while we were gone, and in turn, Lefi and I had told them stories about our time in Alfiro. That was how the day had ended.

Which brought us to today. The two little girls were enjoying themselves studying, Leila and Lew were busy with chores, and Lefi was lazing on her futon like she’d said she would do when we got back. As for me? Well, I was tucked away in a corner of the room, hard at work designing a new weapon. And what else would its main ingredient be but that cursed magic blade?

When I took it out of Inventory, it didn’t try to ravage my sanity like it had the last time, but it definitely started spewing its hateful, suffocating magic. Seemed it was in a bad mood because I’d left it neglected in Inventory. Its magic pricked at my skin like needles. *Yeah, I know, that’s my bad. I totally didn’t forget about you, so forgive me, ‘kay?*

“Whooooa. Th-That’s pretty intense, my lord. I’m getting some seriously sinister vibes, you know?”

“Fascinating... A magic blade with a curse infused in it, hm? I presume that’s the weapon you told us about yesterday?”

Our family’s maids just happened to be nearby at that moment. One cautious and the other curious, they both peered at the item in my hands.

“Yeah. It’s docile now, so don’t worry. But don’t get too close to it, because apparently, it’ll mess you up good.”

“You say it’s docile, but that’s not a pet... Wait, my lord, you’re fine holding it?”

“Yup. This is nothing to me.”

I shrugged at Lew’s astonished expression. My raw materials for this new build would be this magic blade and the Sword of the Ancient Hero I’d found in the bargain barrel—plus some orichalcum, a rare metal I’d bought with DP. This metal was so incredibly receptive to magic that if used for repairing degraded weapons, not only would the weapon’s original luster be restored, but it would become even stronger too. In reality, it seemed most professionals didn’t bother wasting a rare metal in this way. Me being me, though, I figured including it in the mix might draw out some residual power from the ancient hero’s sword.

In this world, all legendary swords and such were made with orichalcum. Weapons that master craftsmen had forged using it were so mighty that they could cut through even a dragon’s scales. That was saying something, considering dragons stood at the top of this world’s hierarchy. At least, according to what Lefi told me. By the by, orichalcum didn’t work on Lefi’s scales. A weapon with it wouldn’t even leave a scratch. Go figure. *Gotta wonder what those scales are made of, then.*

Naturally, it’d cost me an assload of DP to buy a metal so superior to anything else on the market. Using the inn I’d built as a basis for conversion, I could have easily built another four of them for how much I’d had to shell out on a kilo-sized nugget. Only the cream of the crop for this demon lord.

But seriously, my proverbial wallet was *hurting*. Yeah, sure, I had income rolling in from all the monsters living in the dungeon's territory, not to mention my golden dragon's mere existence passively raking in the big bucks. Except that neither of those things changed the fact that I had a *lot* less zeros next to my name. Daddy needed to be pinkie up, so I planned on going hunting with Rir again soon. What was that famous line from a crazy popular game series? Oh, right. "Happy hunting!"

"Master Demon Lord, is that possibly orichalcum?"

"Whaaat?! Orichalcum?!"

"Good eye, Leila."

At my impressed tone, Leila shared her honest thoughts.

"Ahhh... I love it here. I get to see so many things I couldn't otherwise."

"I personally don't think it's such a big deal, but still, it's said that any place to produce orichalcum will prosper for a century after. You know, considering we live with a legendary dragon *and* a fenrir, it makes the metal seem that much less unique."

These two had clearly decided to spectate. While I half listened to their commentary, I lined up the ingredients in front of me, focusing hard on what I was doing. The weapon I planned to create this time would be so powerful that it'd clean out the stupid grudges trapped within the magic blade. I couldn't screw this up. I couldn't afford to fail because these were one-of-a-kind items. If I did, all the time, effort, and money I'd put into even getting my hands on these high-quality goods would be wasted.

Based on everything I'd learned about weapon smithing so far, I needed to keep my expectations simple. Complicating what I wanted from a weapon would only end in failure. So, I only had two desires: heavy and sharp. The end. And if the final product was worthy of me, of my essence, of retaining its dignity as a weapon instead of looking like god-awful trash, even better.

Relax, all of you. You'll be reborn after I remake you, and when that happens, I'll work you hard. Get ready to sweat.

With the image more than solidified in my mind, I poured my magic into the

materials and activated the skill.

“Hrgh...”

They sucked up my power like you wouldn’t believe. Probably because they were high-quality weapons from the get-go. The process consumed even more energy than the time I’d created Hasai.

You better work, goddammit!

I buckled down harder, gritting my teeth because of how much magic I was losing. As I pumped more power into the fusion, the three ingredients reacted too, melting like they were in an actual forge. They began to glow, then melded into a single unit.

“Wow...”

I grasped the hilt and put some power into my arm to lift the weapon. Light from the real throne room’s chandelier reflected off the blade, creating a shower of sparkles. I’d made a katana. More specifically, I’d made an odachi, but for as big as odachi already were, this thing was even bigger. It was longer than I was tall, albeit not by a ton.

It didn’t really matter to me since I stashed my weapons in Inventory anyway. Plus, I knew myself well enough to know that using a sheath would make drawing my sword too much extra work. The blade wasn’t as wide or thick as my greatswords, but it was no less inferior. Actually, scratch that. It had a much more profound heft to it. There was no guard at the base of the simply designed hilt, and the blade itself was crimson. It was such a pure red that it practically embodied a fiery blaze.

Now, it just needs a name... But what should I name it...?

“Got it. I’m calling you ‘Zaien’!”

Zaien: A crimson katana-style greatsword created by Demon Lord Yuki. A sword of judgment that loathes sin and sinners alike. As it consumes the blood of living creatures, it sharpens and develops ever further. When equipped, it amplifies the wielder’s stats. Quality: Indeterminable.

A sword that delivers judgment and purges sin with its scarlet blade.

Tremendous. What an absolutely fearsome weapon. First of all, I had to say that this was hands down the *best* thing I'd ever created. I wasn't sure I'd be able to make anything better in the future either. And based on the description, this wasn't even its final form. Pretty sure that was the reason quality was "indeterminable" too. It blew me away to think that something as amazing as this could get even amazing-er.

It honestly felt like the culmination of my lifelong dreams. I would make sure to mold it into the greatest sword this world had ever seen, one that would outshine even the most famous swords in all the lands here. I could feel waves of happiness pulsing from the sword itself through my grip on its hilt. Maybe it was because it had been reborn from those fugly hunks of junk, but there was no resentment in it anymore. Instead, an irrepressible joy was streaming from it.

Good, good. This is how it should be. And from now on, I want you to show me every ounce of your glorious power as my weapon.

"Oh my gooosh! It's huge! And what a strange curve it has, my lord. Might it be a cutlass?"

"No, this is a katana, totally different from a cutlass."

"A kuh-tah-nuh, you say? Indeed, that is a weapon found in eastern countries."

Leila scrutinized the weapon with great interest as she spoke. Right, how could I have forgotten that she was a fount of curiosity? I'd had the opportunity to understand it better recently.

"Amazing... My lord, can I hold it for a bit?"

"Sure, but I doubt you'll be able to. It's insanely heavy."

"No worries! As a werewolf, I'm pretty confident in my stren— Ngh, it's so heavy!"

Yup, what'd I tell you?

Sweat beading on her forehead, Lew held on to the sword with both hands, doing her absolute damndest not to drop it. Leila and I both absolutely lost it at the sight. We eventually took pity on the wolf girl, though, and I took the weapon back from her no problem.

“Ugh, that was too much... But jeez, you two are so mean, laughing at me like that.”

“I couldn’t help it. Not when I saw that reaction coming a mile away. Okey dokes, I’m off to test this thing.”

“And when do you think you’ll return?”

“Before dinner!”

With those parting words, I left the real throne room and headed outside.

“Whew. Nice work, sword.”

After a few practice swings to familiarize myself with my new katana, I’d called Rir so we could go hunting and had just finished killing a monster. Saying that the weapon had adjusted to me was the best way I could describe how it felt. In order for me to wield it smoothly, Zaien would fine-tune itself so that its blade’s arc met my target cleanly and gave it a beautiful slice.

Thanks to that, all the excess power I’d gotten into the habit of using when handling my greatswords went straight into the weapon itself, making it super easy to use. Another thing worth mentioning was how light it felt when I swung it. I had a hunch that was because of its ability to correct its own stats. Moving like a well-oiled stuntman was totally in the realm of possibilities now. I might even be able to copy Jackie Chan.

Its sharpness was beyond comparison too. When I had charged at the monster with Zaien, my momentum had me cutting into a nearby tree too. Boy howdy, imagine my surprise as the blade sliced through it like I really *couldn’t* believe it wasn’t butter. The day a finger got close to it would be the day I lost that finger, guaranteed.

I needed to keep in mind that living within it was something close to its own will—a consciousness, you could say. It had been there since the beginning,

even before its rebirth. Now that it finally had a chance to fulfill its long-held desire of being a real weapon, it was no wonder it was going ham sammy on anything it could get its blade on.

“Not only do you look out-of-this-world cool, but you’re easy to use *and* take no prisoners when slicing and dicing? You’re a goddamn rock star, you know that?”

I could feel the weapon’s delight as I complimented it. *Sheesh, this thing is way too charming.* Weird as it may have been, I thought the thing was kinda cute.

Okay, next plan made. Soon, I’d use my Sorcerer’s Grant ability to install a sorcerous circuit in my katana. One related to fire would be ideal. A flame would ignite in the section I cut, then the enemy itself would be consumed by fire and wither to ash. I was pretty sure I’d read something similar in one of the books I’d bought.

Zaien had required a shit ton of magic, but its raw materials had also been superb. Because of that, I could embed up to three circuits in it. I’d have to make sure to weigh my options carefully before making my final decisions.

But wait, if the enemy gets incinerated, it can’t suck the blood it needs to grow, right? Whatever. Soon enough, I’d experiment to see what worked and what didn’t. Just thinking about it had me hyped up, and Rir couldn’t help smiling snarkily at me for it. The two of us went on to spend the whole day together while I tested out my new sword.



“...”

“Master Demon Lord, that is quite an interesting posture to read in.”

My feet were resting on the throne while the rest of me was sprawled lazily on the floor as I read my book. That voice had come from above my head.

“Hmm? Oh, Leila, sup? Check this out.”

I turned the book around so she could read it.

“What’s this? Ah, a tome on sorcerous circuits?”

Yupper-dupper. I was reading one of the sorcerous circuit books I'd bought in Alfiro the other day. My current research bid was a result of me hyping myself up to implement a circuit in my newly created Zaien. Alas, hype wouldn't help me understand something I just couldn't wrap my head around. Sad life.

I'd bought all three levels—elementary, intermediate, and advanced. But even the elementary volume was written in a way that expected the reader to have at least a basic understanding of the topic. Very much lacking that fundamental knowledge, my brain was just full of question marks as I desperately tried to read the damn thing.

Admittedly, I didn't have the first idea of what magical theory even *was*. My method of magic use relied on doing what I wanted with my imagination, so I wouldn't know theory if it came and bit me on the ass. I wanted to turn Zaien into a lethal—I mean, world-renowned weapon by inserting that fiery circuit I'd mentioned, but unfortunately for me, I'd hit this massive roadblock before I could even *think* about taking a stab at it.

"If you'd like, I can teach you."

"Whaaat?! You understand this?"

I jerked myself up off the floor.

"I do. Before I was captured as a slave, I had dedicated myself to studying such magics. I believe I can teach you the basics to some degree."

"Hell to the yes. Please and thank you."

I couldn't have agreed faster if I'd tried.

"Okay, Master Demon Lord, are you ready? I think I've asked this before, but a review doesn't hurt. Do you remember what I said about the most common method to activate magic in today's age?"

"Uhhh...you build a magic's framework by chanting a spell and then make it into a reality by pouring your magical energy into it?"

"Correct. A sorcerous circuit represents that framework through letters or patterns, and when that circuit is 'carved into' something, it replaces the

chanting as the structure. As such, pouring magical energy into that circuit activates that particular type of magic. In elemental magic terms, it would be akin to the step before using your imagination—you would draw diagrams of everything before visualizing what you wanted in your mind.”

“I get it now. Your explanation was really easy to understand, which makes me wonder why this book is making the topic so complicated.”

Why didn't I just ask Leila from the start? Why am I like this?

“Well, I’ve read those books as well. They’re specifically geared toward researchers, you see, and researchers love to complicate everything.”

“So that’s how it is, eh?”

“That is indeed how it is.”

After nodding her head in agreement, Leila kept speaking.

“Now, returning to that analogy, a blueprint for a sorcerous circuit can be divided into several phases.”

She started drawing on the whiteboard I’d bought with DP a while ago for Iluna’s lessons.

“Let’s start with Fireball magic as an easy example. It can be broken down into three parts: creating the fireball, controlling the fireball, and discharging the fireball. From there, we can take it a step further to actions like controlling a discharged fireball and modifying a discharged fireball.”

When she finished talking, there was a completed sorcerous circuit on the whiteboard.

“Whoa. That’s awesome.”

I think I understood. Smaller circuits connected with each other to form a larger circuit, which was the sorcerous circuit itself.

“Heh heh, we are still only at the rudimentary level. I really must say again how convenient this board is. I would have loved to have met it so much earlier in life.”

Professor Leila’s lecture on sorcerous circuits continued after that. Just like

her drawing depicted, a sorcerous circuit consisted of several individual circuits functioning together as a whole. However, a sorcerous circuit wouldn't work if the littler circuits didn't connect from beginning to end, like how words needed to connect if you wanted to form a coherent sentence. It was similar to how I had to circulate my magic through my entire body whenever I wanted to use it. Without getting it flowing, I couldn't do jack shit. In a similar vein, if a circuit was too large, magic couldn't flow through it properly, which meant it was necessary to build a compact circuit with direct links. That said...

“Question: does a circuit *have* to exist on a single plane?”

“Pardon?”

“Like, I can think about this as three-dimensional, right? And not all the circuits have to be connected ‘flatly’ on one plane?”

I'd unintentionally hit on this idea of fabricating circuits where they weren't just isolated to a one-dimensional plane that had to be connected by successive lines to work. The thought had floated into my head when I'd considered 3D programming. “What if I could create a structure in three dimensions instead of two?” That way, even if a circuit got bigger, it was still possible to keep things compact, you know? So I explained my thought process to her while I drew it out on the whiteboard.

“Actually, maybe not.”

I stopped halfway through my explanation.

“People who're a lot smarter than me must've already had this sort of idea, which means there's probably a reason this couldn't work. Let's just forget this — Uh, Leila?”

I didn't know why she wasn't saying anything, so I turned to look at her. When I did, I found her staring in intense concentration at my work on the whiteboard. I called out to her again and she gasped as she came back to reality. Instead of her usual nonchalant attitude, though, Leila was now brimming with excitement like I could have never imagined. She grabbed both of my hands eagerly.

“M-M-M-Master Demon Lord! You're incredible! I'd never thought of it like

this!”

“Huh? I— Wha— Um...cool?”

“I-I’d been completely convinced that circuits could operate only on a singular plane, but that’s not the case at all! Your notion makes more complicated but no less compact circuits quite viable! I apologize, Master, but I suddenly have something I must do, so I’ll take my leave now!”

“Oh, uh, sure.”

Bursting with energy, she dashed off into the room I’d added for her and Lew.

“Well, this sucks. I wanted her to teach me the next part.”



The events of a random day.

“Hi-yah! Shii, up there!”

“Kay!”

Shii stretched her arm waaay up to catch the ball Iluna had tossed into the air.

“Wow! That’s amazing, Shii!”

“Tee hee! Shii special skill!”

While sitting on a wooden bench I’d set up in the courtyard, I watched the two little girls, charmed by their interactions. They’d always gotten along really well, but it looked like they’d gotten even closer ever since Shii had learned to talk. Must’ve been because they could communicate exactly what they wanted to say to each other through actual words and not just vibes now. *Friendship is truly a beautiful thing, huh?*

Speaking of Shii being able to talk, she was slowly but surely getting better at it. Thanks to Iluna’s persistent teaching, the awkwardness of her speech patterns was gradually disappearing. I had found Shii’s initial way of talking super cute since the clumsiness showed that she was determined to express herself, so I’d definitely miss it, but no one could stand in the way of progress. I just had to accept this bittersweet feeling as par for the course when it came to watching your kids grow up.

Incidentally, I wasn't out here watching them play because I had nothing better to do. I was currently taking a break from my interior design efforts for my demon lord castle. It was sitting at ten percent complete, and that was with me working on it daily, so a hundred percent was still a ways off. The only part of it that was pretty much done was the palace-like structure in the center. I mean, seriously, which genius built something this stupidly massive? Oh, right, that was me.

Well, it is what it is. I had a ton of time on my hands anyway. A millennium, if I remembered correctly. I planned on taking my time with the renovations since I was in literally no rush. Besides, I had a feeling that if I did try to zoom through it all, I'd probably get bored and burn out.

Even now, despite being in the middle of a build, I was thinking about all sorts of other stuff, like adding more buildings to the castle itself or new geographical features to the meadow area as a whole. I couldn't help it, though. For having started out with absolutely nothing, the place looked a million times better now.

Gazing over at the girls playing, I started to relax. Bathed in the sun's gentle warmth, I could feel my eyelids getting heavier, my body giving in to the exhaustion from remodeling. In no time at all, I passed out.

Waking up from that nice nap was like making my way up from deep underwater, my consciousness steadily returning.

"Nhhh..."

As I opened my eyes, I could see the faint scarlet glow of the sun on the horizon.

"Ah, shit. I totally zonked out."

Time passed in the meadow area the same as it did outside, so the setting sun meant it'd be night soon. *Ugh, I overslept, didn't I?* When I made a move to get my ass up, I finally noticed two separate weights on my body. I looked down, and there were two little girls using my lap as their pillows. I guessed they'd tired themselves out playing so much. They were sleeping like logs, breathing deeply and comfortably.

I stayed quiet. I'd only just started to stand up, so I sat back down on the bench and laughed quietly. Then, making sure not to wake them, I carefully stroked each of their heads. Shii's had a cool, refreshing sensation, while Iluna's was warm and velvety.

I had really felt alive ever since coming to this world. In my life on Earth, I'd existed only to survive. I hadn't had any significant interests or anything I'd particularly wanted to do. I'd always thought my life would just chug along in its boring, meaningless way until I eventually died.

In the end, I *had* died just like that, with nothing special at all coming from my life or my death. My life in this world was deeper and richer than that one had been, and I'd only been here for maybe a tenth—no, more like fiftieth of the time. Today had been fun, and I knew for a fact that tomorrow would be too. I had no hard evidence to back up that claim, but that didn't make me any less confident about it.

I remembered what Lefi had once told me about how I brightened up her world. I felt the same way because now, my days were full of color, and each one made my life all the more vibrant. Every single hue was precious and priceless to me. The weight of these two girls represented another wonderful shade in my personal rainbow. After gently caressing their heads like I was handling rare treasures, I lightly shook their shoulders.

"Come on, girls. If you don't wake up, you're gonna have a tough time falling asleep tonight like a certain dragon lady we know."

"Ngh..."

"Hn... Morning, Master."

Shii was the first to get up, rubbing her eyes sleepily as she lifted herself up off my lap. When she was fully awake and saw me, she beamed happily. *Adorable.*

"Morning, Shii. Though it *is* practically nighttime. Miss Iluuuna, if you don't wake up soon, someone's gonna gobble up your diinneer."

She made another moaning sound, which meant she clearly had no intention of waking up. *Oh well.* In that case, I'd carry her back. I smiled wryly, lifted her

into my arms, and stood up with an “Upsy-daisy!”

“All right, Shii, let’s go.”

“Yah!”

With the curled-up Iluna in my one arm and my other being used to hold Shii’s hand, the three of us set off for the door that connected to the real throne room. As we walked, the setting sun cast long shadows of us on the ground.



“...”

“...”

“Aw, yeah! Gotcha, ya little sucker!”

“What—”

From the corner of my eye, I saw Lefi turn toward me as I yanked on my pole to hook the fish that had tugged on it.

“It’s a fighter! Mwa ha ha, that makes two catches for me. Looks like victory will soon be mine, eh?”

“Grrr... Hmph, how rash of you. Our battle has only just begun.”

She spat those words at me, clearly annoyed as I showed off my trophy catch with a smug smirk on my face.

“In any case, what is even the purpose of fishing? If one desires to eat fish, they can simply dry up a river and be done with it, yes?”

“You just don’t get it. The fun thing about fishing is relaxing and spacing out. Also, no draining rivers ever, thanks. Seriously, I can’t with you, jeez.”

It really doesn’t sound like a joke when you’re the one saying it, Lefi. Right now, we were fishing on the bank of the river located in the meadow area. Nearby, Iluna and Shii were squealing with delight as they dragged Rir around as they pleased. They’d gotten bored of fishing not long after we’d started.

Lew was next to us with a rod in her hand too, but she was distracted by the little girls, her eyes constantly skittering their way. Although on second thought, Rir probably had her attention more than the girls did. Leila was sitting on a

picnic blanket not too far away, observing us all with her usual serene smile. Then, suddenly, she looked startled, like she'd just had a "Eureka!" moment. She immediately began writing something in a bundle of papers that resembled a notebook.

Leila had been like that since the day I'd had her teach me about magic. She'd be here in body but not in spirit even while doing her chores, to the point that I found her muttering quietly to herself pretty often. She still did all her work well, so I couldn't really complain, but honestly, her recent change in attitude kinda scared me.

Take this morning for example. Lew had come to me for advice about her, saying, "Lately, Leila's been giving me the chills." She'd told me that apparently, even when she was in their shared room, Leila would cackle to herself while endlessly scribbling out her thoughts in the notebook I'd given her. *Well, she'll be back to normal eventually. Yeah, that's it, let's go with that.* I just had to believe.

Anyway, back to the present. Today was another leisure day for all of us, just like that picnic we'd had a while back. The reason we'd ended up fishing was because not too long ago, I'd realized there were actual fish in the river. You heard it right, folks. I'd added this river to the meadow using DP some time ago, but after all this time, I hadn't noticed the existence of the fish swimming in it.

Of course, I hadn't put them in myself, so you can imagine how surprised I'd been when I'd found out about them "Yo, what the hell?" had been my literal reaction. I'd just kinda decided that it was a "buy a river, get fish as a free gift" kind of purchase, though. Made me wonder if the mountains I'd added for background scenery had monsters living in them.

So once I knew we had fish, the only logical choice for me had been to invite everyone to go fishing. And that's how we found ourselves out here today. Although in reality, me, Lefi, and Lew were the only ones *actually* fishing.

"Oh! I think I got one!"

"Bah! Lew as well?!"

"Mwa ha ha, this puts you in dead last, doesn't it, Lady Lefi?"

“Tch. Do not get ahead of yourselves just yet.”

Lefi growled menacingly at us.

The three of us had a bet going where the loser had to be pit master for tonight’s barbecue dinner. The winner would be whoever caught the most fish for us to cook up, so quantity was basically the name of the game. There was another way to win too, though: by catching a big one to turn into the main course. *Heh heh heh. I’m a catch a huge sonuvabitch and really rub her epic defeat in her face. She’ll be so salty that we can use it as seasoning.*

At that moment, Iluna, who’d been playing with Shii and Rir, hopped her way over to us. She glomped on to Lefi from behind.

“Lady Lefifi! Did you catch a biiig fish?”

“Mmph— I have not done so just yet. Be patient, however. I shall surely capture a magnificent specimen.”

“Okay! I can’t wait! Good luck, Lady Lefifi!”

Having said what she wanted to say, Iluna raced back to the others.

“Why are you looking at me like that, Yuki?”

She scowled at me as I watched their little side chat, grinning nonstop.

“Nooo reason at all. Was just thinking how nice it is that you two got along so well.”

My reply made her look a little sulky. Her cheeks flushed a bit from embarrassment too.

“Hmph. Iluna is like a younger sister to me. I have no reason to be unkind to her.”

“I see, I see. A younger sister, huh?”

“Whatever are you implying? Spit it out at once.”

“Not a gosh darn thing.”

I’m just happy that that’s how you feel about Iluna.

“Your countenance vexes me, Yuki. I shall astound you with my— Oh ho! Has

my time come?!”

In the middle of what was probably going to be a challenge, Lefi’s rod suddenly got tugged on hard, bending it really far forward.

“Maybe your hook got snagged on the riverbed?”

“Ha! Say what you will! This is undoubtedly a tremendous catch!”

Lefi put a good bit of her strength into pulling up whatever was dragging her pole down. Then, suddenly, *something* sprung out of the water. *What the heck is that?* She’d landed a creature that had a tree-trunk-like torso with zigzagging, squirming...tentacles? Feelers? Squiggly things growing out of it. It had a whole lot of tiny fangs for teeth too. I didn’t know what the hell kind of monster I was looking at, but it kinda grossed me out.

“Miss Lefi, would you kindly make sure you only catch things that are easily identifiable? I don’t know if this thing’s a fish, an animal, or something else entirely.”

“Wh-What does it matter as long as I caught it?! With this, I, too, have one catch!”

“So you telling me you’re gonna eat that for dinner?”

“...Rir may eat it.”

Management politely requests that you not feed our pet weird things. Thank you.

“Ahem! Now, then, you have two fish, Yuki, while Lew and I each have one. As the ranking stands, our contest is far from over! Lew, I would like you to buck up and fish to your heart’s content! We shall put his catches—and his dinner—to shame.”

“Wha— Oh, um, yes, ma’am! Since he’s been mean to me lately, I’ll show my lord a thing or two!”

“Ah, the pathetic cries of the weak are music to my ears. I’ll teach you what it means to go head-to-head with an overwhelmingly powerful opponent. You two’re gonna learn today, and you’re gonna learn *real* good.”

Several hours had passed. It was night now, and a dim darkness surrounded us, but our little group was illuminated by the fire in the barbecue pit and a light I'd created using magic. The moon was already visible in the sky, which was blanketed with brilliantly sparkling stars. Even though I knew the view was fake, it was still so beautiful that my heart felt like it would burst out of my chest.

"What a steaming pile of bullshit. I can't believe I lost like that."

"Heh heh heh. Your arrogance was your downfall. Thus, you have reaped what you sowed."

All smiles, Lefi hung out by me as I worked near the fire.

"Ahhh, so very scrumptious. As always, the meals you make are quite delicious, Yuki. Oh, but of course, the rules of our match forbade the loser from consuming that which they have cooked. How terribly unfortunate for you, unable to partake of such mouth-watering meat."

Lefi chatted away with laughter on her lips and in her eyes. She pinched the meat between chopsticks she'd finally learned how to use just recently and drew closer to me, waving it around all up in my face. Director's commentary included as a bonus for the show, of course. I was, in a word, annoyed.

"Mmm!"

"Gaaah! How dare you eat that?!"

"Man, you were right, this *is* delicious. Mmm, mmm, good."

"Y-You cretin! Spit that out posthaste! I demand that you spit it out this instant! That was my last morsel!"

Chewing obnoxiously loudly, I grinned down at her as she whaled on my arm over and over again.

"My bad, that one's on me. It's just, seeing as you were nice enough to bring it over to me, I figured you wanted to feed me."

"As if I would ever do such a thing! You are a beast! A fiend! A *demon lord*!"

"Ba ha ha ha ha! Third time's the charm, little lady! Took you long enough to realize the truth!"

“I have been well aware for ages now!”

I’d caught a bunch more fish after Lefi’s first catch and was in a comfortable position to take first place. But then, Lefi had complained that “You have fished many times before, yet this is the first occasion for myself and Lew. I find such conditions inherently unfair.” Assured of my abilities, I’d replied, “Okay, fine, then you weaklings can team up against me.” So from that point on, the match was me versus Team Lewfi.

Even with their powers combined, I’d still been ahead just as we were about to call the competition. I was all set to take the dub, except that Lefi landed an absolute whopper in the eleventh freaking hour. The tug on her pole had been powerful, but it was my fault for underestimating her because hidden in that seemingly delicate body of hers was a dragon’s might. Naturally, she would never lose in a battle of strength, so she’d effortlessly pulled up her catch. It was supposedly a fish, but it looked like a goddamn squid, and a gigantic one at that.

If we had never changed the terms of the bet, Lefi would have stayed the winner while Lew would have been in last place, but my dumb ass was the one who’d told them they could team up. So haunted and done in by my own words, I’d ended up the sole loser. We’d decided that the loser would prepare and cook everything for the barbecue, both the fish we’d caught and all the other meats, and that they’d only get to eat after everyone else had had their fill.

When all was said and done, though, it didn’t really make a difference. Lefi and Lew didn’t know their way around a kitchen, so even if one of them *had* lost, Leila and I had still planned on doing the actual cooking. In that situation, I would have just made them wait to eat as their punishment for coming in last. But obviously, that wasn’t what had happened. Since I’d lost, Leila had ended up on the eating side, so I’d been all by my lonesome with food prep. It wasn’t so bad now that the fish were cleaned and ready to grill, though.

“Lady Lefifi, Yukiki, stop bullying each other! Yukiki, here, say ‘Aah!’”

“Aaaah... Mmm, now *that* is yummy. Food tastes a hundred times better when you feed it to me, Iluna.”

“Tee hee. Then I’ll give you lots more!”

Iluna responded with a happy laugh. Truly an angel.

“Honestly, Iluna, you must not spoil him overmuch, for he is the defeated.”

“But, but I feel bad leaving Yukiki out like that! Food tastes better when we eat it together! Right, Shii?!”

“Right!”

The two girls put their faces close together and beamed at each other while stuffing their little cheeks. *Adorable.*

“See that, Lefi? That’s what we call ‘kindness.’ So be nicer to me, ’kay?”

“Hmph. So be it. Here.”

She grabbed some vegetables with her chopsticks and held them up to my face.

“Huh? A-All right, as long as you understand. Thanks for the grub.”

I stretched my neck toward the food she was offering me, tugged it off the chopsticks with my mouth, and started chewing.

“Have another bite.”

“O-Oh, thanks.”

“I will feed this to you as well.”

“Mmph, thank— Hey! These are all vegetables!”

Lefi shrugged. I was pissed, but she didn’t care.

“You know, it is extremely narrow-minded of you to complain when I am personally deigning to feed you.”

“Okay, smart-mouth, then how ’bout you grab some of that meat too?”

“Ah, yes, it looks quite delicious, does it not? Hmm, I am suddenly feeling quite peckish.”

She snatched up the piece I wanted and deliberately put it in her own mouth. *This little...*

“Beg pardon, Master Demon Lord, but I’d be happy to take your place.”

Leila made that suggestion as she ate her grilled fish in a refined way. Oh, and if you were wondering about the gut-churning thing Lefi had fished up, I’d had her toss it back in the river. Not a chance anyone actually *wanted* to eat it.

“Leila, no, that’s the loser’s job.”

“Big words from someone who barely caught shit, Lew.”

“Psh. A win is a win, my lord, even if it’s by default.”

I snapped at Lew while she grinned, unfazed.

“Hey... Hey, Rir, hear me out, bud. Get this: Lew’s being a jerk to me.”

“Oh my gosh! What a sneaky thing to do, my lord! You can’t tell Lord Rir that! H-Here, I’ll give you some of my meat, so hush!”

“No, thank you. I am the loser, after all. A loser’s gotta do what a loser’s gotta do, and this loser’s gotta work.”

“My lord?! L-Lord Rir! It wasn’t like that! I’m truly not such an odious woman! You have to believe me!”

“Grrr...”

Rir let out a troubled grumble, as if he was saying, “Please don’t involve me in this.”

“Yuki, your hands have stopped moving. Pray continue with the roasting.”

“Yes, yes, right away, Your Majesty. And eat some of those vegetables yourself instead of just feeding them to me.”

“Urk... Th-That reminds me. Why is it necessary to eat these grasses? I have pondered this question for some time now. Clearly, I have survived this long without having consumed them.”

“Don’t call them ‘grasses,’ dummy. And you’re technically right about being able to survive without eating vegetables, but they’re important for a well-balanced, healthy diet. Otherwise, it’s not good for your body.”

Hmm, that might not apply to dragons, I guess, but I can’t have her being a picky eater. She likes to take a mile whenever I give her an inch, and I’m not

about that life.

“Fine, then. Here. You wish to eat this meat, yes?”

“Whaaat? Uh, yeah, thanks. Don’t think you can distract me by feeding me meat, though. You better eat those damn veggies.”

“Tch.”

You tryna play me, woman? Fuck outta here.



“Yo! Long time no see, Nell.”

I’d been waiting outside the cave for her, so when I finally saw a human shape coming out of the forest, I raised a hand in greeting.

“I’m not going to ask how you knew I was coming. I have to admit, though, I feel sort of annoyed with myself for being relieved to see your face, Mr. Yuki. It was super scary walking through this forest.”

Okay, and what am I supposed to do with that information?

“Dang, if only you’d showed up three days sooner, you could have enjoyed my delicious cooking at our barbecue. So close, yet so far.”

“Hm... I think I’m fine, thanks. But what’s a bar-bi-kyu?”

Yes, indeed, that human figure with a fed-up expression was our very own hero, Nell.

“All right, what’s next on the agenda? You must be tired after your long trip; wanna get in the hot spring first?”

“I would love to do just that, to be frank, but unfortunately, time is of the essence. I’ll gladly take you up on that next time, though.”

The hero replied with a slightly grim look on her face.

“Roger that. Then let’s head inside for now.”

At my urging, she followed me into the cave, where chilly air wrapped itself around us. Our footsteps echoed as we walked, and we finally arrived at the cave’s imposing, stately door. When I opened it, what greeted us as we entered

was not the meadow area, but the inn I'd moved behind my demon lord castle—the one with the hot spring.

“Huh? Wh-What? Isn't that door supposed to lead us to the *front* of the castle?”

“Mm, that didn't work for me, so I changed our destination. Oh, take off your shoes.”

“R-Right, got it.”

The inn's Japanese-style door rattled as I slid it open to lead the hero to a room she'd been in the last time she was here. Nell didn't look totally satisfied with my explanation, but she followed behind me anyway. I pulled out two floor cushions from a pile in a corner of the room, sitting cross-legged on one and placing the other across from me. The hero kneeled down nervously on hers. Once she was seated, I spoke.

“Now, lay it on me.”

“In essence, the entire plot was orchestrated to buy time. Hoodlums with magic blades, like the one who attacked us, as well as other incidents that occurred throughout the town were designed to draw and keep the chief administrator's attention on the town itself. The business with the Undead, too, was instigated to make sure the town's garrison stayed rooted within Alfiro's borders. But it seems they made a few miscalculations.”

“Whaddya mean?”

“Well, the crazed man you defeated was actually a brainwashed pawn who was originally supposed to charge on the chief administrator's manor in conjunction with the hordes of Undead. His manor not only serves as the town's official administration building, but also as a refuge in times of emergency. If it were under siege, that would have prolonged the uproar, not to mention that it might have opened up an opportunity for them to kill the chief administrator. Your quick action in solving the Undead problem, however, led to a lot less damage being done than the villains had expected.”

“I see...”

I replied after sipping on the hot tea Leila had brought in not too long ago. All the stuff that had happened in that border town—according to Nell, it was the result of some kind of political upheaval taking place in the country. That shithead, waste-of-space prince, finally driven into a corner, had desperately tried his hand at an actual rebellion.

His first attempt had been dispatching a military expedition after successfully recruiting the rich and powerful for their resources by exploiting their greed. That had ended in total annihilation, as we all knew. His second attempt involved using a hero, a vital combat asset for the nation. After she'd been dispatched, the hero's status as dead or alive ended up being unclear as far as the government and Church were concerned.

Obviously, the hero was alive and well, but apparently, during the time she'd been with us, her superiors at the Church had actually been unsure of whether she'd made it. And as it turned out, they'd weaponized her temporary disappearance as a political cudgel against the prince. Even after she'd returned to make her report, Church officials had kept quiet about her living to tell the tale, so to speak, in order to maintain their pressure on His Royal Bitchness.

As far as he and others were aware, the fact that he'd so colossally screwed up his second plan meant he'd forfeited his supporters' trust in him. His back to the wall, the dumbass made a final, all-or-nothing gamble à la treason. When pushed to their breaking point, there were really only two outcomes for people like that: dream about turning the tables in a single move or drag everyone else down with you as you self-destruct.

All of this info was thanks to the interrogation of the black-clad dingus I'd captured. That asshole's role had been to keep the chief old-man-istrator locked up in town. As someone who had opposed the prince's expedition and was also a staunch ally of the kingdom itself, Alfiro's lord had posed a threat to the prince's ambitions. But with him distracted by all the upheaval, he would have been forced to direct the considerable combat resources under his command toward that problem. So, with the mayor and his might out of the way, the prince's strategy had been to stage a coup in the royal capital while the zombie outbreak was happening in Alfiro. He had planned to take control rapidly before anyone had the chance to interfere.

Allegedly, the prince hadn't gone to such blatantly great lengths against other towns and leaders who had objected to his goals, but those settlements also weren't in the same position as Alfiro. Due to Alfiro being an important border location, it possessed both adventurers and soldiers of a much higher caliber than the ones in a lot of other places, making it a strategic stronghold for the country. If the king had asked Alfiro to help out in an emergency, it would have been a big problem for the prince. He'd wanted his coup to succeed at any cost, so he and his lackeys had devised their dastardly plot to immobilize the town's forces with the zombies, magic-blade-users, and other incidents. That way, they wouldn't be able to send troops to aid the national government.

As an aside, the jerkwad in black had refused to talk. So, as a last resort, the chief administrator and his people had *made* him talk by hitting him with the wombo combo of some kind of drug and dangerous brainwashing magic. The dude had supposedly ended up like some sort of mindless, truth-telling zombie who told them whatever they wanted to know. *Man, an isekai sure is scary.*

Far as that dude went though, it seemed that some magical time bomb or something had been planted inside him. The old man had managed to discover their plans, but before he could find out details about the bad guy's organization itself, he'd ended up croaking. Seriously, could this world get any scarier?

Unfortunately, the prince's tactics had worked so well that the king and his daughter's whereabouts were currently unknown and martial law had been declared in the royal capital by the prince's pawns. Their grip on the city was so tight that no other powers could even *try* to take it back. This farce was making me think too goddamn hard and I hated it. The Church was apparently still keeping Nell's status on the DL too, which I found despicable since they were basically using her for their own ends.

The anti-prince faction was in a bind, though. If the king and princess were alive, its members could raise an army to rescue the royal family. But if they were dead, they could use their demise as justification to use military power in order to establish a new legitimate government. That said, because no one actually *knew* if the king and his daughter were dead or alive, they couldn't act recklessly even though time was running out for them. If the prince and his

subordinates managed to solidify their regime soon, that would make it all the more difficult for the opposition to make their move.

What mattered to me was if the prince would stay on the throne. He'd already messed with me a few times now, and if that piece of human garbage managed to seize total control over the country's military, I could definitely see him sending the entire host against me. In that situation, the chance that just mine and the dungeon's power would crush him got a little thin. I might have to lean on Lefi if that happened, and that was the one thing I didn't want to do.

Well, I had given him the business real good twice now, so it was possible he wouldn't invade the Demonic Forest again, but preparing for the worst-case scenario would still be best. Just in case, y'know? It wasn't like an enemy would stop their attack if I said I wasn't expecting them and asked if they would pretty please go away. *Tch. This is what I get for taking it too easy.*

Let me be honest, though: I already had a solution in mind for what to do with Prince Scumbag. It wasn't complicated either. Drumroll, please... Assassination! Is that simple or is that simple?

To execute my plan, I needed something from the DP Catalog. It was a golem called a Duplicate Doll—basically, a robot I could operate remotely. By using a magical pathway, I could connect to the inanimate golem and transfer my consciousness into it, thereby gaining the ability to maneuver it freely. While my real body was in a safe place, I could launch an attack using the puppet.

Its control radius maxed out at a hundred meters, which meant that if the user moved out of range, the connection would be cut. The fact that I needed to be relatively close for it to work was a bit of a downside, sure, but there was an upside too. You see, by spending some extra dough, this variety of golem could be customized just like other types so that it could learn various skills. I figured spec'ing it out as an assassin would be super effective in this particular situation.

I had considered going with a direct assault over a time-consuming strategy like this because I had a feeling me going balls to the wall might speed up a resolution, but I'd ultimately nixed that option since I had no idea what the defenses at the castle in the imperial capital would be like. Plus, I didn't have a

death wish, which was where the golem came in. If anyone found and destroyed it, the only fatal damage would be to my wallet and not to me myself. Better to run out of DP than HP.

On that note, Rir and I had been going ham on our hunts lately. Figured I'd kill two birds with one stone that way by learning how Zaien ticked and making enough moola to buy a Duplicate Doll, but...

"Question: how are you people planning on dealing with the prince?"

"The Church has grave misgivings should the prince gain greater political authority. As he's an extremely uncompromising individual, it's very likely that he would wield that power against the Church. As such, our leaders intend to set out on an operation to rescue the king in the near future."

"I thought no one knew if he was alive?"

"You're right, but that's still their best chance."

Huh, so they're taking a hard-line approach right off the bat. If it works out, hmmm... Wonder if that might actually be to my advantage?

"Affirmative. Message received. I'll lend ya a hand with everything, then."

"Wh-What? Not that it wouldn't be incredibly reassuring to have you as an ally, Mr. Yuki, but..."

The hero's confused expression told me that she wasn't sure about what I wanted in return for my help.

"I'll be in a pickle too if the prince takes over. I sure as hell don't wanna deal with any massive army he'll send out in the future, so I'd much prefer that the current king stays in power. I mean, he *has* honored the treaty not to expand into the Demonic Forest, after all. Even if the king dies, the prince's detractors oppose any expeditions into the Forest, right? That's a lot more convenient for me than anything that moronic prince does."

I wasn't lying when I told her all that, but I also had other reasons deep down. If I actually went through with my assassination plan, there was a thousand percent chance that someone would start an investigation. Let's assume those people used methods I didn't know about to find out who the criminal was—

aka *me*. With the truth exposed, even if the current king was eventually reinstated and his supporters held on to a majority of political power, there was still a very good chance that I'd end up as public enemy number one regardless. They couldn't just let their prince's murderer go unpunished, despite the reasons for said murder. It was an inevitability.

It didn't stop there either. In that particular timeline, there was still the threat of being attacked by a national battalion, which meant I couldn't guarantee complete peace for me and mine anymore. Me being me, I wanted to avoid all that nonsense by helping the anti-prince guys. They could take the official credit for bringing him down, I could go back to chilling—win-win for everybody. But also, I didn't have enough DP to buy the golem I needed for my assassination strategy yet. I would've had to go and do the deed live and in person, except as luck would have it, this opportunity fell right into my lap. No way was I passing it up.

"Mr. Yuki, I don't think they'll believe you even if you say you'll cooperate. You *are* a demon lord, you know. Of course, *I* know that you're special, that you're different from most of your kind, but *they* don't know that."

Damn, I felt both complimented and insulted. *Tell me how you really feel.*

"Yeah, I definitely can't go traipsing around in my real form. What if I pretended to be your valet or something? Someone you met on one of your journeys, maybe? I could even wear a mask if you want me to."

"I don't think that will work. They have evaluation crystals too."

"No worries, amiga. I have an idea, so just leave it to me."

I grinned at the slightly anxious hero.



The next day, early in the morning.

"All right, I'm off again. I should be back in less than a week."

Standing in front of the cave, I spoke to our dungeon's residents.

"Be safe, Yukiki! Hurry home, okay?!"

"Huwwy home, okay?!"

Once I'd lightly patted Iluna's and Shii's heads, Lefi took a step forward.

"Yuki."

"Sup? Hrgh—"

She suddenly raised her hands and smooshed my cheeks between them hard.

"I will not be joining you this time, so I shall make myself exceedingly clear. You had best not become infatuated with some human trollop or return late."

Her face right in mine since she'd dragged me down to her eye level, Lefi spoke with a menacing smile.

"Y-Yesh, ma'am."

My garbled words and vigorous nodding in acknowledgment seemed to satisfy her. With a "Hmph" she let go of me.

"Very good. We will protect your castle whilst you are away."

"Ahhh... I've got nothing to worry about now, eh? I'm leaving my home, heart, and everyone else in your hands, Lefi."

"As you wish."

Then, I turned to the hero, who'd been waiting patiently this whole time.

"Well, then. Shall we be off, my lady? As we are in a hurry, I have taken the liberty of preparing this carriage to bring us there with utmost swiftness."

"Why are you talking like that? And what do you mean by 'carriage'? Are you referring to this huge wolf?"

"Correct."

I leaped on Rir's back and thumped his neck gently.

"Can you take us to the royal capital, bud? Sorry it's a little far, but you got this."

With Lefi staying behind, there was no need for Rir to hang around at the dungeon too. Besides, we didn't have the time to take it easy, so why not use the Super Express Fluffrir train to our advantage? Rir nodded his head as if saying, "You can count on me." With that, I turned to look down at the frozen-

in-shock hero so I could urge her to get a move on. She stared at me in disbelief.

“C’mon, get up here.”

“I... I think I’d rather go on foo— Whaaat?!”

There was no point arguing with her about this, so I grabbed her arm as she cowered away and hoisted her onto Rir’s back.

“Okay, Rir, go!”

“Huh?! W-Wait a— Eeeeeeeek!!!”

The hero’s unexpectedly melodic screams echoed everywhere as they left a trail behind us.

Side Story 1: Girl Talk

That night, after Yuki and the hero had left for the imperial capital. In the dungeon, Lefi, Lew, and Leila were congregated on top of futons in the real throne room, chatting about things they normally couldn't with Yuki around. In short, they were having girl talk.

Iluna and Shii had been awake until a short while ago, super excited to participate in their first girl talk. But once their bedtime had arrived, Shii had turned back into her slime form and positioned herself on her beloved cushion, while Iluna had made Lefi's lap into her pillow. Then, they'd both gone off into their individual dreamlands.

"Oh, right. So, something's been on my mind for a long time now, Lady Lefi. Whenever I'm near my lord, I feel really calm—like, at ease, you know? Do you get that same feeling too? A weirdly peaceful sensation when he's close by."

"Mm, yes, indeed. That is the effect wrought by his magical power."

"Would you elaborate on that?" Leila interjected before Lew could even get a word in.

"Though it varies subtly from individual to individual, magical energy radiates weakly from all living organisms, be they beast folk, demon folk, or even dragon folk."

"Hmm...I believe I know what you're talking about. I've felt others' 'auras,' so to speak. Now I understand that it was the influence of their magic."

"Precisely. Perhaps it is a reflection of his own somewhat eccentric personality, but that man emits an energy that attracts people. Else, for those like Lew, it reassures them. For that reason, Iluna took to Yuki immediately upon meeting him. Much the same occurred with the hero, who should have viewed Yuki as naught but an enemy. By merely exchanging a few words, however, he managed to dispel her wariness. Ah, though Yuki's complete lack of malice toward her may have also contributed to that. In any case, you can

consider it a talent of sorts. A philanderer's talent."

Lefi spoke while combing her fingers gently through the hair of the little girl who adored her as an older sister.



“‘Ph-Philanderer’?”

“What other name would you give it? Suppose he worked in a profession that relied on him deceiving women. Knowing what we do of him, he would be invincible, his schemes unstoppable.”

Lew snickered at Lefi’s aggrieved snort.

“I guess that makes a strange kind of sense... Oh, I was curious about another thing, Lady Lefi.”

“And what might that be?”

“The ring you always wear lately. Could it be...”

Lew pointed at the ring on Lefi’s free hand.

“Ah, yes, th-that. Hm. It... It was a gift from Yuki,” Lefi responded somewhat shyly.

At that reaction, Lew shrieked in delight, though she took care to muffle it so the little girls wouldn’t wake up. Leila, impressed, commented, “Nicely done, Master Demon Lord. You can certainly do things when you put your mind to them.”

“O-Oh my gosh! Does... Does that mean he already p-proposed to you?! When did things move so fast between you two?!”

The powerful bond between the girl in front of her and the young man not currently here was indisputable, even from an outsider’s perspective. Though the two had never explicitly discussed their relationship, there was no doubting the affection they clearly held for one another. Their constant, tireless bickering, incessant board game matches, and general liveliness when together were proof of that. Furthermore, the ring was on *that* finger, so Lew suspected that something special must have happened between them while they were in town together. She wouldn’t have been surprised if some catalyst had deepened their connection even more during that trip.

“N-No, no. That could not be further from the case. He gave this to me as a gift—nothing more.”

“Aw, really? Then I guess you two still have a ways to go, huh? But wait, by

giving that to you, doesn't it mean you're only just short of the goal?"

"I wonder..."

Lew found it a little odd that Lefi was being so unusually wishy-washy, but she pushed on with another question.

"Ultimately, how do you actually *feel* about my lord, Lady Lefi? I think anyone can tell just by looking at you two, but I'd still like to know."

At Lew's blunt question, Lefi didn't blush or even try to dodge it in a panic. She merely kept quiet for a while. Eventually, seemingly having reached some kind of conclusion, she began speaking slowly and deliberately.

"Hmm... Well, the truth is that I do not know."

"You honestly don't?" Leila asked again.

"You see..." The silver-haired girl paused before continuing. "I have always been alone. For a dreadfully long time. Eons. Others either saw me as someone to challenge or someone to fear. Not a single soul existed who would treat me amicably. And then, *he* appeared at that fateful moment. He was not afraid of me, nor did he view me as an enemy. That man's attitude toward me was perfectly, astoundingly ordinary."

Leila and Lefi listened quietly, paying rapt attention as Lefi spoke.

"It was the first time I had ever had such an experience. Now, I reside here with you and these young girls, but not long ago, I could never have imagined a day would come when I would live amongst others. Moreover, the feelings I have for him, the thoughts I have of him, everything is a first for me. So, candidly speaking, I do not know how to judge my emotions or even what I should do next."

Lefi talked to them with her eyes averted and a slightly embarrassed look on her face. Despite her youthful appearance, they knew what she was really like on the inside, so it was hard for them to reconcile her as a bashful young girl. They also understood, however, that carved within her long memory were ages of immeasurable loneliness, something the rest of the world could never imagine.

“Then, do you enjoy being with my lord, Lady Lefi?”

“Very much so. There are many intriguing and peculiar things in this dungeon, but the strangest would certainly have to be the master himself.”

Leila and Lew burst out laughing at Lefi’s playful reply.

“I concur. Master Demon Lord is a breed of gentleman I’ve rarely encountered.”

“My lord sure is an interesting person, huh? But wow, despite being the Supreme Dragon, you’ve gone through a lot too, Lady Lefi. Honestly, I feel really close to you right now.”

“I myself did not know that I was such an ordinary woman.”

Lefi chuckled, a teasing smile on her lips.

“Tell us about how you first met my lord, Lady Lefi.”

“Well, it is certainly a tale worth relating. That was when I first sampled the otherworldly delicacy known as ‘chocolate.’”

And so, night passed in the dungeon currently absent its master.

Epilogue: To the Royal Capital

Lit by the moon, walls stood in front of us. Armed soldiers patrolled on top of them, scowling ferociously at their surroundings. From a single glance, I could tell they were keeping an eye on everything both inside and outside the walls. Guarding the gate that served as the sole entrance and exit was a group of a dozen or so troops. Their tight defensive formation and grim expressions made it clear that they were on high alert. It didn't look like they planned on letting a single soul through.

A little ways away from all that, me and the hero were hiding out in some brush.

"Ugh... I'm still shaking everywhere..."

"Quit yer bitchin'. We got here two days before the horses you wanted to ride would have."

I shrugged my shoulders in response to the trembling hero's words. Even with taking several breaks, Rir had gotten us to Arsil, the country's capital, in just a few hours. Normally, a distance that huge would take a day or more to cover, but lucky for us, our ride just happened to be the legendary creature of yore, Rir.

Nell's and my combined weight didn't slow Rir down at all. I'd left wearing only the clothes on my back since everything I needed was in Inventory anyway, while Nell didn't weigh much to begin with. Her light armor lived up to its name too. Thanks to all that, Rir had raced to the city at the speed of a regular car. Traveling this distance in one day was a piece of cake for the bottomless well of stamina that was Rir.

"That's true, but... Wait, Mr. Yuki, why aren't *you* all shaken up?"

"Because I'm used to riding Rir, duh. Dummy."

Also doesn't hurt that I'm an adrenaline junkie. Oh, yeah, Rir wasn't with us right now. After we'd arrived, he'd made himself smaller—about the size of a

regular wolf—then headed off into the nearby woods. I'd told him to stay on standby there until I called him since we obviously couldn't just take him into the city with us.

"So, Nell, how are we getting in?"

From what I could see, I had serious doubts that they would serve us tea if I went up and said, "Howdy, y'all!" Way more likely that we'd get ganked on the spot.

"That's a good question..."

She muttered her answer while I kept my eyes on the walls.

"Hey. When you originally came after me, you planned on coming back here once you completed your mission, right?"

When I glared at her, she panicked a little and started to explain everything.

"I-I was, yes, but I didn't think security would be so stringent! A-Anyway, you know, th-there's that—"

With that, she pointed at...looked like a sewer? It was hard to make out seeing as it was covered by trees and tall grass, but there was definitely a passage of sorts cut into one side of the outer walls. Iron bars were fitted over the opening, and several soldiers were standing guard outside it.

"It's actually supposed to be invisible thanks to a magical tool and is normally only used during emergencies, but now, it doesn't look like they'd let us pass regardless. The truth is, that's where I was supposed to rendezvous with a knight from the Church."

Ah ha. I think I see the light now, so to speak. The government had found out about the secret path.

"Hmm... Okay, I getcha. To confirm, you've already got a plan for once we're inside, right?"

"Y-Yes, pretty much."

"Cool, then let me do my thing to get us over the walls. Beggin' your pardon, miss."

As soon as I said that, I grabbed her and tucked her under my arm.

“Eep! Wh-What are you—”

“You’re fine, so hush.”

I quickly activated my Stealth ability. It worked on anything I was in contact with while using it, so as long as I kept ahold of her like this, I could hide her presence as well. It would’ve been real problematic for me if it didn’t work like that. I mean, can you imagine if the ability only worked on my body? *I’d* know I was moving around, but to everyone else, it would just be a set of clothes walking around all casually and stuff. *That’s some horror movie shit right there.*

“Keep your voice down or we’ll get found out.”

Once I made sure that Stealth was working right, I popped out both of my sets of wings. With a *swish*, I flapped my wings and we were up in the air. The ground dropped away from us in a matter of seconds and my field of vision expanded.

“Eeeeeeeek!”

“Goddammit, woman, I told you to keep your mouth shut!”

“A-As if that’s even possible!”

“Who said that?!”

“It’s coming from above! Hurry, bring a torch!”

“See what you did? They know we’re here now. Frick!”

Now, there was a sudden commotion around the outer walls. *Crap, I don’t have a choice. They still can’t see us, so I might as well keep going.* With the hero cradled under my arm, I successfully used the sky to trespass into the royal capital.

Special Story: An Ordinary Day

“Master!”

“That’s me, in the flesh.”

“Iluna!”

“That’s right!”

“Lady Lefifi!”

“Mm, yes, indeed.”

“Rei! Rui! Roh!”

The wraith sisters couldn’t talk, so they just floated up and down in response.

“Miss Leila!”

“Heh heh, you are correct.”

“Miss maid! Wif dog ears!”

“Ha ha, yes— Wait, what?! Why am I the only one she’s describing instead of using their actual name?!”

Lew had waited excitedly for her own turn to be recognized, but now, she collapsed dramatically.

“Sh-Shii, that’s not right! C-Come on, try again!”

“I mistake! Miss Lew!”

Despite being a little embarrassed, Shii still giggled happily. Calling her an angel was a serious understatement.

“I don’t know if I’m fully satisfied with that, but you’re cute, so I’ll take it!”

“You’re amazing, Shii. I still can’t believe you were originally a creature that didn’t use language. What incredible progress. I surmise part of that can be attributed to the fact that you managed to understand our words even as a slime?”

“Yeah, I think you’re on to something there, Leila. As the demon lord in charge of this dungeon, I can easily communicate with Shii and Rir since they’re both my dungeon summons. Some kind of mutual understanding feature we’ve all got or something. But even then, there are limits on my side like I figured there would be, so it’s still a mystery to me how Iluna could actually talk to slime-form Shii no problem.”

“Oh! Are you saying they’re your subordinates, Master Demon Lord?!”

“Right. They were already here when you and Lew moved in with us, so you wouldn’t have known, but yeah, Shii and Rir are my subordinates.”

Technically speaking, Iluna had been the one who summoned Rir, so it might’ve been more accurate to say that he was *her* summon.

“You know, when we refer to a demon lord’s ‘household,’ it’s usually composed of those in the same race. You three, though, have nothing in common whatsoever, hm?”

“Wait, seriously?”

“It is as Leila says. Up until now, all of the dungeon monsters I have encountered that belonged to demon lords were from closely related races.”

When I turned in Lefi’s direction, she nodded back at me affirmatively.

“Wow. You learn something new every day. Ooh, I think that’s because it’s easier to communicate with your own kind and hand out orders. Something like that, probably. I’m different, though, since the Catalog has all kinds of monsters I can summon.”

“Really? I have read that there are quite a few recorded variations in dungeon monster summons, but what exactly is the underlying theory for them?”

“Honestly? Beats me. Can’t say I understand it too well.”

“No? But you were the one who brought your summons to life, were you not, Master Demon Lord?”

“Mm, more like the dungeon did all the work, if you ask me. I summoned Shii from the DP Catalog, and I got Rir from a loot roll.”

“Wh-What do you mean?”

“Okay, so, in general, a catalog is something that has a bunch of items in it that you can buy. My DP Catalog has a specific section for monsters I can summon. One day, I saw a ‘Slime’ category, so I tested out a summon, and that’s how Shii was born. As for a loot roll...I guess the easiest way to explain it would be to say that it’s a type of gambling. You never know what you’re gonna get when you try, so I tried and got Rir. Huge jackpot for me. Like, dude, you have *no* idea how shocked I was back then.”

“Setting aside Shii for a moment, I would wager that Rir has some complicated emotions about his own existence, no?”

“Nah, I don’t think so. He probably doesn’t even know how he was born, so I doubt he’s worried about stuff like that.”

“Well, in the outside world, a fenrir like him would be feared and worshiped on the same level as Lady Lefi. With that in mind, his treatment here is a bit crude, wouldn’t you say?”

Right, because not only is he a pet, but he’s the only other dude in the dungeon. Oof, rough is right. Tough break for him, but it is what it is.

“Younger!”

I wasn’t sure if she’d been listening to our conversation or not, but Shii chimed in out of nowhere.

“Huh?”

“Rir younger than me!”

“Ohhh. Yeah, that’s actually spot-on.”

Shii was my very first dungeon monster, after all.

“That why I teached him lossa tings!”

I stroked Shii’s head as I talked to her. She was doing her best to speak despite still struggling with it.

“Woow! What kinda things did you teach him?”

“The best parts ’bout Master!”

“Ha ha, did you, now? Can you tell me what you told him?”

“Yup yup! Um! !! I said!”

Thus began Shii’s tales about all sorts of my weird behaviors. How I’d randomly use weird voices or mutter to myself whenever I was alone, my strange dances, my deranged laughter, the list went on. Her enthusiastic chatter showed no signs of stopping, so I cut her off as fast as I could.

“O-Okay, okay, I think we get the picture. Like, seriously, Miss Shii, that’s enough for today. Please for the love of all that is holy, cut me some slack, would you? *Please.*”

“But why? Shii want to talk more about Master!”

“Don’t. I’m begging you.”

Lefi had been sitting next to us this whole time, listening in on our conversation. When she heard me groveling—super politely, no less—she couldn’t help butting in with a big, stupid laugh.

“Gah ha ha, Yuki’s inaugural subordinate has done quite a remarkable job of observing you, Yuki. I must say, I am surprised to hear of all these things you do when not in our presence.”

“N-No, I can explain. Sure, out of context, all that stuff would make me look like a freak, but there were reasons for all that stuff. Shii must’ve been talking about times when I was messing with my interface or making something. If you just look at the big picture, I don’t think I’m *that* out there...”

A-All right, so maybe, possibly, there were some cases where I didn’t have a reasonable explanation for acting like a kook because I was just being a kook. But ya can’t hold that against a guy.

“You are quite the eccentric even with proper justification, Yuki.”

“You *are* a little bit different, Yukiki! But, but listen, okay? I love the weird you *and* the fun you!”

Thanks, Iluna. That doesn’t actually help me at all, though.

“Master! Master! What dis?”

“Hm? Oh, that’s a fake nose. Here, this is how you put it on.”

Curious about the thing, Shii had picked it up. I grabbed it out of her hand and popped it onto her nose.

“Oh! It stay!”



“Wow! What a funny nose!”

“Tee hee hee! Master, Shii funny?”

“Yeah, hilarious! I’m gonna pee my pants if I laugh any harder! Talk about comedy gold!”

Truth be told, “cute” was a better description than “funny” with her clown nose on.

“Would you care to tell me why you even possess such an item, Yuki?”

“Whaaat? ’Cause I thought it’d be fun.”

Lefi didn’t say anything, but the look on her face and the way her mouth was twitching told me that she sure as hell wanted to. *Wait, does she want to try it on?*

“You wanna give it a go, Lefi?”

“Lady Lefifi too?”

“Absolutely not.”

Liar, liar, dress on fire.

“Boo, Lady Lefifi! It’d be so fun if you put it on!”

“N-No, Iluna. Just observe this foolish artificial nose. It is too similar to that of an orc— Yuki. Do not dare attempt it. I demand that you cease sidling toward me with that abomination in your hand.”

I had taken the nose back from Shii and slowly, sneakily closed the distance between us. But Lefi had good eyes, so she’d noticed me and said that while on her guard.

“Now, now. Stay calm, Lefi. Easy, girl. Let me just put this on your nose reeeal gentle-like, all right?”

“No, *you* calm down. You had best lower that hand or be prepared to suffer a terrible fate.”

“‘A terrible fate,’ eh? Can’t wait for you to tell me more about it. I mean, what man *wouldn’t* want to know his future?”

We squared up cautiously. When I took a step forward, she took one back. When I moved right, she went left. Then, finally, the stalemate ended. Using my super-strong demon lord body, I rushed at her without warning while stretching out my arms to grab her and stop her from moving. But Lefi's physical prowess exceeded even mine. She nimbly twisted her body away before smacking my hand with the fake nose in it. Her frightening speed almost defeated me, but I just barely managed to keep pace with her. I dodged her attacking hand, then reached out again to grab it.

"You are too naive, Yuki!"

"What—"

Freaking... *Apparently*, she'd been going easy on me until now. For a moment, she disappeared, but then she was suddenly standing right next to me. She turned, sticking her foot out dramatically.

"Gah!"

Just as I was about to take a step forward, she tripped me and I face-planted *hard* on the floor.

"Uh-oh. You okay, Yukiki?"

Iluna looked at me worriedly.

"Indeed, *Yukiki*, are you unhurt? I suggest you give up before you further embarrass yourself. It is impossible for you to catch me!"

"Heh... Heh heh heh. Bwa ha ha ha ha! You've made a fatal mistake, Lefi! You've forced me to unleash my full power on you!"

With that splendid three-part evil laugh, I jumped up and jabbed a finger in her direction.

"Indeed?! Your full power, you say? I would certainly delight in seeing that. Though it had best not be a sweets ban."

"If you let me put this nose on you, I'll let you feel up my wings for the rest of the day."

"Wha— Ngh! Grr, so this is the full extent of your power... You have attacked my weakness with deadly precision. I must say, this is wholly unexpected."

As she trembled in fear, I smiled evilly at her before unfurling my wings.

“What’s wrong, Lefi? You’re not moving. Aren’t you trying to get away from me? Keep standing still like that and even the high and mighty Supreme Dragon will find this ugly-ass nose on her face!”

“Bah. You are truly a formidable opponent. Is there no way for me to combat your stratagem...?”

Watching our absurd show from nearby, Lew made a casual comment.

“You know, watching this play out is giving me a weird feeling—one where I can’t imagine this labyrinth as the dwelling of a notorious demon lord.”

“Heh heh, I agree. If we still lived in the outside world, survival would be a desperate struggle every day. But it’s a different story in here, hm?”

“If that isn’t the fenrir’s honest truth. We have absolutely nothing to be afraid of here, and we never have to worry about our next meal. If I were still living in my village, I’d have to worry about famine, bandits, monsters, and more. Always one thing or another, all year round. Then again, there are times my lord comes home with injuries after fighting monsters, so I guess there’s a *little* something to be scared of.”

“Even so, with Lady Lefi here, we can definitely extol this labyrinth as the safest place in the world, yes?”

“Ha ha ha, you’re so right about that!”

With our maids acting out their own bit next to us, I turned to Lefi, looking exasperated.

“May I have your attention, please, Miss Lefi, O greatest, most unrivaled security system that not only surpasses the best security company on Earth but also has our dungeon’s maids’ undying trust?”

“What? And must you speak so nonsensically?”

“You surrendered quite easily, my dear.”

“Incorrect. Your scheme was merely too cutthroat. In any case, you may feel honored, having successfully trapped the Supreme Dragon.”

“Aight. All’s well that ends well, I guess.”

Lefi stuck the fake nose on her face. With a rueful smile, I offered her my wings for her groping marathon.

Today was another peaceful day in the dungeon.

Afterword

Hello, this is Ryuyu. Thank you so much for picking up the second volume of *Now I'm a Demon Lord! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My Dungeon!* I intend to devote myself to thinking up even more ideas so that all you readers can relax too. With that said, I hope you stick around for years to come!

Now that we're at volume 2, I think you have a pretty good grasp of the characters' personalities, but I'd like to definitively state that the protagonist, Yuki, is an idiot. In a comedy duo, he would play the funny man. I don't think I need to explain Lefi. Lew is clumsy, Leila's an oddball, and Iluna and Shii are archangels. Beyond that, I'm not too concerned with the details. I'd say the person with the most common sense in that dungeon is Fluffrir. He's technically not a person, though.

I think all of us find flawed people fascinating because perfect people just don't get anyone's blood pumping. I think I'll just leave it at that.

As far as the newcomer, Nell the hero, might she turn into this story's conscience?!

Next up is an important announcement. Are you ready? This work has been turned into a manga! I can't believe it! Woo-hoooo! The artist is Note Tono and it's being serialized in Nico Nico's Dra Dra Dragon Age publication! God, I'm so grateful. Seriously.

I just feel so super blessed to have both Daburyu and Note illustrating my story with their incredible art. My gratitude knows no bounds. It's like a dream.

And finally, my acknowledgments. First, to Daburyu for creating such wonderful drawings that always bring a smile to my face. Next, to my editor, H, for never complaining even though I barely manage to meet my deadlines. To Note Tono for taking on the manga version. To everyone at Kadokawa. And lastly, to all my readers! From the bottom of my heart, thank you to everyone who supports this work.

Well, then, I hope you look forward to the demon lord world centered around our idiot Yuki, as well as the shenanigans of our hero Nell, who is subject to his whims!

Ryuyu

I love books so much.

I ended up becoming an author.

You know, I really think books have a mysterious power.

Once you start reading, you can't stop.

So I want to write books readers can lose themselves in too.

Ladies and gents, grab a book and read your hearts out.

Wraith Triplets
Yuki Summoned

Rei

The oldest.

Her talent is
telekinesis.

"Ugh,
seriously...?
I can't
take this
anymore..."

Wraith Triplets
Yuki Summoned

Roh

The youngest.

Her talent is
mind magic.

Wraith Triplets
Yuki Summoned

Rui

The middle one.

Her talent is
illusion magic.

Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My **DUNGEON**

Hero

Nell

A scaredy-cat
and a bit(?)
of a crybaby.

A tomboyish hero.

2

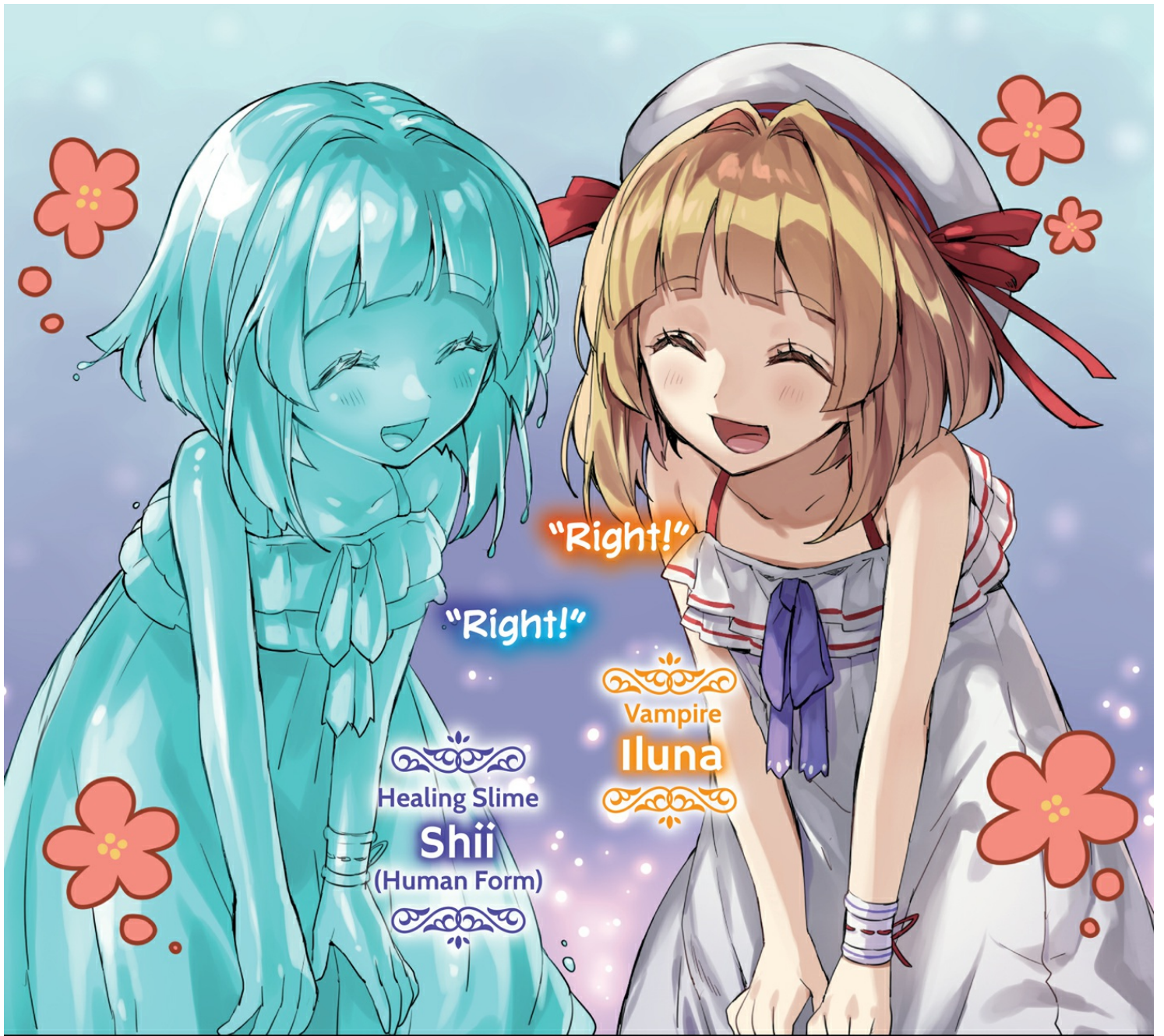


"I am
happy,
Yuki.
Thank
you."

The fire cast a brilliant
shine on her soft smile—
and against my will, my
heart continued to slam
against my chest. It was
thumping so loudly that
I was afraid everyone
could hear it.

A scaredy-cat

Lefisios
(Pet Name: Lefi)



"Right!"

"Right!"

Healing Slime
Shii
(Human Form)

Vampire
Iluna



Fenrir
Fluffrir
(Pet Name: Rir)

"Master
Demon
Lord."

"It seems that
I continue to
underestimate
your abilities,"

Of the
Ovine Race
Leila

Werewolf
Lewin
(Pet Name: Lew)



"What's up,
buttercup?"

The Young Man
Reborn in Another World
As a Demon Lord

Yūki

He's a demon lord...
but he shows up like a hero!

"M-Mr.
Yuki?!"

Author: Ryuyu

Illustrator: Daburyu

Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
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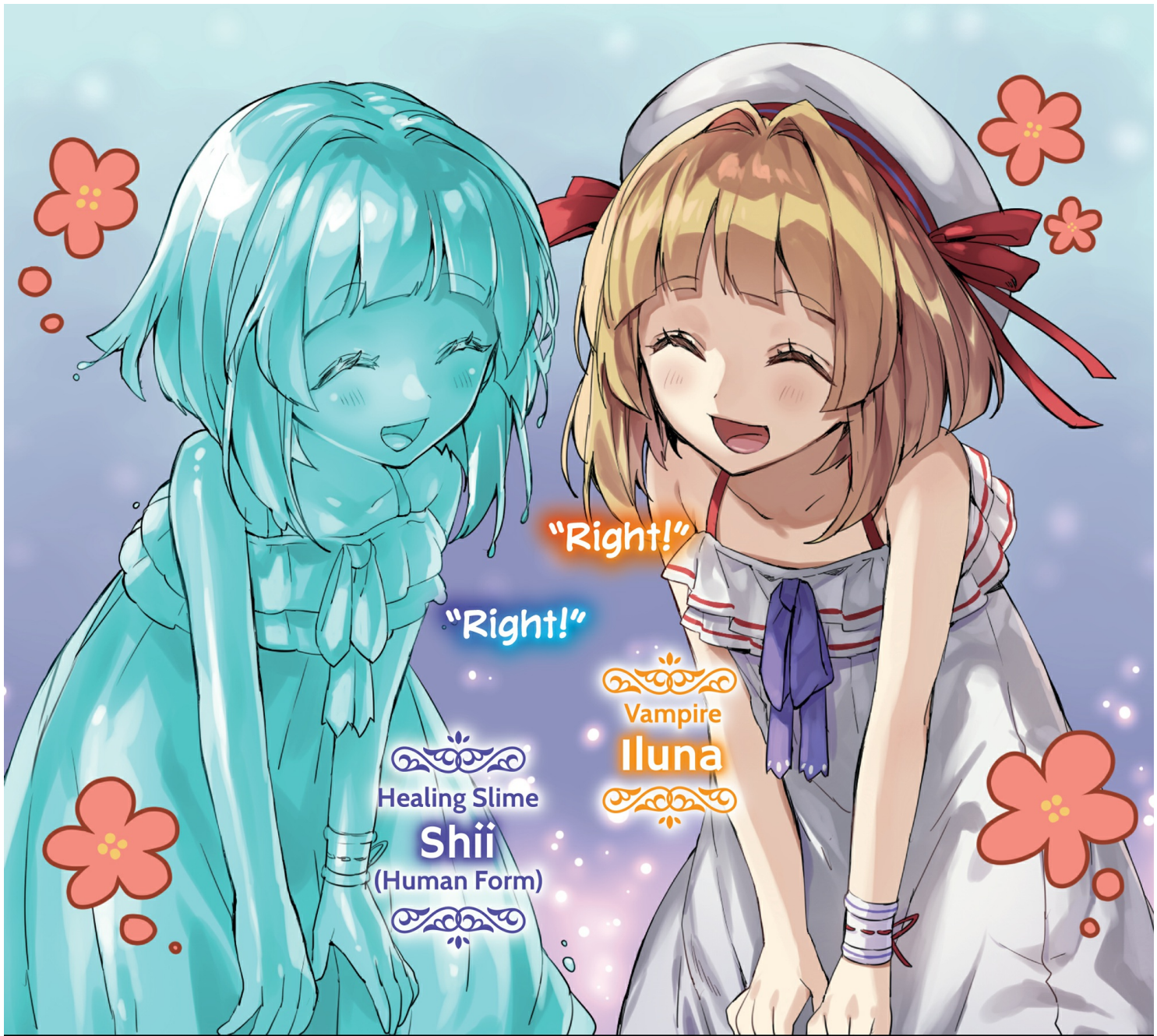


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Now I'm a Demon Lord! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My Dungeon:
Volume 2

by Ryuyu

Translated by Kashi Kamitoma Edited by Adam Haffen

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MAO NI NATTANODE, DUNGEON TSUKUTTE JINGAI MUSUME TO HONOBONO
SURU Vol. 2

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Ebook edition 1.0: November 2022

Premium E-Book