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12

Lazy Dungeon Master



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Neighbor's Wife
REDRA

Neighbor's Daughter
IGNI

"YEAH!
I'M GONNA
EAT AS
MUCH AS
I CAN!"

"LEAVE SOME
FOR ME, OKAY?!"

**GOLEM BEET
EATING CONTEST!**





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Prologue

Goren City rested in the Tsia duchy of the Laverio Empire. It was a rapidly developing frontier town supported by its dungeon, the [Cave of Greed]. High-quality iron could be mined from Iron Golems that spawned in the dungeon, and due to the large tunnel piercing through Tsia Mountain it became an important hotspot connecting trade between Tsia and Pavella. The travel time between Tsia and Pavella shrunk enormously thanks to the paving of roads to and from the town, and naturally that brought forth a large impact on trade and profit.

Said influence was largely only noticeable in the cities. To towns along the road itself, the largest change was that traveling merchants had higher-quality goods. Still, everyone had gotten much richer. The only ones who would complain were—

“Despite that city road being built, I have barely been getting any more taxes from my land...!”

—those who looked a gift horse in the mouth and went out of their way to compare their good fortune to another’s.

Ringen Lodol. Such was the name of a Pavella noble ruling the towns near Tsia Mountain, otherwise known as Count Lodol, head of House Lodol. He was in his office within his estate and storming about after receiving an income report from his steward.

“This cannot be! Why is there not more?! A road connecting Pavella and Tsia should make all the towns along the way equally rich!”

So he said, but the road from the tunnel to Pavella had been built to be as short as possible with the surrounding geography. As a result it was uncomfortably far from the towns ruled by House Lodol, and in any case the road was short enough that those using carriages would end up in Goren within a day. One more day of leisurely travel after that and they’d be at Tsia without needing to stop anywhere else.

As a result, the only people to stop at towns along the way were merchants traveling on foot, which naturally led to very little money circulation. It made complete sense that income from taxes wouldn't rise as much as Count Lodol expected. (As an aside, the road had been funded by Pavella merchants that were members of a merchant's guild, and Count Lodol had contributed not even a single copper to its construction. In fact, he had even charged the guild an exorbitant fee to build the road on his land.)

"My lord, income from the towns has been rising at a favorable rate."

"Favorable? Favorable, you say?! You said that last time, and there has been barely any growth at all!" Count Lodol snarled before slamming the report on his desk. "Why is Goren not paying me taxes despite being located so close to Tsia Mountain?!"

It was because it was on Tsia's side of the mountain and paid taxes to Tsia nobles. But Count Lodol was irate enough not to care about something so obvious. They were in the wrong for not giving him money, and that was that.

"Gah, this is unbearable! If only that disgusting town were blasted off the map!" he shouted, and that was when it hit him. Wouldn't everything go his way if only Goren were to disappear? All the merchants with heavy pockets would go to his own towns, and his taxes would shoot through the roof.

"You."

"Yes, my lord?" replied the steward.

"I am going to destroy Goren. With my talents, it should be gone in a matter of days!"

"...My lord?! B-But how do you intend to do that? You say destroy it... By that do you mean you will send soldiers to burn and pillage it?"

"That is one option, but doing so would start war with Tsia. Use your head a little more."

"Erm. But, my lord. I believe that Goren is growing with each day, and is only a shadow of the metropolis that it will be in the future."

"That is why I will destroy it while I still can!"

“But that is not all. I have heard Goren’s town chief is a living legend and not to be trifled with,” the steward said before providing him with the details.

Rumor was that he rescued C-Ranks from a dungeon when he was just an E-Rank.

Rumor was that he donated a hundred golds of his own money to Goren’s budget.

Rumor was that he was the ideal boss who cared a lot about his subordinates.

Rumor was that he was the Pope of Beddhism.

Rumor was that he was friends with the archduke of Tsia, and was betrothed to his daughter.

Rumor was that he was close with the legendary Wataru the Hero, and was in fact stronger than him.

Rumor was that he defeated a Flame Dragon that appeared on Tsia Mountain.

Rumor was that the imperial princess herself escorted him to the capital to be given a noble title.

However, Count Lodol rejected all of that. “You fool! No one person could accomplish all that! Besides, someone capable of such things would not be a mere town chief! Those rumors are all rife with exaggeration and impossibilities!”

Perhaps some of them, such as the first rumor, were true. It was possible that he really was the ideal boss. Given that Beddhism was a new religion, it wouldn’t be unthinkable for him to be the pope. Even the bit about one hundred golds was within reason if he was from a wealthy family.

“But him, betrothed to the daughter of Tsia’s archduke? Only a fool would believe that.”

No doubt he simply attempted to woo the archduke’s daughter when she came to observe the newfound religion. Not to mention, it was impossible to think that he defeated a Flame Dragon or that he was stronger than Wataru the Hero. If either were true he would have already begun work founding his own country, not wasting his time as the chief of a town. Plus, there would have

been a greater fuss in the region if the imperial princess truly had come to escort him somewhere.

“Are there any *bad* rumors about this town chief?”

“Y-Yes, my lord. They say he is a furry and a lolicon, that he is rarely seen working, that he forced a massive debt upon Wataru the Hero, and that the Adventurer’s Guild is keeping a close eye on him.”

“See? I told you! Not even the rumors are consistent!”

It was unthinkable for any person to bring a filthy beastkin child to the bedroom. No ideal boss would be rarely seen doing work. Wataru the Hero would never be friends with someone who forced a debt on him.

“It’s settled. That town chief is nothing more than a swindling fraud.”

“But my lord, surely you remember the Dragon that appeared so recently upon Tsia Mountain.”

“I imagine that is stolen valor from Wataru the Hero. At most he grabbed a fang from somewhere... a Wyvern fang, and claimed he slayed the Dragon himself. That is simply what fraudsters do.”

His lies spread so far that he found himself unable to stay in town, leading to him grabbing a nearby beautiful girl and claiming that the imperial princess had come for him as an excuse to flee. So concluded Count Lodol, and if that were the case, the so-called living legend of a town chief would never be returning to town.

“Bring me a map!”

“Yes, sir!” the steward answered, grabbing a piece of parchment off a nearby shelf before spreading it on the table to reveal a map of Tsia Mountain and the surrounding area—primarily the land ruled by House Lodol. It was their only map with new information, that being Goren and the aforementioned roads.

Count Lodol faced it while holding a light stone. It was a tool for scraping the front of parchment and removing the contents.

“I will! Destroy! Goren!” he shouted, scraping the stone against the map and removing the word “Goren.”

“...My lord. Removing the name of the town from the map will not actually destroy it.”

“I know that! This is just a metaphor!” he roared, spit flying from his mouth. Indeed, he was not that dumb.

“Should I take that to mean you will be sending soldiers after all...?”

“I just told you no! This is what I’ll do!” Count Lodol said before writing *Dragg* where Goren’s name had been. He then extended the line of its border to show that Pavella’s side of the tunnel exit was part of the town as well. “This town of Dragg will become mine! We will have no better chance than now, with the town chief absent!” he declared with enthusiasm.

“My lord, there is nothing on this side of the tunnel,” the steward observed with a finger pointed at Pavella’s side of the tunnel.

“You fool! We couldn’t pass it off as a Pavella town if there was nothing on this side of the tunnel!”

“Then what do you intend to do with the space?”

“Heheh. Can’t you see? We will make Dragg ourselves! And soon we will absorb Goren into it, forming the true town of Dragg!”

And so, a new town was born on the side of the tunnel opposite from Goren.

...To be clear, that conversation happened about two months ago. Keima and his party had just left Goren for the imperial capital.

Side Chapter—Bunny Maids

Having finished producing Core 629 for the Dungeon Battle, Keima and the others returned to Goren. Everything returned to normal without any particularly notable problems.

“Y’know, I thought some real shit would have gone down from us not being here to do our jobs, but looks like everything’s been just hunky-dory.”

“Mhm. Same.”

Both Ichika and Niku slid back into their jobs in the inn without any issues whatsoever, with neither of their absences having contributed to any catastrophic failures. That was thanks, in part, to Keima stealthily using his {Teleport} to visit the dungeon, and proactively setting their shifts to resume once the Dungeon Battle ended.

“Didn’t really feel like I was home until I started working as a waitress, y’know?” Ichika said.

“I agree. We were doing similar work, but actually moving myself makes all the difference,” Niku replied.

“Moving those rabbits sure was hella fun, though. Think we could bring some over and make them our store pets or something?”

“I do think a store pet would increase our sales...” Niku said thoughtfully. If only she would remember that Keima didn’t really care about how much money the inn made regardless.

Suddenly, a customer entered the cafeteria. The small talk would have to wait. Niku, with very experienced movements, hopped over to the customer and looked up at him with an intense stare.

“U-Uhhh, Kuro? Is something wrong?”

“Mm?” Niku tilted her head, as if to ask him to feed her a carrot. And that was how Ichika realized what was going on.

“Kuro, Kuro, no! That’s not what we do here!”

“Oh! S-Sorry.”

Niku had been controlling the rabbits in the [Rabbit Paradise] by widening the monitor to fill her line of sight, then using the controller while moving her own body in turn. It hadn’t been actual possession, but it was as close to full dive immersion as you could get without actually doing the diving, and through weeks of that, the mere act of begging had become instinctual for her.

Niku bobbed her head hurriedly in apology. Her face was as expressionless as ever, but Ichika had trained her to beg, and every ounce of her body radiated cuteness. Really, her expressionlessness gave her the cuteness of a pet, since you couldn’t read animals’ faces.



“H-Hey, don’t worry about it! It’s no problem at all. Actually, let me add a purin onto my order! Hahaha! I think I’ll just give it to you, Kuro!”

“Um, th-thank you?” Niku said.

“...He gave me a purin for some reason.”

“Y’know, Niku, I guess you’re already our store pet, huh? Dang. I never thought about it, but acting like a rabbit’s actually a legit strat.”

Ichika resolved to try it out herself. And luckily enough, it wasn’t long before the next customer came walking in. Ichika slid up to him.

“.....”

“Er, hey there, Ichika. Good to see you back... Is something up?”

“.....” Ichika leaned forward and looked up at him with wide eyes, her head tilted. But the customer didn’t see any of that, because his eyes were drawn to her boobs like a black hole.

...Indeed. When Ichika bent forward, the exposed top of her cosplay maid outfit left her cleavage in full view. So really, nobody could blame the man for staring. Ichika’s boobs were so magnificent and impossible to miss that it would be more rude *not* to stare at them. The only man who didn’t stare at her cleavage was a certain anonymous foot fetishist.

“.....”

“U-Uh?”

“Tch, can’t you take a hint?”

“Oh, wait, do you want me to slide my food ticket into your cleavage?”

“Say WHAT?” (<- Fucking pissed)

“F-Forget I said anything...” The customer accepted her righteous anger and held out his food ticket. Ichika took it and served him his food before returning to Niku.

“I get it, I get it. Cuteness is justice. Cows go home. I know.”

“I think that was just the customer’s tastes.”

“Nah, I’m like, just doomed to being sexy. I’m not built for cuteness attacks like you are, girl. That’s all it is!”

It wasn’t that she was unattractive. Rather, she just had so much overwhelming attack power that her cuteness was overwhelmed by her two other outstanding attributes. With her shameful defeat justified, Ichika gave Niku a big grin.

“Anyway, let’s just do our jobs normally. Try not to mess that up a second time, alright?”

“...Ngh. Sorry.”

Indeed. Ichika wasn’t just being a sore loser there. She had turned it into a joke and tried it out herself so that Niku’s careless mistake would be perceived as them joking around, rather than being a clear connection to Core 629’s dungeon to a careful and well-informed observer. Once again, Niku was impressed by how competent Ichika was with following up on mistakes and fixing them.

“You can repay me with fried food or somethin’ later.”

“...You could just ask Master to give you some, couldn’t you?”

“He’d make me cough up some coppers, girl, and I’m already fresh outta that sweet metal.”

“Hm...? Oh.” After a second of thought, Niku vaguely remembered that Keima had mentioned making Ichika pay for Catalog food since otherwise she would just keep eating forever. That hadn’t really been relevant to her before now.

“Sigh, guess I’m gonna have to beg Master for some allowance again.”

Incidentally, Keima giving Ichika an allowance when asked was completely fair since all he was doing was giving her the money she herself wasted on the slots. He never had to manipulate the odds on the slots when she played, either. All her money just vanished into them on its own.

“Allowance?”

“You bet. Heh, ’cause I’m a real beauty, y’know? When I bend over and puff up my chest like this, well, you know what happens next.”

“He just sticks it in like *this*?”

“Eeep! Er, no, he just hands some money over.”

That made sense. Keima was right to just give Ichika her own money back in a loop, Niku thought while pulling her fingers out of Ichika’s cleavage.

“Girl, I bet he’d give you tons of money if you begged a little.”

“I don’t need any money right now, so it’s fine. (Read: I don’t really want anything, and if I did he would just give it to me if I asked.)”

“You sure? Feels kinda bad to be the only one he gives money to. Like he’s showing me favoritism or something, y’know?”

So she said, but in truth it mattered so little she forgot it within literal seconds.

Chapter 1

With the Dungeon Battle in the imperial capital safely over, I headed home to Goren with everyone else. Traveling to the capital took forever, but the way back was only a single day since we traveled through the [Ivory Beach]. It was kind of underwhelming in a way. But regardless, we stealthily returned to town and resumed our normal lives. We didn't want anyone suggesting that we hold a welcome home party, after all.

I'll give Wozma a report on our return after I've slept for a couple of days. I'm exhausted from all that work I did. Gotta get my sleep as the pope of Beddhism! True believers, know that sleeping is your duty! Plus, I've gotta organize all the stuff I won in the Dungeon Battle. There sure were a lot of rewards.

Leeet's see. First up was the 70,000 DP left over from what Haku gave us. In the end, we didn't use any of her funds on the Dungeon Battle itself. Next was Haku's reward for us winning... which was Core 629, Mikan the rabbit Core, being assigned as our subordinate. Core 564 ended up as Mikan's lackey, but that didn't really matter, especially since the only way we had to contact them was my {Teleport}. *Hopefully the message system Aidy asked Father to make works well.*

Next up were the two pieces of the divine bedding that Father gave us. One was the Divine Quilt, the other was the Divine Alarm Clock. If we threw the Divine Comforter on top of that, we had three pieces of the divine bedding. *The Divine Alarm Clock is technically part of the old seven pieces of divine bedding, but, uh... I'm sure it's fine. It's still considered divine bedding, so... Anyway, Maiodore has the Divine Pillow and Haku has the Divine Mattress stashed away somewhere, so both of those are within my reach. The last three pieces of the divine bedding—the Divine Nightcap, the Divine Pajamas, and the Divine Underwear of the new divine bedding set—are complete unknowns in regards to location and function.*

Then there were the Boss Monster Spawners I got as a bonus. Two of them,

even. I would probably get rich overnight if I used them to make Orichalcum Golems. *Bwahaha...! I'll make a small one first and see how long it takes to regenerate. Don't want them saying Orichalcum Golems are so unique they'll take a hundred years to regenerate, with the spawners unusable in the meantime.*

Last but not least was the Dungeon Core that Father gave me, but I wasn't planning on using it. I would rather play it safe and boost my {Ultra Transformation} skill to max through Dummy Cores first, to guarantee that the Core would give me a new skill. Dummy Cores gave you experience for existing skills, but they couldn't become new skills.

...What about the right to hug Rokuko? Oh yeah, I forgot about that.

* * *

Anyway. With all that considered, I went to the exact middle of the coliseum area in our dungeon. It was the perfect place to experiment with {Ultra Transformation}, and I needed to follow through on my ideas immediately before I forgot.

"Out you go, Dummy Cores."

I bought two Dummy Cores for 10,000 DP, then quickly cut them in half with an orichalcum sword (the one I had gotten last year, having only used some of its blade as metal parts). Leona had said that it was safe to destroy three of them at once, but I decided to scale it down a bit for safety's sake. Her word was anything but trustworthy, after all.

...That reminds me, we got a purple Dummy Core from Rokuko rolling the gacha forever ago. I wonder if I could have destroyed that instead. Yeah, I'll try that out next year if I remember. Why is it purple, anyway? Pretty sure they're normally white... Maybe it's not a Dummy Core at all? You know what, that's actually pretty scary, so I'm just gonna leave it in {Storage}. Time is stopped in there, after all. The Divine Alarm Clock and Dungeon Core I got for my rewards were tossed into {Storage} too. Which is also where my orichalcum sword will be going in just a second.

You know, I feel like those super dangerous Gravity Bombs that Rin gave me are still in there too... My {Storage} is kind of a ridiculously dangerous treasure

room. It's kind of turned into a Pandora's Box, but, uh... Let's not think about that.

I shifted my thoughts to {Ultra Transformation}, which had indeed safely leveled up. My soul didn't feel particularly corrupted. Not that I knew for sure whether I could feel soul corruption anyway.

Level 5, huh? Apparently Dummy Cores won't give enough experience to level up the skill on their own quickly, but that's two levels for me. I wonder what the max level for it is? But either way, the changes are... yeah, they just popped up in my head. I'll go ahead and show effects for the first three levels too.

— In each 24-hour period, you can transform into one thing you envision per skill level. (Five times per period at level 5.)

— Level 1: You can transform into something that exists.

— Level 2: You can mimic some abilities of what you've transformed into.

— Level 3: Once per 72-hour period, if you die while transformed, you can revive by undoing the transformation.

— Level 4: You can transform into something that existed in the past. (New!)

— Level 5: Relaxation on the limits of what you can do while transformed. You can now use the unique skills and powers of what you're transformed into. (New!)

...And there it is.

First of all, I could transform five times a day instead of three times. That was pretty good. A simple power boost with no strings attached. Next.

The Level 4 power let me transform into something that had existed in the past. Up until now I could only transform into things that were actively existing in the world. An easy to understand example would be me transforming into Rokuko. Up until now I've only been able to transform into Big Rokuko, not Loli Rokuko. Reason being, Loli Rokuko didn't exist anywhere in the world while Rokuko was in Big form. But now I could transform into either at any given moment.

However, there were limits to that. For example, to transform into a letter

before it was burned, I would need to have seen the letter prior to it being burned. It was necessary for me to have at least seen something briefly to transform into it and that applied to things in the past as well. Too bad, it would have been pretty useful if I could transform into a person when they were younger, or a stone manuscript before it broke apart.

Anyway, Level 5. It was kind of like a powered up version of Level 2's effect. As a concrete example, at Level 2 you couldn't fly even if you transformed into a Gargoyle. Only Level 5 would let you fly. Their wings were for show, after all, and they used a {Flying} skill to actually do it.

Up until now, I could only use weak skills when transformed, but there was depth to that. Level 2 said I could mimic some abilities, but in general what it actually meant was that I could use skills I knew myself if I worked really hard, though there was a limit to that.

Either way, I can still use {Element Burst} which is all I need to fight, and at some point I can use {Create Golem} and {Summon Gargoyle} even when transformed into myself. I dunno why, but maybe it's a bug or something. {Element Burst} being so weird might have caused problems.

In any case, regarding the "You can now use the unique skills and powers of what you're transformed into" part, that meant if I transformed into a monster that used skills to fly, I could fly as well. But I wouldn't be a master of the skill or anything close to it. The situation could best be compared to buying a bike and then being unable to ride it without practicing first. I would copy their skill, but not their experience or feel for using it. I'd need to practice if I wanted to fly freely through the air. That was kinda annoying.

"Keima! There you are."

"Hm? Oh, Rokuko."

She entered the coliseum... and just seeing her made me feel a little awkward. You could probably guess why, but putting that aside for now, I did my best to greet her with a composed expression.

"What's up?"

"Wozma's been looking for you. He was all in a panic, saying you should go to

him as soon as you get back.”

Ahhhh, right. Even if I hide, he could guess I’m back from everyone else being home. But I wonder what he’s panicking about? The town seems pretty peaceful, and Rei’s report didn’t mention any problems in particular. Maybe some real deal errand popped up out of nowhere?

“I just noticed a second ago, but a new town was built. Maybe he wants to talk about that?”

“Huh? Our town’s been built here forever. What’s he talking about?”

“Oh, no, not our town.”

“What?”

Rokuko stood next to me and opened up her map. *Whoa there, too close, too close.*

“Come on, Keima, look at the map.”

“Right, right... Sorry, I’m just, uh. Y’know?”

“...Wh-What are you getting all embarrassed about? We’re partners. You’re gonna make me embarrassed too at this rate! Just look!” Rokuko said, pointing at the map while blushing. There was a collection of buildings large enough to be called a town... on the other side of the Tsia Mountain tunnel.

“...What’s all that about?”

“I told you, it’s a town. A town.”

“I mean, I know, but... Rei didn’t mention it in her report.”

“When she said ‘There have been more humans lately,’ she was probably talking about this.”

“Oh yeah... I kinda remember her saying that. But wait, does that mean the immigrants we got from the Dragon business started their own town over there?”

“That could be it.”

Well, they’re still in dungeon territory, so it’s no skin off my back. But Wozma’s the actual boss of this town and he thinks it’s important, so I’ll do my job as a

figurehead and go talk to him.

* * *

“In short, a new town has been built on the other side of the tunnel.”

As expected, Wozma wanted to talk to me about the town on the other side of the tunnel. It was completely unrelated to Goren, and despite some similarities it was an independent town.

Its name was Dragg. It kind of seemed similar to Goren, at which point I realized the name was probably taken straight from Dragon. That made sense. We were near Tsia Mountain after all, and there had just been all that Dragon business.

Anyway, the town chief of Dragg was a Pavella noble by the name of Count Ringen Lodol. Apparently, he had invited an overwhelming number of immigrants to Pavella’s side of the mountain and formed a small town with those who left.

But practically speaking, that had no impact on our dungeon whatsoever. I had already made the other side of the mountain into dungeon territory. Towns growing over there just meant more profit for us. And indeed, the large number of people were already earning us tons of DP.

In conclusion: It wasn’t a problem for our Dungeon, and from Rei’s perspective it was actually to our benefit to let them just do whatever they wanted. With that in mind, it only made sense that I would completely overlook it in the report.

“It seems that they have built an inn of their own.”

“Oh, nice. That means less customers we have to deal with at our inn.” *And we’ll get their DP without having to accommodate them at all. Less work we have to do for the same pay. What’s not to love? Let’s hope they keep expanding.*

“...Erm. Excuse me, town chief. It sounded like you just said that’s nice.”

“I sure did.”

“Even though our inn will receive less customers?”

“That’s exactly why it’s nice. There’ll be less work for us to do. I was just about to say that the inn’s getting too busy for us to handle.”

Because seriously, the reason I made the inn in the first place was to give myself a place to sleep. And yet once the town was built, we got so busy I needed to get a bunch of employees, and once things were calming down, a Dragon came, which made us even more busy. There was nothing I wanted more than for some other inn to take our customers.

Especially since I wasn’t even doing this for money. I could sleep in the chief residence or the church if I wanted to, so yeah, it wouldn’t be wrong to say I was just done with the inn. It was a thing of the past and I didn’t care anymore, though it was still useful to experiment with customer satisfaction and have a place for Haku to stay when she visited.

“...I suppose you have been expanding into other businesses, sir.”

“Wait, have I? Pretty sure the only other gig I have going on is the whole pope thing. What else is there?”

Wozma sighed, then began listing them all out. “There are the farms, the businesses, the bars, and many other things which they are copying in their town.”

“Oh? If they’re copying us, does that mean they’ve got a church and everything?”

“...They do have shrines, where they worship the Ivory Goddess, the Business God, the Smithing God, and the Food God.”

...Maybe I should ask them to make a shrine for Beddhism. Actually, nah, that sounds like work. Our own town has the first church of Beddhism after all. Might as well say that all inns are shrines of Beddhism or something.

“Furthermore, it seems their church has been dedicated to creating something special, though I do not know what it is.”

“Whoa, really? I can’t wait to see what that is. I’m gonna have to go check it out once it’s done.”

“I see...” Wozma said with a heavy sigh. He seemed pretty tired.

“Hm? Wait, does that mean there’s a new dungeon on the other side of the tunnel?” I asked, despite knowing for sure there wasn’t. Something as major as a new dungeon wouldn’t have been a minor part in Rei’s report at all. That’d be a big deal for us, and she would have given me the full details.

“No, as expected, they are unable to recreate our dungeon.”

“Perfect. Then what’s the problem? Our whole town was built because of it.”
Really, what I want to know is why they bothered making Dragg on the other side of the tunnel when there’s no dungeon there. Don’t tell me they just wanted to compete with Goren for some reason.

The thought occurred to me, but it was more likely that the other side of the tunnel was just a good spot for a town. There may not have been a dungeon over there, but traveling merchants would be crossing through the town and bringing a decent amount of trade. It was along the road connecting Tsia and Pavella, after all, so it was guaranteed to have foot traffic. Even while competing with Goren it was a good spot.

Especially considering how many people were here due to all that Dragon business. No way would even a halfway competent noble miss this opportunity, which Count Lodol presumably was. It was stranger that a town hadn’t been built on such fertile ground before now, really. The only explanation I could come up with was that they started planning to build the town once the tunnel was made, and it took until two months ago for them to finally reach the building phase.

After all, the [Flame Caverns] were right there. Goren was closer to it, but it would be completely reasonable for Dragg to pave a road to the entrance and make it easily accessible from their side of the mountain.

“Well, maybe another town will help the traveling merchants out. They’ll be able to trade without passing through the tunnel, and there will be more spots for them to rest. Hopefully this just grows trade between us and Dragg.”

Not to mention that merchants had to pay money to use the tunnel, which only meant more profit for us.

“B-But... Is that not exactly what Dragg wants?”

“...Huh? Is there a problem with them getting what they want? It’s not like we’re enemies or anything.”

“We’re not... enemies?”

Why’s Wozma thinking of Dragg as our enemy? I dunno what he’s basing that on, but maybe something happened that I don’t know about?

“What, you want us to treat them like enemies? Are they messing up the peace and order here or something?”

“Er, no, they have reasonable amounts of order there. Ahem, well, if you don’t think they are enemies, sir, then I suppose, well...”

“At the end of the day, they’re on the other side of the tunnel, and it doesn’t belong to either of us. They’re not stealing any land from us and there’s a clear line dividing our towns.” *Or so I’m going to pretend anyway. It’ll be my secret that our dungeon’s actually taking the tunnel passage fees.*

“The truth is, when they built the town they... not quite declared war on us, but made an announcement that removed all doubt about them being hostile toward us.”

“Oh yeah? What’d they say?”

“They said that you are a fraudster that sits on a throne of lies, sir.”

.....

I waited for a second, but Wozma didn’t say anything else.

“Is that all? I mean, I imagine you’re summarizing it, but...”

“Yes, I am, and many townsfolk heard them disparaging you.”

“Was it that bad?”

“The part about you being an upstart lolicon was within reason, but that was only the beginning of their tirade.”

...Within reason, seriously? You’re fine with me being called a lolicon? I’m not!

“Unbelievably, they even said that you were not serious about your work, and in fact did nothing at all...! They claimed you were a figurehead that pushed all his work onto others!”

...?

.....?

Oh! Ohhhh, okay, I get it. Everything makes sense now. Wozma doesn't want people figuring out that I'm a figurehead and he's actually running things. He's the one worried here. Man, I just did not understand what he was getting at. Because it's the truth.

"Sheesh, you're getting that mad for my sake? You sure are a hard worker."

"Not as much as you are, sir."

"Hahaha, yeah right."

Still, to think they'd see through the act and figure out I was just a figurehead... Dragg's town chief must be a real competent guy. Maybe I should go butter him up or something?

"So, they went out of their way to not quite declare war on us, but still announce they hate our guts. Does that mean they've been pulling dick moves on us over the past couple of months? Like building a toll gate by the tunnel exit and charging yet another fee to go through?"

"No, nothing like that so far."

Figures. If they just wanted to spite us, they'd build the gate and decrease the number of traveling merchants without building a whole town.

"...Why'd they make the town?"

"May I suggest that you discuss the matter with their town chief?"

"Good idea. Well, Wozma. Make it happen."

"Erm?!"

And so, I would be meeting their town chief on some future date. Meanwhile, I would be lazily lying about in time to recover from my exhausting journey.

...Oh, they saw through me because I do things like this? Oh well, no helping that.

* * *

We set up a meeting in no time. The adventurer we sent off with letters came back with two positive responses. But the meeting would be held where Count Lodol wanted —in other words, Dragg. That was entirely fine by me. It was the perfect opportunity to go check out their town. I could bring some Golem Beets with me as a gift.

That said, the day before the meeting, Wozma seemed pretty unhappy with all that.

“Why must you go there yourself? Goodness, sir, you must be more firm with these kinds of things.”

“Whoa, now. I know that’s what you want in a town chief, Wozma, but if I start acting tough for no reason there’s gonna be some cracks. You might as well give up on me acting like someone I’m not.”

“...You certainly are a kind individual, indeed. I suppose there is nothing that can be done about this.”

Glad you agree. I’m a figurehead, the last thing we want is cracks forming around me. And most importantly, acting all stiff is exhausting, so I’m glad I don’t have to bother with it.

“That said, you are still a legend that defeated a Dragon. Please act at least a little self-important.”

“Fine, fine. So don’t act polite? Well, we’re dealing with a count here, so maybe I should be polite.”

“You may speak casually.”

That felt a bit off when dealing with nobles, but if Wozma said so he was probably right.

“Alright. Well, this may be a meeting, but it’s not like we’ve got much to talk about. This’ll just be a way for us to buddy up a little.”

“Please be sure to use this opportunity to ask about their future plans for developing Dragg.”

“Sure. Wait... You’re not coming, Wozma?”

“Is there a need for me to?” he asked, having apparently come here just to

see me off. *If the idea here is for us to form a friendship, Wozma's hostility for them won't be very helpful. Not like we're going to hold any important discussions about anything.*

With that settled, I went to the tunnel that went through Tsia Mountain. Accompanying me on the walk were Ichika and Niku. We could have just placed ourselves there to speed up the process, but we needed an alibi. Besides, there was nothing wrong with the occasional walk. *Might as well use the opportunity to double check the tunnel I made a while ago.*

First was the entrance to the tunnel. I built it to look like a normal cave entrance from the outside, but at some point it had been touched up a little, and now it resembled the entrance to a proper man-made tunnel. To be specific, there were beams forming a rectangular structure in front of it. Given that it was part of the dungeon, the tunnel wouldn't actually collapse as long as the Dungeon Core existed, and anything placed inside would be absorbed by the dungeon (we did so by hand), so it really was just decoration for the entrance. The inside of the tunnel was dark, with travelers being expected to bring their own sources of light.

Passing through brought one to a cave with an exposed dirt floor, though one that was equally smooth throughout. I had built the tunnel at a slight incline to help with ventilation, but only after finishing did I notice that the dungeon naturally absorbed carbon dioxide and other stuff heavier than air, which provided natural ventilation.

There were light producing magic tools placed along the tunnel at various intervals, and as I walked past them with my Golem assistance we passed by a merchant carriage coming from Pavella's side. The tunnel was wide enough for two carriages to pass each other easily, so we didn't need to run against a wall or anything. It was common knowledge in this world for people to walk on the side of the roads to not get in the way of carriages, so carriages coming from behind us wouldn't be a problem either.

...Maybe I should dig into the wall and make some rest spots for pedestrians.

We kept walking for a bit, arriving at the midway point with the toll area. The tunnel widened to accommodate the area, and several rooms were lined up. It

took a lot of work to set all this up, so let me explain.

Each room of the toll area had three layers of walls in it. The walls had a crystal ball embedded in them as a switch, and pressing them would cause the walls to slide up into the ceiling. You could think of them as basically being shutters.

There was a wall at the entrance, in the middle, and at the exit. But naturally, you couldn't go from both sides at once. Opening one side would lock the door on the other side.

When you pressed the crystal ball embedded in the middle wall, the entrance wall would close, and a price based on the total weight in the room would be announced. If you couldn't pay, you could just leave through the entrance. But by putting money into a hole in the middle wall, it would open and you could go to the other side. There was no change given, so it was important not to overpay.

Anyway, once you tried opening the exit wall, the middle wall would close before it opened. The people and/or carriages inside would pass through, then the exit wall would close.

Man, I sure went through a lot of different versions before settling on this style. It took a lot of work before I got a system that worked.

My efforts seemed to have been rewarded, as there hadn't been any problems with it so far. *But hey, feel free to get crushed by a closing wall and die. That'll be free DP for me, and we'll take your stuff to put in [Cave of Greed] chests.*

Incidentally, {Storage} was pretty overpowered given that the price was based on weight, but there was no helping that. I did the best I could with Golems, but they just couldn't see into someone's {Storage}.

Anyway, three walkers without any luggage ran a price of about ten coppers. We paid as we passed through for the sake of our alibi. It didn't mean anything since all that money went right back into our pockets, but appearances were appearances.

Once that was done, all we had to do was walk to Pavella... but halfway there,

Ichika let out an enormous sigh. “Guuuh... This sucks.”

“Hm? What’s wrong, Ichika?”

“I mean, we’re heading to a Pavella town, right? That means there’s gonna be Pavella dudes over there, and I bet one of ’em is gonna recognize me from my ‘*ye olde adventuring*’ days...”

Oh yeah, Ichika from before she was enslaved... I wonder what kinda stuff she pulled to feel that bad about it.

“All I gotta say is, I did some shit with food, man. They didn’t call me the Food Monster for nothing.”

“Makes sense.” That alone was enough for me to guess what kind of heavy sins she had committed. “Hm... What do you think about wearing a mask to hide your face?”

“Yo, that sounds dope. If I keep my mouth shut, nobody will recognize me in these hella fancy clothes.”

Note that Ichika and Niku were at the moment wearing their maid uniforms from the inn. They were serving as my attendants here, and maid outfits were kind of a natural fit for attendants, so it all came together perfectly.

“Gimme one second, then. {Create Golem}... And, done. Here.”

“So fast! But also, so predictable. Thanks.”

I handed a smooth, gray mask made of stone to Ichika, after attaching some leather and string to it first. She pulled it over her face right away.

“A bit hard to see, but not bad. I can breathe just fine too,” she said, her voice coming out muffled due to the mask covering her mouth. Given the change in her voice that probably meant she could talk a bit without issue too.

...That said, feels kinda like maid outfits and a stone mask don’t go super well together. Maybe if the mask covered just her eyes... Or you know, now that I think about it, this actually looks kind of cool? Like an assassin maid, I thought, and Niku pulled on my sleeve.

“...Master. I want a mask like that too.”

“No problem. Here.”

It was rare for Niku to ask for something, so I gladly made her a mask and handed it over. This time, I used my newfound experience to make it cover just her eyes. Niku put it on at once.

Yeah, covering just the eyes looks a lot less intimidating. But, uh, two girls in maid outfits wearing stone masks is kind of a bizarre sight. I feel like anyone passing us by is gonna do a double take. Maybe I should put on my Narikin mask to hide too... Ah, guess I can't since I'm visiting as the Goren town chief. Dang.

“Oh, hey, there's the exit.”

“Guess I'll shut my trap then. If something happens I'll just tap you on the shoulder or something, 'kay?”

“Sounds good.”

The light from the exit meant we didn't have to carry our lanterns anymore. We had finally arrived at Dragg.

We exited the tunnel through Tsia and found a kingdom of snow, or rather, a town filled with white buildings. The architecture was a lot like what we saw in the port town of Pavella, what with the square white buildings that resembled what you'd see in European towns by the Aegean Sea. They were probably using some kind of mortar for it. Due to either the recent construction or all the cleaning, the buildings were pure white, making it seem at first glance that the town was covered in snow.

The white buildings were lined up along either side of the road exiting the tunnel through Tsia mountain, as if it were entirely like the main street of a city. Or, well, it was a main street, except the city was still a town and there weren't enough people to really consider it a main street.

“Seems like the town's a lot better planned than Goren.”

“That's 'cause Goren's all about the [Cave of Greed]. People kinda just built stuff on a whim, so yeah.”

In either case, we were visiting as promised. Maybe someone was waiting for us here, but looking around didn't reveal anyone who seemed to be waiting.

Hmmm? Well, I can probably just go to Dragg's town chief's residence here. We have an appointment and everything.

I called out to a passerby who looked like a villager to ask for directions. "Hey, got a second?"

"Hm? What's up, bro? You sure got some hella scary-looking friends with you," the villager replied with a distinct Pavellan accent, looking at the masked Ichika and Niku dubiously. I could understand how he felt, honestly. If I saw someone with companions like this I would think they were suspicious too.

"Do you know where the town chief's residence here is?"

"Y'mean Count Lodol's mansion? My man, it's right over there," he replied while pointing at a mansion some distance away. Or, well, I said mansion, but it looked like any other white cube house here. The only difference was the white wall surrounding it.

"Makes sense. Thanks."

"No prob, my man."

I gave him a large copper as a payment for the information (which was ten small coppers, about 1,000 yen in Earth terms). He left with a satisfied look.

Ichika plopped a hand on my shoulder. "Master, my dude, one large copper for info is way too much."

"Going overboard is what legendary Dragon-slaying heroes do, no?"

"...If that's what you're going for, sure."

With Ichika's approval earned, we headed to Count Lodol's mansion. Along the way, we passed by several houses under construction. It definitely felt like a town that was incomplete.

We got to the front gates. There was a guard standing guard... of course. I wasn't so rude as to just silently walk by, so I called out to him.

"Working hard or hardly working, am I right?"

"....."

Apparently, the guard wasn't the talkative type. I tried again.

“I’ve got an appointment to see Count Lodol today. Can we pass through?”

“...Tell me about those maids. Why do they wear the masks?” the guard replied. Rather than being untalkative, he had just been taken aback by my masked maids.

“They’re my attendants. That’s all I have to say on the matter.”

“R-Right...”

“So, can we pass through?”

“Sure... E-Er, wait! No!” he said, coming back to his senses and moving to block our path. I put a hand on Niku’s shoulder to stop her from protectively standing in front of me.

“Just to be clear, I do have an appointment. I’m Keima Goren, the town chief of Goren. You should know what to do.”

“What do you have to prove your identity?”

Oh right, my ID. I’ll just grab my guild card, I thought, only to be interrupted before I could put a hand in my pocket.

“I, uh, speaking of which, I heard the town chief of Goren defeated a Dragon. If you’re the real thing, show me... a scale or something from the Dragon. Then I’ll let you pass,” the guard said, his tone stiff like he was reading from a script. Somebody had probably ordered him to say that.

Looks like I’m being tested here... Guess Wozma was right to say I’m being looked down on. But sure, I’ve got a scale Igni gave me after all the Dragon business. Haven’t done much with them since offering one up to Emperor Lionel. They’ve just been stuck in {Storage} ever since. Guess now’s the time to bust them out.

“Here. How’s it look?” I said, taking out a scale from {Storage}—and despite just being one scale, it was the size of my palm, looking more like a chunk of ore than anything.

“W-Wait, that’s a real scale?”

“Yep, straight off the Flame Dragon itself. I’ll be going in now.”

“W-Wait!”

I thought he’d let me in after I showed him the scale, but he still called me back.

“I need to check to make sure that’s real! If it is, a metal hammer like this one wouldn’t even land a scratch on it!” the guard exclaimed before taking out a metal hammer and anvil like one might see in a smithy. *I dunno why he has a metal hammer and anvil at the ready, but they both seem to be made of iron. Not a chance either of them will lay a scratch on a real Flame Dragon scale.*

“Sure, fine.” I set the scale onto the anvil.

“W-Wait, you don’t mind? I’m gonna do it! If it’s a fake, it’ll shatter to pieces!”

“Go ahead.”

The guard faced the scale, looking a bit anxious, then held the hammer high and—

“URYAAAAH! {Fire Stamp}!”

—used a skill that wrapped the hammer in flames and boosted his attack power as he swung it down as hard as he could. Dong! A metallic sound, ill-fitted to material taken from a living being, reverberated through the air.

But we were dealing with a Flame Dragon scale here. It took the hammer blow head-on without even cracking a bit. In fact, it absorbed the fire and ended up looking glossier than before.

“...N-No way! There’s not even a scratch on it... Th-This is a real Flame Dragon scale?!”

“Satisfied?” *Sheesh, what a guard this guy is*, I thought while picking up the scale and putting it into my pocket. “And here, here’s my guild card as some ID. Can I go through now?”

“...What?! B-Rank?! F-Forgive me, sir! I had no idea!” the guard exclaimed, straightening his back and bowing his head politely. *Yep. B-Ranks are nobles, and this is the kinda treatment that being a noble gets you.*

“Hey, you just did your job as a guard. No hard feelings. Oh, and should you send word or something?”

“Sir! I will send word immediately. Please wait just a moment,” the guard said before racing through the gate into the mansion. I waited as he asked, and before long a butler-looking guy came out.

“M-My apologies for the wait, noble Keima. Come right this way. My lord is waiting for you.”

He looked kinda sick, but I didn’t rudely ask whether he had been getting enough sleep.

Once inside the mansion, we were taken to a parlor, and Count Lodol showed up not much later. He was a middle-aged man with a protruding belly, covered in so many fancy accessories and articles of clothing it was kind of garish. Each of his fingers had rings with sizable gemstones in them, probably to show off how much money he was making.

“So you’ve arrived. I am Ringen Lodol, head of house Lodol.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Keima Goren.”

“...Why are your servants wearing masks?”

“Ah, they’re just into that kind of thing. Don’t worry about it.”

“I-I see...”

With our greetings exchanged, we sat down in our seats. But Count Lodol seemed pretty distracted by my masked maids, and his narrowed eyes were glued on them. *Seems like he’s particularly interested in Masked Maid Number 1 (Ichika)... Don’t tell me Ichika’s problems were with Count Lodol of all people.*

“So, how about we talk about Goren and Dragg’s future?” I said, forcibly changing the topic to get his attention off her.

“Ah, yes, of course. Let’s see here... Our future, hmm?”

“I’d like our towns to have a good relationship moving forward.”

“I see! That is what I like to hear,” Count Lodol said before leaning back in his chair and gesturing forward with his fingers. It looked kind of like he was fingering the air, but that couldn’t be right.

As I looked on in confusion, Ichika tapped my shoulder. “Master, he’s asking

you to give him a hella bribe.”

“Ah. Okay.”

Once Ichika told me that, it all made sense. It was only logical that negotiations with a noble would be predicated on bribes. *But won't he look down on me if I just go ahead and bribe him? Hmm, y'know, I really should have brought Wozma with me.*

“Do I really have to give him something?”

“Dude, I have no idea. Maybe you should just give him a gift or something? I know you brought something with you.”

Oh, yeah. I had prepared some snacks (an arrangement of Golem Beets) for him. I went ahead and took the sweets box out of {Storage}, then set it on the table.

“It's not much, but here.”

“Hmph. Very well.”

Count Lodol took the box of sweets with a nasty grin, then rang a bell and gave it to his steward to take away. *He probably likes sweet food, given his portly size.*

“You should probably check the box before the day's over.”

“Of course, of course. When the time comes.”

That's perishable food, y'know. Though they're freshly baked thanks to {Storage}.

“With that done, what are your requests?” Count Lodol asked, adjusting his sitting posture to face me directly. *Uh, requests? I didn't think of anything like that.*

“...Nothing in particular. At most, I just want us to stay on good terms, like I said.”

“Good terms? Ahaha, ahaha! I see, good terms!” Count Lodol exclaimed, laughing joyously. He had tested me down at the gate, but maybe he was a surprisingly good person. “In that case, continue serving as town chief in Goren.

You've finally come home, after all. I would like someone who understands things like you do to stay in power."

"Sure?" *I'd keep being the town chief whether he asked me to or not. Though I'm just a figurehead.*

"Oh. Wait, there is one thing."

"Hm? I expected as much. Go on, say it. I don't mind giving you a paltry gift if need be."

"There's an inn in Dragg too, yeah?"

"Indeed there is. We are in the process of constructing a second. Oh, that reminds me. You are managing an inn of your own, no?"

"Yep. Thanks to your inn, we've been getting fewer customers as of late."

"Ahaha! Well, what follows is all up to your attitude. Are we on the same page?"

"Yep, and thanks. I'd like about as many customers as I used to get way back when."

I wanted to say back before we had to have the Silkies split into multiple copies (under the guise of hiring their relatives), but that would be revealing a bit too much. We would be fine with Count Lodol drawing customers over to Dragg instead. After all, it was putting the cart before the horse to let a side business take up more of our time than our main business.

With that in mind, the ideal amount of customers was how many we had right before the Dragon stuff. And hey, I wouldn't mind going even further back than that.

"In that case, I have a request for you as well."

"Yeah?"

"We are in the middle of building a Beddhist church in Dragg, but we have no one that is familiar with Beddhism here. It's been a struggle for us."

Oh yeah, I remember hearing about that. I'd love for them to build a church bigger and better than ours here to draw away all our worshipers. But if they

don't build it in the right way, everyone would just shake their heads and stick to our church. That wouldn't be good at all. I've gotta help him out here.

"So you want me to send an experienced Beddhist over?"

"Quite. I hear that you have many, ahem, nuns in that church of yours."

Ahhh, the Succubi. At this point they've completely adapted to their lives as Beddhist nuns, and they're even holding mass on their own. If they keep an eye on construction, the church is definitely gonna end up as a fine Beddhist church.

"Alright. I'll send an experienced nun over."

"Aha! We are on the same page after all. Be sure they're a young nun, understand?" Count Lodol said, wearing an even nastier grin than before.

"Sure. A young nun. I have one that's pretty well-educated, so it'll be no problem at all."

"I see, I see! A well-educated young nun, hm!"

Michiru's the youngest, but even she knows third grade math and the principles of Beddhism. She can even hold mass if she has to. She's done it before and it got pretty good reception. Though everyone had just smiled warmly throughout.

"The church will end up fine if you build it according to her specifications."

"Very well."

Count Lodol and I exchanged a handshake.

Sweet. Now the inn and the church are all settled. Can't wait for my life to get a lot easier! Now all I have to do is look around Dragg for a bit before going home.

Count Lodol's Perspective

Keima Goren, the town chief of Goren, had at some point arrived back at his home. Count Lodol learned of this only when the person himself sent a request for a meeting.

"Why has that fraudster returned?" Count Lodol asked himself. He had

concluded Keima was a fraudster forced to flee the town after his lies had caught up to him, but he had returned nonetheless. “Well, regardless. Despite his flaws he still made an entire town for me to take. I shall deign to meet him.”

And so the date for the meeting was established posthaste. But only after sending his reply did Lodol realize the possibility that the swindler had returned only to scam money out of him, now that he had built this wonderful town of Dragg.

“If that is the case, he will no doubt present materials from the Flame Dragon to establish his superiority. I will have to strike first.”

And so, he instructed the gate guard to destroy whatever fake claw or scale Keima presented as being from the Flame Dragon.

“No matter what forgery he prepares, a blacksmith will be able to destroy it! Bwahaha!”

To that end, he assigned a guard who was the son of a blacksmith to stand the gate, with an iron hammer and anvil prepared nearby. If Keima was ordered to present Dragon materials to prove his identity, he would no doubt proudly take them right out. Then they would be shattered before his very eyes. Just imagining what face he would make made Lodol grin. When he entered the mansion afterwards, Lodol could exploit his depression to make unfair deals.

Lodol put all the pieces in place, and the day of the meeting arrived. There was no need for him to send someone out to greet Keima. His mansion was so splendid that anyone would notice right away. And so, Count Lodol waited leisurely in his room.

Eventually, his steward came to report that the town chief of Goren had arrived. He looked a bit sick, but Count Lodol wasn't one to pay mind to the concerns of his subordinates. He eagerly headed to the parlor where Keima was waiting. Now that he was depressed from his fake materials being shattered, it was the perfect opportunity to exploit him.

He threw the door open and strutted in with all the pride of a noble count. “So you've arrived. I am Ringen Lodol, head of house Lodol.”

“Nice to meet you. I'm Keima Goren.”

They exchanged greetings, at which point Count Lodol found his eyes drawn behind Keima. His two maids were dressed quite oddly. Or to be specific, they had on smooth gray masks.

“...Why are your servants wearing masks?”

“Ah, they’re just into that kind of thing. Don’t worry about it.”

“I-I see...”

But regardless, their uniforms were exceptionally alluring. Putting aside the beastkin child that the rumors had spoken of, his other maid’s sizable bust was emphasized; it was quite the sight to behold. Though her creepy stone mask did kind of spoil the mood.

“So, how about we talk about Goren and Dragg’s future?” Keima said. It was then that Count Lodol realized he had missed his opportunity to rebuke Keima for speaking so casually to a noble such as himself. Trying to do so now would simply look ungraceful for him. What a devious fraudster... Count Lodol should have expected he would be a master of manipulating others through conversation.

“Ah, yes, of course. Let’s see here... Our future, hmm?”

“I’d like our towns to have a good relationship moving forward.”

“I see! That is what I like to hear,” Count Lodol said, interpreting that as Keima saying he wished to serve under him. He gestured for Keima to provide a bribe suitable for such a drastic measure, but his reaction was slow.

After a moment, one of his maids, the hot busty one, stepped forward to whisper into his ear. The fraudster was a commoner, and apparently hadn’t understood his noble gesture. But his maid did recognize it, which meant she was probably a high-class prostitute or something of the sort.

“It’s not much, but here.”

“Hmph. Very well.”

It probably wasn’t very much, but Count Lodol accepted the box of money. It was lighter than one would expect from a box its size. As expected of a swindler’s bribe, the box was fine in appearance but light in substance. Count

Lodol handed it over to his steward. He would forgive Keima's rude language in exchange for his bribe.

Count Lodol then asked Keima if he had any requests, at which point he asked again to serve him. To 'be on good terms' meant, in other words, to serve beneath him. Count Lodol went ahead and ordered him to continue working as town chief. He planned to make the town his own one day, and when the time came he might consider giving Keima a cushy job or something of the sort.

"Oh. Wait, there is one thing," Keima said, finally getting to the point after all that meandering.

He wanted to talk about the inn. Count Lodol had heard that the landmark of Goren was the Dancing Doll Inn, and that the town chief put more money and work into it than anything else, so in Dragg he had put constructing inns at the highest priority. The first inn had been completed already and was receiving regular visitors. The second inn was still under construction.

"Oh, that reminds me. You are managing an inn of your own, no?"

"Yep. Thanks to your inn, we've been getting fewer customers as of late."

As expected, Goren's main source of income was suffering now. Count Lodol couldn't help but burst into laughter after hearing Keima complain about getting fewer customers. His plan had worked brilliantly.

"Ahaha! Well, what follows is all up to your attitude. Are we on the same page?"

"Yep, and thanks. I'd like about as many customers as I used to get way back when."

And so their cooperation was secured. Behold the power of House Lodol's negotiation techniques. But returning to receiving as many customers as he had prior to Dragg's inn being built was quite the demand. Count Lodol took the opportunity to add his own condition.

"In that case, I have a request for you as well."

"Yeah?"

"We are in the middle of building a Beddhist church in Dragg, but we have no

one who is familiar with Beddhism here. It's been a struggle for us."

So he said, but that was all a cover story. All churches were built roughly the same way, and none of it really mattered in the end. Count Lodol was certain that if he just ordered the church to be built with greater gravitas, it would appear that much more impressive to believers who would then go there instead.

"So you want me to send an experienced Beddhist over?"

"Quite. I hear that you have many, ahem, nuns in that church of yours," Count Lodol said, indirectly saying that Keima was a crook claiming to be a pope through gathering fake nuns in a church.

"Alright. I'll send an experienced nun over."

"Aha! We are on the same page after all. Be sure they're a young nun, understand?" Count Lodol said, wearing an even nastier grin than before.

"Sure. A young nun. I have one that's pretty well-educated, so it'll be no problem at all."

"I see, I see! A well-educated young nun, hm!"

It turned out that they weren't just fake nuns, but ones well educated in the lewd arts as well. Count Lodol couldn't help but grin.

"The church will end up fine if you build it according to her specifications."

"Very well."

The two of them shook hands, having resolved the church issue with the nun.

As soon as Keima returned to Goren, Count Lodol went to his office and summoned his steward.

"Excuse me, my lord."

"There you are. That was quite the agreeable fraudster," Count Lodol said with a cackle.

"Excuse me, my lord. It seems that Keima had a real Dragon scale with him. Despite swinging the hammer with all his might, the guard couldn't even scratch it."

“What?!”

“I have to say that it seems the rumor of him defeating a Dragon is true.”

“...No! No, that can't be true! In fact, now I understand why he returned to town!”

“May I ask what you mean?”

“Learn to think for yourself! But that said, I will deign to explain. The long and short of it is that he no doubt realized it was only a matter of time before his fake materials were discovered. He then went and got the real thing, or at least, something that he could pass off as the real thing! With that accomplished, he returned smugly, thinking that his lies would not be discovered yet. That explains everything.”

“Ah, yes, I see... That would explain everything. You certainly have a point there,” the steward said with a nod.

“Now then! I shall look at the bribe he gave me. He did say to check it before the end of the day.”

“Sir! I have brought it with me.” The steward set the box Keima gave them onto the table.

“Let's see here. How much gold is inside... Hm?” Count Lodol opened the box and found something strange inside. The delicious scent of food wafted into the air and filled his nose. “What in the world...?”

“Those appear to be... Golem Beets, a famous food from Goren.”

“Food, you say?!”

“Well, thinking back, he never once said that the box contained money.”

Count Lodol checked for a double layered bottom, but there was no doubting that inside was nothing but sweets.

“That cursed fraudster tricked me! Gah, let's see how he likes it when I accelerate the construction of the inn! Proceed with all other sabotage plans! We will do whatever we can to hurt the Dancing Doll Inn as much as possible!”

“Sir! It will be done.”

The first inn was on the cheaper side for commoners, and the second inn would be a higher class one for richer patrons. Once it was done, Count Lodol expected the few visitors still visiting the Dancing Doll Inn to come rushing his way. *Good grief. If only you had given me a proper bribe, I would have delayed these efforts to some degree...* Count Lodol grumbled to himself.

“That foolish fraudster doesn’t know who he is dealing with! Good grief... What was he thinking, giving me mere baked sweets?” Count Lodol complained as he grabbed one of the sweets, but its nice smell kept him from throwing it away. The truth was, Count Lodol had an irresistible fondness for sweets.

“Come here, steward. Test these for poison.”

“Sir? Mgggh!” The steward let out a muffled groan as a Golem Beet was forced into his mouth, then down his throat. “Gulp... Oh, that was quite tasty!”

“No poison, I see. Excellent. I shall have them myself.”

“Wait, my lord! It’s possible that only one of them has poison. I believe I will need to take a bite out of each to be sure!”

“Silence, fool! That was enough testing! I shall eat them!”

Count Lodol pushed aside the steward, who obviously just wanted to keep eating the beets himself, and chomped down on a Golem Beet himself.

“...Ah! These certainly are delicious.”

“They are a popular sweet in Goren, I hear.”

Count Lodol gorged himself on the rest of the Golem Beets. The steward watched them disappear enviously as he held out a cup of tea for the count.

“...I may consider forgiving him, depending on the quality of the nun he sends over,” Count Lodol said with a satisfied sigh as he drank his tea. He must have really enjoyed the Golem Beets.

“Is that so?”

“Or perhaps once I’ve stolen Goren, I will have that fraudster make these sweets for me.”

“That is a good idea, my lord.”

And so, the construction of the second inn was slowed back down. But then... the nun he sent was a loli. A child. A little girl.

“Ah, yes... How could I forget that he was a lolicon?” Count Lodol murmured before resolving to show no mercy whatsoever to Goren, and especially none to Keima’s Dancing Doll Inn.

Keima’s Perspective

Several days had passed since I talked with Count Lodol, the town chief of Dragg. Word had spread of my return by the time I came back, and it wasn’t long before Gozou and the others returned as well. That meant that they must have gone on some detours that led to my group getting back first. Maybe I should have spent some more time chilling in the imperial capital.

When Ichika told Wozma about how our talk went down, he let out a heavy sigh, as expected. *But why didn’t he ask me about it? I mean, I know Ichika will be able to give a more objective report, but still. Not that I mind having less tedious work to do.*

“Town chief. Are you certain you don’t mind our inn receiving fewer customers? It will be as empty as a Goblin’s nest soon.”

“Hey, if nobody comes, that just gives me more time to sleep,” I said. Wozma was so moved by my sincerity that he rubbed his temples.

“Chief Keima, please be aware that I am exasperated, not moved.”

...I know, I know.

Incidentally, “to be as empty as a Goblin’s nest” was an idiom referring to a business slump. *I’m gonna use it on Wataru the next time I see him.*

Anyway, once we were done chatting I went ahead and sent Michiru over to Dragg as an experienced nun familiar with Beddhism. Kuusan (one of the town authorities, and the builder of about ninety homes in Goren) went with her as a guard and construction consultant, so it was safe to say Dragg’s church would end up pretty solid. Michiru, sounding very proud, sent back word that she was teaching the builders to read, write, and do math. *Is that what they needed a Beddhist nun for?* I thought, but decided not to say anything.

“A church, hm... Chief Keima. If I may be so bold as to ask, why would you give meat to a Slime?”

“It’ll be easier for me to sleep if the church next door isn’t so busy,” I explained, and Wozma agreed with my explanation so much he buried his face in his hands.

“No, I am just so exasperated I feel an actual migraine.”

...Like I said, I know that.

As a further digression, the phrase “give meat to a Slime” meant the same thing as “throwing a bone to your enemy.” *Again, I would use it the next time I saw Wataru.*

And so, as Count Lodol promised, the construction of a second inn was soon finished over in Dragg.

“He looked kind of like a villainous noble on the outside, but seems like he’s actually a good guy.”

“Master, my man, you’re legit the only person thinking that.”

So said Ichika, but now people would stop coming to our inn at all, and I would be able to spend my days relaxing like I had before all the Dragon business... Or so I thought.

“Keima, do you have a sec?” Rokuko asked, coming into my room while I was lazing around.

“Hm? What’s up, Rokuko?”

“The inn’s been getting kinda busy again. You don’t mind me hiring some new employees, right?” she said, and I couldn’t believe my ears.

“Hold up. Did you just say we’re getting busy?”

“I did.”

“B-But why? Dragg just built a second inn, didn’t they? By all logic we should be getting fewer customers now.”

“...Well, that’s not what happened.”

“Yeah, it must not be if we’re as busy as we were with the Dragon. This

doesn't make any sense. Why are we getting more customers?"

"I thought you'd ask that, so I went ahead and investigated why."

"Niiice. You've really been on top of things lately, Rokuko."

And so all I had to do was listen to Rokuko's findings.

"Let me just summarize what everyone who went there said. Dragg's second inn... just kinda sucks because it's supposedly too high-end."

Apparently their second inn was being marketed as high-class, with the price of each room being double ours—one silver a night, food sold separately. That might have been fine on its own, but the rooms weren't that impressive, and it was hard to relax in them. Each was the size of about two normal rooms here, and while they were using decent furniture, the bedding itself wasn't good. To the average person, a bed made of several blankets with a sheet covering them was certainly high-class, but they couldn't compare to the futons our inn used. And perhaps due to not being {Purified} enough, they didn't smell great either.

"It's like, high-class inns are marketed to merchants with money, right? But basically, all the merchants that travel through here are Beddhists. The second they messed up the bedding, they screwed themselves."

"Uh, what?" I asked, doubting my ears once again. "Why are so many merchants practicing Beddhism?"

"I mean, you're the one who said Beddhists get extra fried food and purins, remember? A lot of people join just for that."

Oh man, I forgot we were doing that... It's been so long. And all the merchants staying in Goren would be using the Dancing Doll Inn. There weren't any other inns nearby until recently, so yeah.

"But still, if they're just joining for the food, why would they care so much about bedding? They shouldn't be really pious Beddhists or anything."

"It all started because they experienced this inn's futons after joining Beddhism. Not really weird that they would start comparing the beds, right?"

Not to mention that merchants wealthy enough to specifically stay in high-class inns tended to have bought their own futons to use. It wasn't hard to get

one since they dropped in the [Cave of Greed] and could be bought in the local Beddhist church.

“Do you think a Beddhist on the level of using their own futon wouldn’t care about an inn’s bedding?”

“...Alright. So their standards have gone up.” *We made it so that rich merchants could only be satisfied by truly high-quality bedding, not the crappy beds of this world.*

“Did you know merchants that own stores are putting futons in their waiting rooms and shilling Beddhism to people?”

Oh yeah, I remember the archduke of Tsia having futons in his parlor. Must be something similar.

“Not to mention...”

“There’s still more?”

It turned out that the high-class inn was claiming that you could use as much hot water as you wanted, but...

“It’s not hard to see how we beat them.”

When they said you could use as much hot water as you wanted, they didn’t mean you could stay in the bath as long as you wanted—they meant you could ask for as many buckets of hot water as you wanted. On the other hand, we had... an onsen. One anyone could visit for free, even those with normal rooms.

There wasn’t even a comparison between the two, really. Especially since here you could draw a bucket of water from the onsen and take it back to your room.

“Looks like we really stomp them there.”

“It’s a shame for them, too. Under normal circumstances it would actually be a nice bonus to have as much hot water as you want in the mountains like this, but, well...”

We struck hot water and made a whole onsen here. Kinda makes buckets of hot water feel less impressive.

“Not to mention, also...”

“There’s *still* more?”

As a final blow, the food they charged extra for was pretty unremarkable, and cost a hefty price for seafood you could get at Pavella normally. The transportation fees could explain the price, but the freshness of the ingredients was hurt by the transportation, so the prevailing attitude was, why not just eat in Pavella itself?

“The menu is pretty small too, apparently.”

“...I can’t deny that we’ve got a pretty big menu here, yeah.” *And it’s a bit too late to go out of our way to remove some options.* “Alright, alright. I know why their inn sucks now, but what does that have to do with us getting busier? I would understand us not *losing* customers, but why are we getting *more*?”

“Apparently, rumors are going around about an inn cheaper yet better than a supposedly high-class inn.”

...Seriously? That’s ironic, too, since as far as I can tell, their second inn did everything a normal luxury inn should do. But it still just made our inn more well-known.

“What can we do here...?”

“Hire more employees, like I said. You don’t mind, right?”

“Alright. You can hire normal workers or summon new monsters, whatever works. I’ll trust your decision.”

“Okaaaay, leave it to me. But it’s mainly just the cafeteria that’s busy, so part-timers will do fine.”

And so it was settled.

“By the way, Keima, I forgot to ask, but how’re your Boss Spawner experiments going?”

“...Well.”

The truth was, I hadn’t just been sleeping. I’d made a small Golem about the size of a thumb out of pure orichalcum, then registered it to a Boss Spawner.

Then, I melted it down with {Create Golem}.

Five days had passed and it hadn't regenerated yet. That was a crazy amount of time for a monster the size of a thumb, and judging from the fact that I couldn't change the monster registered to it, there was no doubt the Boss Spawner was in the middle of regenerating it. I just wished it would display how much time was remaining. *At this rate it might take longer than a Red Dragon (two weeks, according to Father). An Iron Golem the size of a thumb took five minutes to respawn, so I guess pure orichalcum really does take forever to regenerate.*

"So yeah, turns out mass producing orichalcum and using it as much as we want isn't actually in the cards for us."

"He said we could speed it up using DP, but we don't know how much faster it will go. Though on second thought, isn't a thumb-sized Golem made of pure orichalcum kinda crazy? Like, wouldn't it be super hard to beat?"

"Huh...? Wow, now that you mention it, you might be right." Orichalcum was strong enough that even a wire thinner than a strand of hair wouldn't bend at all. You could make legendarily strong rapiers just by attaching a handle to a wire of the stuff.

And here we had a thumb-sized Golem made of the stuff. It was speedy thanks to the pure orichalcum; it was difficult to hit with normal attacks due to being so small, and even if you did hit them it was too sturdy to destroy. Not to mention that since it didn't have a magic stone, it didn't even have a weak point to attack. *Would magic work on it? I get the feeling orichalcum is pretty magic-resistant too...*

"They'd have to beat it by hitting it and disturbing the mana or whatever, but I think you would need an orichalcum weapon to even come close to doing that," Rokuko observed.

Oh, crap... I think the last boss of our dungeon was just born.

"So, Keima. What's the smallest sized Golem you can make?" Rokuko asked with an evil grin.

Oh. I see what she's thinking.

“...Rokuko, is it just me, or did you just have an incredible idea?”

“Eheheh. A speck-sized Orichalcum Golem in a huge boss room will be impossible to find, much less defeat! How’s that? Feel free to compliment me on my genius,” Rokuko said with a smug look on her face. But honestly, her idea was devilish enough that she deserved to be smug. I didn’t know if I could make a Golem literally the size of a speck of dust, but I could definitely make a ring-sized one. Hide one of those between the rocks on the ground and it’d be essentially impossible to find. Even if you did find it, good luck landing a single hit on it.

“...Yeah, I think you deserve some compliments this time. You’re incredible, Rokuko.”

“Bwuh?!”

I gave her some headpats. Her golden hair was silky smooth and nice to the touch.

“H-Hold it, Keima... Isn’t this usually when you’d ask if I was the real Rokuko or something? I-I never thought you would actually just, um, g-go and praise me like that!” Rokuko stammered, her face bright red. I kept stroking her hair as she fidgeted in place.

“But seriously, you’re amazing. You’ve really grown, Rokuko!”

“Eep, eep eep eep!”

“You’re a real mature Dungeon Core now. I’d expect nothing less from my partner. I’m proud to have you by my side.”

“Eeep! W-Well, I’m your partner, so of course! I have to be at least this good!”

“And you’re cute, too. Here, let me stroke your hair some more.”

“Kyaaaah?! R-Really? I-Is it just me, or are you really teasing me?!”

“Rude. I praise you this much and you’re still unhappy? What, do you want me to use both my hands? Want me to use both my hands to pat your head? I don’t mind using both my feet if I have to.”

“I think you’re the only one who would enjoy having your head patted by feet...”

“Okay, I admit, that last part was a joke.”

Though she’s right to say I would be happy about it. Anyway, that should be enough of showering her with praise to tease her, I thought, but right when I moved to stop...

“S-So, Keima. If you want to compliment that much, um, c-could you give me a rewaaard...?”

“Huh? What kind of reward?”

“Like, um... a kiss?” she said, fidgeting with a blush, and I was hit by a wave of cuteness so hard I felt my chest squeeze painfully tight.

“W-Well, maybe later,” I said to dodge the question.

“Okay. It’s a promise,” Rokuko said with an impish smile.

Welp... Welp. Guess I should steel my resolve. For more things than one.

“A-Anyway, I’ll go hire the part-timers.”

“...Sounds good.”

Rokuko dashed out of the room.

...Oh, if people are coming because the inn is cheap, can’t we just solve everything by raising prices? The thought came to me, but doing that would require me to redo the instructions for all the Register Golems, so I gave up on the idea.

Count Lodol’s Perspective

“But why?! What’s going on?! Why isn’t our inn getting customers?!” roared Count Lodol, striking the desk with his fist. He was visibly furious at the report his steward gave him on their second inn, the Dragon’s Nest Inn. It was a luxurious inn filled with high-quality benefits Count Lodol had thought up himself, all to land the finishing blow on the Dancing Doll Inn.

And yet the reality was that while a reasonable number of customers were visiting the cheap Dragon’s Footprint Inn, barely anyone was visiting the Dragon’s Nest Inn—and for some reason, the Dancing Doll Inn was getting more

customers than it used to.

“What is the meaning of this?! The Dragon’s Nest is a high-class inn! Why is no one visiting it despite all I did to make it the perfect inn?!”

“I-I have no idea, my lord.”

“And that is why you are useless! You never understand!” Count Lodol roared again, the gears turning in his head. He wasn’t a noble in name only. He had the brains necessary to think things through and identify the sources of problems, which was one reason nobles stood above the common man.

“There is no fault with my inn... so the fault lies with theirs?”

“Speaking of which, one of our inn employees did ask customers what they knew about Goren’s inn. Apparently, they offer free hot water as well, on top of their food and bedding being not only better, but available in cheaper rooms as well. They also recently hired more workers.”

The second Count Lodol heard that, everything clicked.

“I see! I understand everything now!”

“Ooh, I would expect nothing less, my lord! What went wrong, may I ask?”

“It’s simple! They no doubt started their own high-class services to compete against our inn! And on top of that, they lowered their prices to undercut us!”

His logic was simple. If their services were the same, all that came next was picking whichever was cheaper. That was just how business worked. Count Lodol concluded that Keima’s inn had pushed itself to add new services at a reduced cost.

“But they are no doubt pushing themselves. Their resistance will not last long! We will keep running our inn the same way! I expected something like this might happen, and calculated our inn’s expenses and profits to just barely break even! Their inn on the other hand will collapse into itself before long! Bwahahaha!”

“As genius as ever, my lord!”

Due to Count Lodol’s quick wit, it was decided that the Dragon’s Nest Inn would continue operating as normal. But it wouldn’t be elegant to just wait for

their competitor to collapse, or so thought Count Lodol anyway.

“Ah yes, I have an idea. I shall accelerate their collapse myself.”

“Did you divine an idea, my lord?”

“Indeed! I will send thugs and ruffians to them! After all, their inn does business with crude and lowly adventurers! They’ll never track the thugs back to me! All I have to do is pay villains in Pavella’s slums to go stay at their inn!”

Thugs going on a rampage within their inn would ruin their reputation and decrease business, with all the customers being turned away going straight to the Dragon’s Footprint Inn and the Dragon’s Nest Inn.

“Understood, my lord. I will make it happen at once.”

“Perfect. Use your best judgment here.”

This time for sure, the Dancing Doll Inn would be finished. Count Lodol couldn’t help but grin as he imagined Goren’s town chief weeping and begging for forgiveness.

Keima’s Perspective

It was a wonderful day with nothing in particular going on. In order to deal with the increased number of customers, the inn... or rather, the cafeteria... had hired part-timers to help, and thanks to the previous flood of customers from the Dragon situation, everyone knew where to camp outside, and when the inn’s rooms filled up, the church was ready to accept more.

People adapted to the situations they were put in. Despite the inn being so busy, I had plenty of time to sleep with Niku as my dakimakura, like I was doing now.

And that was when Niku turned over in my arms to look at me.

“Master.”

“Hm? What’s up, Niku?”

“I punished five people today,” Niku said proudly, her tail wagging. I patted her head and congratulated her, which made her tail wag even faster. It was

going so fast it felt like it was coming close to pulling our blanket off.

“Neat, that’s a bit more than last time.”

“Yes.”

More people meant more people complaining and causing problems. People tried to stir up trouble all the time back when the Dragon was around, and at this point it wasn’t anything to worry about. Really, it was even more peaceful now than it was back then thanks to there being more merchants. Oh, and there were some thugs too, but that wasn’t anything new.

“...More people, more problems. That’s just how it works.”

“I’m just glad I get to serve you well, Master.”

“Yep. Thanks as always, Niku.”

Man, Niku sure is strong... Even considering Golem Assistance, she’s almost abnormally strong. Nothing better than a girl that’s cute and strong, if you ask me.

“I grabbed them by the neck and threw them out.”

“Hahaha, is that so? That’s my Niku.”

“Yes, I am your Niku... Ahaha.”

I kept stroking Niku’s hair until I fell asleep, imagining myself as a pet owner giving a dog a treat.

Count Lodol’s Perspective

“...The plan failed?”

“My lord! I did as you instructed and paid thugs in the slum to go visit their inn, but... I am told an adventurer in the inn subdued them immediately. It seems they have a guardian angel in their inn.”

The steward had been forced to acquire this information through a chain of different individuals to avoid being discovered, but the precise details of the story didn’t matter.

“Hm. I see... Hmph, I suppose a low-class inn is used to dealing with low-class customers. Hiring a guard would be simple and effective for them. It seems slum thugs will pose no threat to their operation.”

“I am told the thugs were taken to the guild at once, where they were punished with hard labor.”

“Hmph, I care not for the fates of failures. I am moving on to my next strategy. I shall take my sight off the inn and focus instead on attacking them elsewhere.”

“By which you mean...?”

“That town chief said his town’s most famous food was Golem Beets, no? We’ll halt their production. Think about how sweet they were—it’s easy to conclude they use sugar in their recipe.”

“I see. They certainly did taste of sugar, rather than honey.” The steward nodded, thinking back to how he felt that the Golem Beets would taste even better with some honey on them.

“In short, he is importing sugar from Pavella! All I have to do is stop his supply train!”

“W-Wait a moment, my lord! Does that mean you intend to set a customs house to block the passage of sugar? I cannot imagine the archduke of Pavella would ever permit that.”

“You fool! Who knows what action the Pavella house would take if I were to do that! No, I am simply going to buy all of the sugar myself! Here, in Dragg!”

“I-I see. That is possible, I suppose... I will make the arrangements at once!”

Keima’s Perspective

While walking down the road in town, a kid wearing a hood called out to me.

“Oh! Uncle Keima, I came to play!”

“Hm? Oh, it’s you, Igni.”

Igni the Flame Dragon. If she were in her true form, the town would be kicking

up a huge fuss, but right now she just looked like any cute girl. She grinned, exposing her sharp shark-like teeth that would probably hurt like a bitch if she bit you.

“...Weren’t you grounded or something?”

“It’s fine! I told Mom about this!”

Alrighty. Guess this is fine, then. Ittetsu always bends like paper when Redra steps in.

“So, you come to buy Golem Beets or something?”

“Uh-huh. Oh, Mom asked me to bring some back for her too. She wants Flame Dragon Beets! Are there any left? I wanna have some too!”

“Well, those are kind of limited.”

They were rare with only a few of them being made each day, which meant they sold out immediately. After all, it was a pain to make the super spicy paste inside of them.

“She said Dragon Beets would be fine if the rest were out!”

“Alright. Those are sold normally, so yeah. Do you have the money for it?”

“Uh-huh. Mom gave me some allowance!” Igni exclaimed. She had gotten so used to her human form that she could buy stuff without issue.

And so I went to a Golem Beet stand while chatting with Igni.

“Five Golem Beets, please. Also, got any Flame Dragon Beets left?”

“Heya, town chief. Sorry, all sold out of Flame Dragon Beets.”

“Tcccch,” Igni said, her lips pursed with annoyance. “I’ll just have some normal Dragon Beets, then! Mom wants me to bring them back!”

“Sure thing! Thanks as always, little girl,” the stand guy said while pouring dough into the various molds and baking them. The nice aroma of sweet dough being baked filled the air.

“Aaah, that’s the stuff. I love the smell of Golem Beets!” Igni said, sniffing the air. *Hey, watch it. You’re growing horns.*

“Are Dragon Beets still selling better?” I asked.

“Yup. But the Golem Beets are selling good too. Merchants always grab ‘em since they get more for the same price.”

“I see... Huh?” I glanced beside the stand and saw an unusual number of sugar jars.

“Is it just me or do you have more sugar than normal?”

“Oh, yeah. Dyne asked me to make some sugar for him to sell. I’ll be sending it his way later.”

“Oh yeah? What’s he doing that for?”

“I dunno, but merchants coming from Pavella are begging us to sell them all the sugar we got, so we’re making as much as we can.”

Makes sense. Luckily, we’ve got developed fields and mainly subsist on our own crop. It helps that the fields are part of dungeon territory and grow crops a lot faster as a result. Not to mention the people running Golem Beet stands got a weather adjusting magic tool from Bonodore, which lets them make as many sugar beets for turning into sugar as they want.

“The ground’s not getting drained or anything?”

“It’s completely fine. Pretty sure being close to the dungeon helps, but we’re also doing that crop rotation thing that the books talked about.”

I wonder if the dungeon is refreshing the nutrients in the ground too...? Hopefully it’s not draining enough DP for it to matter to us. We probably get more DP from the farmers growing the crops anyway.

“Oh! Should we not have been selling sugar without telling you?!”

“Nah, it’s fine. Making sugar beets to sell sugar was my original plan anyway. I just never got into it since so much sugar was coming this way from Pavella. I’m letting Dyne handle it all.”

“Alright. You got it!”

Incidentally, turning the sugar beets to sugar was Kinue’s job. She was being given a tenth of the resulting sugar in compensation, if I remembered correctly.

But if the sugar's selling that well, maybe we should sell some of ours too? I thought just as Igni bit into her hot, freshly baked Golem Beet.

"Golem Beets sure are the best!"

"Nothing makes me feel better than seeing you eat the beets up, little miss. Alright, I'll do something special and save a whole Flame Dragon Beet for you tomorrow. Think you can make it?"

"Really?! Oh... but I want one for Mom too..."

"Ngh, and you're a good kid that cares about her mom... Alright! Two Flame Dragons! I'll go ahead and make extra paste just for you!"

"Yay! Mom will be so happy! Thanks, mister!"

Yeah... Igni's three hundred years old despite how she looks, but she still calls me 'uncle' and still calls this stand owner (an adventurer) 'mister'... Well, I guess she calls me 'uncle' mainly 'cause I'm friends with her dad, but still. This is kinda complicated.

Count Lodol's Perspective

"...What is going on?! They're still selling Golem Beets like always!"

Count Lodol had sent off one of his soldiers to buy Golem Beets, then to complain when there weren't any, but... he ended up buying them just fine.

"About that, my lord... It seems that Goren is independently producing its own sugar."

"WHAT?! Sugar...? You're telling me sugar can be found within Goren's dungeon?!"

"I-I do not know! But if monopolizing sugar sales is having no result, that is the only conclusion I can draw..." the steward said, bowing his head weakly. Count Lodol pounded a fist on his desk in frustration.

"Curses! Stop buying sugar! This plan is over!"

"My lord, what will you do next...?"

Count Lodol popped a whole Golem Beet into his mouth at once. That calmed

him down a bit.

“The truth is, I have been conducting my own investigation... and I discovered that he is holding so-called rat races in the backside of his inn.”

“Ah, I have heard of those. I believe they have rats compete in races to see who comes in first.”

“Indeed. And they predict who will win as a form of gambling!”

“Gambling!”

“Races and gambling go hand in hand, but to think they would gamble on racing rats. I would expect nothing less from that fraudster.”

Rats. They were filthy little animals that could be found anywhere, and he was going out of his way to gather them for races. It was a filthy idea fit for a filthy man.

“I am not too familiar with the details myself, but gambles are always designed so the house wins. In other words, the rat races are the fraudster’s source of money. He will have no choice but to bow his head to me once they are destroyed.” Count Lodol grinned at the thought of Goren’s town chief begging for forgiveness over his rudeness once he was out of money.

“Brilliant, my lord! How shall they be destroyed?”

“I will hold races of my own! There is no reason he could do something that a Count such as myself could not! I will make them even larger and grander than his!”

Count Lodol wasn’t even considering the possibility of failure. Nobles were superior to commoners, on top of having more brains, money, and servants. In his mind, anything that commoners could do, nobles could do better.

“I see. I will gather rats at once!”

“Bwahaha! That fraudster will rue the day he crossed me!”

Not to mention the gambling would prove to be a huge source of income for him once it was all over. Count Lodol grinned, delighted at the thought of the mountain of gold coins waiting for him.

Keima's Perspective

I was eating in the cafeteria, when suddenly Kinue—who usually only ever poked her head out of the kitchen when making food—sat next to me, probably on her break.

“Master, I heard some rumors that caught my attention recently,” she said. Apparently, she wanted to talk to me about something.

“Yeah? It’s pretty rare for you to be interested in rumors. What’s up?”

“Well. It seems that Dragg has developed an enormous rat infestation.”

“A rat infestation? What’s going on there?”

“This is just my assumption, but...” Kinue said as a preface before continuing with eager, shining eyes. “I imagine that their town is incredibly filthy. By now, it is certain that their town is the dirtiest a town has ever been, with the food in disarray, scenery polluted beyond recognition, walls black with dirt, and rat feces and corpses scattered all about.”

“...Well, let’s hope no weird diseases start to spread around.”

“Exactly. That would be problematic, no? It would be. And so, I would like to ask if I may go clean their town for them,” Kinue asked, her eyes practically shining with glee. Her cleanliness-loving Silky instincts were no doubt screaming at her to go and clean to her heart’s content. *But should a neighboring town count as part of our home? Oh, I guess their town is in our dungeon territory too, so yes.*

It was then a merchant eating nearby joined the conversation. He was a regular and a traveling merchant.

“Ah, think you got some facts mixed up there. The truth’s a bit different.”

“Oh yeah? How so?”

“Turns out, they actually gathered the rats on purpose to hold some rat races of their own.”

Rat races were held in our inn’s recreation room. They were surprisingly popular.

“So they were storing the rats in boxes... but they bred like crazy and escaped, you see.”

“Ahhhh...”

We were holding our own rat races, but the rats we used were no ordinary rats. They were actually Gray Rats, and from the very start they were domesticated rats bred to obey orders from the dungeon. Not to mention that by giving them nicknames for the races, they became Named monsters, which gave them a boost to their intelligence. They fixed matches and hyped them all on their own. In other words, they couldn't even be compared to wild rats.

If you just grab a bunch of wild rats and try to put them together, they won't listen to anything you say, and they'll breed like crazy. Wouldn't be too hard for them to chew through wooden boxes and escape. Not to mention how annoying it would be to feed them and handle their bathroom stuff.

“...But still, that would make their town unbearably filthy now, wouldn't it?” Kinue asked, almost desperately.

“I dunno how things look beneath the surface and inside the houses, but they're just barely managing to keep things looking clean on the outside.”

“Hrm... I see,” Kinue said, her shoulders visibly slumping with disappointment. She would be an outsider to Dragg, and the places she could clean would be limited. Dungeon territory or not, people wouldn't just let her into their homes to clean willy-nilly. *Though if the rats were getting into the rooms of the inn, she could just stay at the inn and clean her own room... Though I don't think Kinue would like that idea.*

“Cleaning the inn is the job of the inn's employees. I don't want to steal the jobs of others.”

And there you had it. Kinue wanted to do what she could in her own sphere of influence, not encroach upon others.

“Guess we can make some Rat-Killing Balls and sell them. Kinue, if I get you a recipe for them, could you make them?”

“...Ah! Yes! You may count on me!”

And so, I decided to have Kinue make an item that could technically be considered related to cleaning (all one had to do was consider genocidal purging to be cleaning, and when it came to rats Kinue certainly did). *Maybe if I call them balls and frame them as a food recipe, Kinue's {Cooking} skill will work as she makes them. They're like meatballs, except poisonous.*

"Oh, rat killers, huh? I'll buy 'em! I could sell them all day with the situation being so bad over there!" the merchant exclaimed.

"Hey, I'm gonna want some too!"

"Kinue's own cooking... Gotta say. Feels like it's a waste to let rats eat them."

"Don't eat them yourself, pal. It's poison."

A bunch of merchants came walking over, smelling the scent of profit. *Yeah, yeah, I expected this. I'll go ahead and add all the profits to Kinue's wages.*

Count Lodol's Perspective

"What a horrible failure...!"

The escaped rats had bitten into the house infrastructure, spread feces everywhere, slipped into inn beds to make nests, and did all sorts of other horrible things, but thanks to Rat-Killing Balls that traveling merchants brought in, everything came to a peaceful close.

"Goodness, we certainly were saved thanks to those Rat-Killing Balls," the steward said.

"Indeed. I heard that the chef working in the fraudster's inn made them. I will have to give her special accommodations when I steal Goren from him," said Count Lodol, and that's when he realized something funny. "To think that chef would have made poison for killing rats. Bwahaha, I can connect the dots here. I perceive that Keima's subordinates don't think highly of him. It won't be long before his rat races will be put to an abrupt end by poison—we don't need to bother with them anymore. Though the inn will be mine before then," Count Lodol said to himself with a nod. "Ah, but what was that rumor about him being an ideal superior? Seems like the truth is not so positive for him!"

“Absolutely. It is as you say, my lord.”

Count Lodol cackled, feeling as if he had landed a solid punch on Keima’s face.

“Now then, how should I strike next...” Count Lodol said, beginning to think of his next move once the laughter faded.

“My lord. May I first say that the church has been completed?”

“Hm? The church...? Oh, yes, I completely forgot I had ordered one to be constructed.”

The disappointment of being sent a loli nun had hit Count Lodol so hard that the Beddhist church had escaped his mind completely. But construction had continued steadily, and the other day it had finally been completed.

“On second thought, I ultimately had the church built at his request. I might as well set fire to it and pretend it never existed.”

“That would be a waste of resources, I believe.”

“I cannot disagree. I suppose leaving the church around poses no problem of its own... Ah, of course! I just had an incredible idea!”

“Did you, my lord? What might it be?” the steward asked, excited. Count Lodol let out a smug laugh.

“Since I built the church for him, I will collect reward money from him!”

“Oh, reward money?”

“Or I would ask for money, but no doubt he has none to spare—which is why I will demand to have as many of his esteemed Golem Beets as I want!”

Indeed. Under the guise of a party celebrating completion of the church, he would make Keima bake a mountain of Golem Beets, and then hand them out for free to all participants.

“Does everyone include me...?”

“Of course! You may eat until your stomach bursts!”

“Why, I believe that is a brilliant idea! Your most brilliant idea yet, even!” the steward declared, more moved by his lord’s brilliance than ever.

“A fraudster like him will no doubt be humiliated to give away so many Golem Beets for free! Make it happen at once!”

“My lord!”

Count Lodol imagined Keima’s face wrenched up with frustration, then realized he probably wouldn’t be that frustrated at all, then corrected himself—Keima would definitely be frustrated, extremely so, for sure, no doubt.

Keima’s Perspective

Word got around that Dragg’s church had finished construction. And apparently, Count Lodol sent out an order to hold a large eating competition of Golem Beets to celebrate. The good old count had really taken a liking to Golem Beets and kept sending his subordinates over to buy some. In a way, he was one of our best customers.

Though the letter he sent did say that he was low on funds due to all that rat business. He probably wanted us to give him the Golem Beets for free.

“Well, that should be fine. He did build the church for me, after all.”

And so the eating competition in Dragg’s church was set in stone. I would use the opportunity to go check out how their Beddhist church looked. I decided to bring Michiru and Suilla the head nun with me, both for hopefully obvious reasons. Once mass ended I went over to the church to tell them.

“So yeah, we’re gonna go check out the church in Dragg in a bit. Please and thank you.”

“Very well, I shall accompany you. I can hardly wait to see the Beddhist church Michiru built.”

“Eheheh, I worked hard on it! You should prepare to be shocked and awed.”

These two should be all I need to bring. Dragg is our neighbor, after all.

...Oh, and I’ll prepare new nun clothes for the day-of. Their current outfits are kinda, uh, tight on them. I probably shouldn’t let them walk around other towns wearing the skimpy outfits that Succubus mana corrupts their nun outfits into.

Soon enough it was the day of the eating competition slash our church tour. But when I brought the nuns to visit Count Lodol, he was absent. Apparently he was going on a walk to prepare his stomach for the competition.

He must really be looking forward to it, huh? I thought while heading to the church. The fact that all the passersby had their eyes drawn to Suilla in her nun outfit just went to show what a hot nun (Succubus) she really was.

Anyway, the Beddhist church was built pretty close to Dragg's main road. There was nothing built around it, which meant it was positioned in the middle of a plaza.

"And there you have it! The Beddhist church I built myself! Amazing, huh!" Michiru declared, puffing out her nonexistent chest with pride. It was a relief to see that the outside of the church looked normal, at least.

"Yep, looks like a fine church on the outside. Not bad, Michiru."

"Eheheh. Okay, let me show you the inside!"

Michiru guided us into the church, and inside we found desks with dividers, just like in Goren's church. In every other way it was a normal church. Oh, and of course there was a huge holy Beddhist symbol hanging from the wall. There were bookcases too, but they were all empty. *Can't say I'm surprised. Books are expensive in this world, and it isn't easy to protect them from drool. Maybe I'll bring them some prepped books later.*

"Whoa. Looks like a normal Beddhist church."

"Of course! It is a Beddhist church! Geez, what did you think I was going to build?" Michiru asked, her cheeks puffed out with anger. *Oh, nothing. I believed in you. I knew it would turn out well. Kuusan was with you, after all.*

Michiru continued guiding us. Suilla and I just followed after her.

"So here are the rooms for the nuns, here's the living space, and here is the bathroom," she explained. Everything was just like a normal church here.

"These are the rooms for private prayers, and they also have everything they need for massages," she continued. The praying rooms were more of a Beddhist thing. In terms of comfort they probably beat out the local inns.

“And here is the confession booth!” she exclaimed. *Whoa! Now that’s a real church thing. I’m moved! I gotta admit, I was actually expecting Michiru to just load the church with crazy Succubus ideas, but it looks like I should’ve trusted her more.*

“And here is the jail in the cellar,” she finished. *Welp.*

“Hold on a second. Why is there a jail in a church cellar?”

“Bwuh? I mean, this is where we torture thieves who try to steal books, remember? There’s one in our own church too,” she said. *Oh yeah, there is... And I made it.*

“Now, now, Michiru, you mustn’t call it a jail. It’s a repentance chamber for those who have sinned.”

“Oh, right! Teehee!”

W-Well, alright. Repentance chambers are an important part of churches... Maybe? I thought, then noticed Suilla glancing anxiously around, looking for something.

“Michiru. Do we not have any of, ahem, those? You know what I mean.”

“Of course we have them, sister!”

“Wait, what are we talking about here?” I asked.

“Simple! A field of eggplants! Sister asked me to make one, so I did!”

It was outside of the church. There was a field that, although small, was in a good sunny spot.

“I think this field will grow lots and lots of thick, hard eggplants!”

“C-Come now, Michiru! You mustn’t say such... such... I-lewd things in front of the pope!”

“Wait, really?”

Michiru tilted her head as Suilla blushed bright red. *What’s so lewd about eggplants...? I don’t know, and it looks like Michiru doesn’t either.*



“...Uhhh, well, I guess it’s like a family garden?”

“That’s close enough, I think! You’re not wrong or anything!”

I feel like I can guess what’s going on here, but I’m going to pretend I didn’t notice anything. Sometimes it’s best to let sleeping dogs lie. Yep.

In any case, there weren’t any (big) problems with the church, so I decided to send some of my nuns over on rotating shifts. The Succubi went out of their way to build a nice church, and it would be a shame for it to not have any priests or nuns. *And I’ve been letting them stealthily do their, uh, “actual jobs” for a bit, so they should be fine here.*

...I wonder if hiring part-time nuns would be in the cards? Or maybe they could raise nuns in the orphanage... Though, uh, I dunno how I’d feel about having normal townsfolk train to be nuns under Succubi. Guess I’ll have to think about this later.

“Time for the eating competition. I think we should open the church as soon as it starts, probably. Can I count on you two to take care of that?”

“Perfect. You may leave it to us, your holiness.”

“Awww! I wanted to join the eating competition too!”

“Now, now, Michiru. You mustn’t be selfish.”

Suilla obeyed my orders obediently, and despite her protests Michiru ultimately agreed as well.

“...I’ll give you a bunch of Golem Beets later to make up for it.”

“Okie dokies then!”

Not long after, preparations for the Golem Beet eating competition began. All the Golem Beet stand owners in Goren came over, and they brought Kinue along as a helper because even then they predicted there wouldn’t be enough. Kinue let out a deep sigh when she saw that the roads were spotless and didn’t need any cleaning.

“...Sigh. I see that the town has already been cleaned up,” she said.

“What, so you did want to clean after all?”

“It’s a bit of a shame, but all’s well that ends clean. I shall make do with just baking Golem Beets today, Master.”

Incidentally, on top of preparing a mountain of ingredients, we could buy more with DP when we really needed to. With Kinue’s {Chef} skill on top of that, we could deliver more Golem Beets the second they were ordered.

And so, the eating competition began just before lunch. Anyone could participate and eat as much as they wanted for thirty minutes. You would earn one point for every Golem Beet you ate in that thirty minute period, with your number of points being put up in the rankings afterwards. The person in first place at the end of the day would be the winner. Simple stuff.

“Yooo, don’t say you didn’t think I’d be here, my dudes!”

Naturally, there was no way Ichika the Food Demon wouldn’t be participating. She had wisely taken the day off ahead of time so she could partake on her own time. It helped that I had modified her maid stone mask to not cover her mouth.

“I’m gonna join in the first round, then join again at a later round. That’ll get me more food than just going at it once!”

“...I mean, you’re not wrong.”

And so, Masked Maid Number 1 (Ichika) began eating with the first round of challengers, but... she tapped out in ten minutes after finishing her fifth one. She didn’t even make it into the rankings. Not gonna lie, that caught me entirely off guard.

“What can I say, I’m not actually a big eater, my man. All I care about is getting some good grub, then chilling.”

“Y’know, that makes a lot of sense. Good thinking.”

Incidentally, when the first round ended, Count Lodol had the most points at twenty-five beets eaten. Public consensus was that it was a pretty good score.

“Bwahaha! Burp... H-How was that?! I ate a lot of ’em...!” Count Lodol declared to much applause.

“As expected, milord. You did well.”

“Ngh, h-hmph! This is nothing for a man of my talents,” he said, but as far as I could tell he seemed to be in a lot of pain.

“Hey, man,” I said, “You can go rest in the Beddhist church if you want. There’s some comfy beds there.”

“...No, I plan to participate in a future round. I just need to walk this off a bit...”

Apparently, the count was planning to return for round two just like Ichika was. He walked off with his wavering steward (who came in second place) in tow.

Future rounds involved Dragg townsfolk, passing adventurers, merchants, some people from Pavella’s slums who heard there was free food, and overall just a bunch of people who turned it into a big thing. At the end of the day, Count Lodol’s score had dropped to fifth place, and he declared that he would be participating in the final round no matter what.

Incidentally, Ichika had eaten over fifty in total, but due to her spreading it out over multiple rounds, she didn’t make it into the rankings.

And so, it was finally time for the last round. Count Lodol, a bunch of people deciding they might as well join in, and hardcore challengers viewing the last round as the true competition all took their seats.

“Hey, Uncle! I heard we get to eat as many Golem Beets as we want here!”

“Keima! I came too! GIVE ME ALL YOU GOT!”

Igni and Redra had arrived. They were the mother and daughter Dragons that lived in Tsia Mountain’s [Flame Caverns]. Though naturally, they were in human form and had magic tools on to contain their power.

...Maybe it’s actually, like, normal and good for Dragons to join Dragg festivities? Maaaybe?

“Where’d you hear about this...? Wait, oh yeah, we were marketing it to everyone. Well... Go easy?”

“Yeah! I’m gonna eat as MUCH AS I CAN!” Redra roared.

“Mooom, leave some for me, okay?!”

Incidentally, Ittetsu had been left behind to keep an eye on the dungeon. Poor guy.

I was a bit curious about how eating would work in their human forms, but suffice to say, they were chewing their way through Golem Beets bite by bite. And to be clear, by that I meant they were eating an entire Golem Beet per single bite. The other challengers could do nothing but watch in a daze as they waited for the round to end.

Ultimately, the store of beets didn't last long, and we had to buy more ingredients with DP. Kinue pushed her {Chef} skill to its absolute limit, serving piping hot Golem Beet after Golem Beet right after finishing them, but both the Dragons were of the fire element so the heat just made them like ice cold refreshments.

Then, after thirty minutes straight of eating without any breaks...

"O-One thousand! They both hit one thousand! Altogether they ate two thousaaaand! This is an absolutely incredible resuuuult!"

"HOORAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" cheered the crowd.

So yeah, it was actually hard for the counter to keep track of it all, but even so Igni and Redra each shoveled one thousand Golem Beets down their throats. The crowd couldn't stop cheering. Everyone else did two digits at best, but these two both got four digits—nobody could believe it.

"Alright, that should do for today! Keima! Thanks for the food!" Redra declared.

"Thanks, Uncle!"

"Didn't I ask you two to go easy...?"

...Yeah, I think at this point, it would be totally fair for me to ask Ittetsu to fork over some DP to cover that.

"Hm? Did we eat too much?! My bad! We'll make it up to you later somehow!"

"Er, well, don't worry about it. Congratulations on your stunning victory."

We went straight to the award ceremony. At the time, we hadn't had any

rewards planned, but, well...

“I want a hundred Flame Dragon Beets for dessert! And some beer!”

“Me too! Uncle, you know what to do!”

Yeaah... Figures.

“Alright, I’ll deliver them later! Just take it slow and savor the flavor, okay?!”

“Hahaha! I knew we could count on you, Keima!”

“Yaaay! I love you, Uncle! You’re my number two, behind Wataru!”

Thus the Golem Beet eating competition came to a close after a day of crazy, heated competition. The Beddhist Church saw a lot of traffic from people taking breaks, so everything went according to plan.

Also, not long after Ittetsu sent over a mountain of Salamander scales as an apology. *Did these fall off you from all the stress you’re feeling? Oh, you shed them in the past?*

Count Lodol’s Perspective

“I don’t think I’ll be needing any Golem Beets for some time... Burp.”

“Truly, I did not expect challengers capable of eating a thousand Golem Beets each to appear. Burp.”

Count Lodol was very satisfied after eating Golem Beets to his heart’s content.

“Two thousand beets were eaten in total... Or I suppose around four thousand, considering the other challengers? I have to say, I’m surprised they managed to prepare that many ahead of time,” Count Lodol observed.

“Very surprising indeed, milord.”

“Quite. That fraudster might have a talent for hosting festivities, of all things,” Count Lodol said, then remembered the uncomfortable smile on Keima’s face after the winners were announced. “That expression of his was all I ever hoped to see.”

“Considering the price of Golem Beets, we can predict this competition cost him a fortune of gold coins!”

“Bwahaha. If only he had just given me an honest bribe at the start. I can only imagine what a blow this must have been to his wallet.”

Incidentally, the traffic from the competition had driven a lot of business to Dragg’s merchants. Count Lodol had damaged his enemies while bringing benefit to his allies. A solid move that killed two birds with one stone, if he did say so himself.

“I truly am a genius. Now, I suppose it is about time to finish him off.”

“Oh? I thought for certain you would just wait and see for now,” the steward said, earning a grin from Count Lodol.

“You fool! That is the idea of a third-rate plotter. It is precisely when your enemies are weak that you must pin them down and land the finishing blow! Not to mention that each successive strike will hold more power than the last!”

“So you intend to ride the inertia of this success, then! Brilliant, milord!”

To that end, Count Lodol needed to formulate a move that would land the final blow on Goren no matter what. He couldn’t miss this opportunity. Thus, he began writing letters with sheer determination.

“Oh? Two letters, milord? I suppose one is for the town chief, but the other...?”

“Indeed. According to what I’ve learned, the heir apparent of the Pavella Family, Lord Cid, is exceptionally interested in tales of the Dragon and the fraudster’s lies about eliminating it. I shall show Lord Cid the truth, that the fraudster is in fact nothing special at all. What do you think will happen then?”

“I-I haven’t a clue, milord,” the steward replied, which only widened Count Lodol’s grin.

“Bwahaha. This is not an opportunity I intend to miss. Prepare yourself, Keima Goreeen!”

“Wh-What will happen, milord?! I must know!”

“Silence! I am busy writing the letters! Think for yourself for once!”

In the end, would Count Lodol be able to make Goren his? Only time would tell.

“...Ah! By exposing his crimes, he will be removed from his position of town chief! And then I will move in to fill the power vacuum, making Goren mine! The strategy is perfect! Impressed?!”

“You just thought of that now, didn’t you, milord?! But yes, it is impressive!”

...In the end, would Count Lodol be able to make Goren his? Only time would tell.

Side Chapter — Archduke Bonodore Investigating Goren (Beddhism)

A certain report found its way to Bonodore Tsia, archduke of Tsia.

“Hm? A Pavella noble is harassing Goren?”

“Yes, my lord. It seems he desires possession of the [Cave of Greed].”

According to his subordinate’s report, the noble was doing things to interfere with business in Goren, though it seemed that none of his attempts were going well at all.

“...I see. And although Keima doesn’t seem to view this as a problem, I believe I should nonetheless investigate this matter myself,” Bonodore said, standing up from his chair and throwing on a long overcoat.

“Are you departing, my lord?”

“Indeed. I will go have a look at matters for myself. You know your mission.”

“Yes, sir! You may count on me.”

All that said, Bonodore’s footsteps were light. He had his own reasons for wanting to visit Goren. One was Beddhist mass, and the other was the High Priestess’s massage.

Rei, the High Priestess of Beddhism. In the past she performed massages in the Dancing Doll Inn, and through achieving the miracle of giving massages that didn’t hurt at all even when done aggressively, she was canonized as a saint. Her miraculous massages kept the church together, and all the other nuns respected her greatly.

Bonodore was busy enough with his affairs as archduke that he could only manage to visit once or twice a week, but he was beyond addicted to Beddhism. Only during Beddhist mass could he truly sleep like a baby. All his exhaustion would be purified by the High Priestess’s miraculous massages. It was important healing for Bonodore, who spent most of his time handling

matters of state.

...He made sure that his wife, Waltz, and his sons didn't see him while leaving the mansion. He didn't particularly care about them seeing him, but if they asked to come along, he would need to bring more guard soldiers with him. That would be a pain, and in the past he had been so busy with the paperwork that he had failed to make it in time for mass. Bonodore didn't want to let that happen again.

* * *

Avoiding his family's eyes, Bonodore got on a carriage to Goren. He was wearing the poor clothes of a commoner to hide his identity, but his movements had an unavoidable air of power and authority to them, so those riding in the carriage easily guessed he was a noble in disguise.

"Oh?"

"Hrm?"

It was then that Bonodore made eye contact with another passenger. She was wearing the clothes of a commoner, but it was impossible to hide her elegant grace. Or, more importantly, her face. It was undoubtedly Bonodore's wife, Waltz.

"Hello there, dear. Fancy meeting you here."

"...Yeah. Same to you. Business in Goren, dear?"

"Indeed. I imagine my business is the same as yours," Waltz said, retrieving the round holy symbol of Beddhism from behind her shirt. It was silver-colored. From a commoner's perspective, that was a fairly expensive holy symbol. Bonodore had one on himself. He did have his own gold holy symbol, but naturally if he wore that he would be revealing that he was either a rich merchant or a noble.

"I didn't know you had joined Beddhism, dear. I thought for certain you were a devout follower of the Ivory Church."

"My, my, dear. Beddhism is a sub religion publicly approved by the Ivory Goddess herself. This is perfectly fine."

“Very true,” Bonodore replied before they clinked their holy symbols together. It was a common greeting performed by Beddhists.

“Hey, hey, you two joined Beddhism as a couple, huh?”

“What a coincidence, I’m a Beddhist too. Oyasuminasai and all that.”

“Are you heading to mass? Same here.”

That prompted several other passengers with similar holy symbols hanging from their necks to call out. Some Beddhist merchant had spread the idea that tapping your holy symbol against a higher quality one in greeting would boost your good fortune. Iron was better than bronze, silver was better than iron, gold was better than silver, and finally the ruby symbol the High Priestess held was better than gold, and finally, finally, *finally*, the massive holy symbol in the church was better than everything.

These passengers probably wanted to exchange greetings to get that boosted luck. Bonodore and Waltz were glad to oblige.

“Take a look. I made this wooden holy symbol myself.”

“Oh, splendid. Allow me to exchange a greeting.”

“Hey, man, I engraved mine with wheat to hope for a more bountiful harvest.”

“Splendid. Tsia is a grain basket, after all. Allow me to exchange a greeting.”

The fact that hand-made symbols and those with dreams carved into them were considered high quality as well just went to show how compassionate Beddhism was.

“Given that you speak of wheat, I imagine you are a farmer? What say you on the state of this year’s wheat?”

“Not bad at all. I’ve got lots of buyers from Pavella.”

“Oh? All thanks to that tunnel, I suppose. We have gotten much closer to Pavella than ever before.”

“Yep. So much so that traveling merchants come to buy it straight from me, no middlemen. Though people like that are pretty suspicious and I turn them all

down.”

They exchanged information casually while performing the greeting. Bonodore had been known as a populist leader for his tendency to descend to cities and talk to commoners himself, but he was firmly rooted in noble habits which had kept some distance between him and the commoners until Beddhism came to bridge the gap.

“Hm... I suppose more traffic means more suspicious fellows mixing in with the others as well. I’ll ask a friend of mine to keep an eye out for them.”

“Oh, that’d be great. I’m sure I can trust any friend of yours, man. Beddhism proving itself so beneficial to us all once again, huh? Hahah!”

They continued their mutually beneficial conversation until arriving at Goren. The carriage shook significantly more than most noble carriages did, but thanks to the cushions sold in Goren it was hardly a bother. Unlike the thick cushions used in noble carriages, they were cheap and easy to carry, so even commoners had them. It literally saved the asses of those nobles traveling in secret. Especially since lately carriages were preemptively installing cushions.

“Now then, shall we head to mass? I would like to get a front row seat. I sleep more soundly there than anywhere.”

“Oh my, I always go for the back row. It is easier to get books there. I always read until it is time for mass to start.”

“...Waltz, I thought you received exceptional grades back in school. Are any books there still of interest to you?”

“But of course. Dear, don’t tell me, have you never looked at the books there before?”

“Ngh... I-I learn through experience. Though I did notice there were farming books among them.”

Waltz let out a sigh.

The Beddhist church had fully stocked bookshelves. Among the books were some describing farming techniques not widely known in the Laverio Empire (including some memos likely from Pavella, describing how to spread cooked

seashells in farmland).

Incidentally, for some reason the Beddhist bible was not included among these books—which was strange, considering most churches would make copies of their holy text available first and foremost. It was a religion so unconcerned with spreading its own teachings that it actually kind of made you worried. Though it would be even worse if they were super pushy about it like the Church of Light.

“I will borrow one later. If I can just make a single copy of it, I am sure you will understand what a wonderful book it is.”

“P-Pick an easy one, if you would. Wait, they allow the books to be borrowed?”

“Normally, they only let townsfolk borrow books, but I revealed my identity and negotiated with money to broker an agreement.”

The fact that Keima lent expensive books to townsfolk for free showed just how noble his goals for the town really were. But Bonodore thought that he was being too virtuous, to the point of simply letting his guard down.

Bonodore’s thoughts were interrupted, however, when someone pulled on the back of his shirt and stopped him from entering the church. It was his wife, Waltz.

“Dear. It seems there was a thief.”

“Hrm?”

Bonodore glanced down and saw a hole at his feet. At the bottom was a merchant-looking fellow, bound and unable to move.

...Such was the fate of one who stole books. Some magic tools or the like worked together to create the pitfall. Bonodore had no idea how it worked, but he believed there was a magic tool-making smith somewhere in the town.

The hole slowly closed. He saw a nun appear at the bottom of the pit through a door and bow right before the hole closed entirely, so he could imagine that the criminal had been safely captured.

“...I’d like one of these in our own estate.”

“Agreed, dear. Though it does seem that innocents do fall alongside the thieves by mistake at times.”

“That’s no good. Does anyone complain?”

“In those cases, nuns cast {Purification} and give them massages for free. In fact, it seems that they end up glad to have fallen, with the criminals suffering far more than they do thanks to the power of karma.”

“All a matter of perspective, then...? Karma and virtue truly are convenient words. They give religion strength.”

Incidentally, jumping in intentionally got you neither {Purification} nor a massage. It was bad karma.

With that out of the way, Bonodore and his wife safely attended mass. They brought their own cushions with them and used them as pillows to sleep. When they woke up, they felt as refreshed and good as ever. They did feel a bit stiff due to falling asleep at a desk while sitting, but they had plans to receive massages later so that was no problem at all.

“Incidentally, dear. Did you know that the High Priestess is currently back to giving massages only on reservation?”

“...Come again?”

“Ohoho. Behold my reservation ticket. No, I shan’t give it to you,” Waltz said while holding up a wooden card with an insignia burnt into it.

“Ngh! This is awful. My spies told me nothing of this!”

“It seems she had to resort to reservations due to more people visiting again. I happened to meet the High Priestess and discuss matters before mass thanks to reading in the back... Regardless, I hope you enjoy the point press massages of the other nuns.”

“Grr! But those are painful, and you know it!”

“How sad for you,” Waltz said with a giggle.

It is our secret that Bonodore’s mission turned into a date with his wife, and he ultimately returned having investigated nothing of the Pavella noble harassing Goren, earning the cold glare of his disappointed steward. Ultimately,

he just said that if he hadn't experienced any problems on his date, the problem was probably insignificant enough for Keima to handle on his own.

Chapter 2 — Keima's Perspective

"Town Chief. Count Lodol has challenged you to a duel," Wozma announced while I was lazily signing documents in my office.

"Uh, what?" Why would he do that? I know at the start he was kinda viewing us as an enemy or something along those lines, but it really felt like things have been going well between us lately.

"It seems his goal is to apologize for scorning you while you were absent from the town, thereby disgracing your name as a Dragon-conquering legend. By holding a duel he hopes to show everyone your true power and remove all doubt as to your legitimacy. To this end, he will build an arena in Dragg with witnesses, and he would like for you to visit the town tomorrow at noon."

"...Uh, in other words?"

"He is challenging you to a duel despite claiming to apologize. He has set the date and gathered the witnesses himself. This is clearly not an apology, but a direct challenge. Do not hold back, Keima. Destroy him with everything you have."

Wait, wait, wait, wait. Why do I gotta duel him?

"Is not going an option for me?"

"Considering that it is beyond rude to schedule a duel one day after the challenge, refusing to go would be within reason, but I can already see them framing it as you fleeing from them like a coward."

"I see... Could I have someone fight in my place?"

"You could, but as they have specified you in particular, well... Oh, though I suppose the challenge is issued to 'the Dragon-conquering legend' without any name in particular, so you could send someone else who has defeated a Dragon," Wozma said with the devious smile of someone who just thought of an evil plot.

“Nice. I think I know what you mean by that.”

“The honorable Kuro would be perfect for this job, I believe. They might claim she is not a Dragon-conquering legend, but in that case you need only reveal her identity.”

“Perfect. Good job, Wozma.”

So yeah, when tomorrow came I had Niku Kuroinu serve as my representative Dragon conqueror. I went on over to Dragg, with Niku disguised as Masked Maid #2. This time we had people waiting for us as soon as we left the tunnel.

“So you have come, Keima Goren!”

“Yep. I got the letter, so here I am.”

There stood Count Lodol, not looking at all like someone about to apologize. Beside him was a man in full plate armor, with a well-dressed child standing not far behind him. There were also a number of villagers and travelers gathering nearby.

“Listen well, everyone! I am Count Ringen Lodol! I hereby declare that I challenge Keima Goren to a duel! Our gamble will be our honor! I say that now is the time for him to show us the power of a Dragon-conquering legend!” Count Lodol declared, in a needlessly loud voice. “Our witnesses shall be all of you gathered here today, as well as Lord Cid Pavella, the heir apparent of the Pavella house!”

Apparently, the kid was the heir of Pavella’s archduke. He looked about as old as Niku. Yeah.

“Now then! Do you accept, Keima Goren? Or will you turn tail and run? Bwahaha! If you wish to run, now is your only opportunity! BWAAHAHAHA!”

“If I was gonna run, I wouldn’t have come all this way. Is it safe to assume you’re going to be the one fighting, Count Lodol?”

“Bwahah—Nghuh?!” Count Lodol’s weird laughed morphed into painful choking. “I-I would never do something as crude as fight! Can you not tell from looking that I am having a representative fight for me?! This duel will be performed by Duston, the greatest knight of the Lodol house!” he declared, and

the full-armored knight beside him took a step forward.

I glanced at the map and saw that Duston was earning us... 290/DP. *Not bad, seems like he's pretty strong. Ichika would probably lose to him. That said...*

"Think you can beat him?"

"He seems weaker than Whatever the Hero, so I will be fine," Niku said with a confident nod, her face hidden by the stone mask. *Uh... I appreciate the confidence, but maybe don't call Heroes "whatever"? I feel like that's bad karma.*

Anyway, Niku took a step forward in my place.

"Hrm? What are you planning here, Keima Goren?"

"Oh, well. I figured I'd fight personally if you stepped up to the plate, Count Lodol, but if you sent out a representative, I would too. It's more fair if we both use representatives, right?"

"Hrmmm...?" Count Lodol looked Niku over from head to toe. "In other words, if this beastkin slave girl loses, it will count as your loss? And you are fine with this? Hm?"

"Yep. Totally fine," I said, and Count Lodol instantly grinned. *Well, I can imagine what he's thinking. Niku definitely does look like a normal dog loli. It'd be hard not to think she's a weak little child.*

"Very well! I accept your representative! Know that her loss will be, in effect, your loss!"

Thus, the duel was established. Cid Pavella, the witness, looked a bit unhappy. If I had to put it into words, his dissatisfied expression was saying, "This is clearly bullying the weak, is it not?" He came here thinking he'd see a Dragon-conquering legend, only for a masked maid loli to come out instead. Understandable. As for Duston... Well, it was hard to tell since his mask covered his face, but his confident gait conveyed that he thought an easy job had just gotten easier.

"Lord Cid, may I ask you to kickstart the duel?" Count Lodol said, and at his encouragement Cid Pavella reluctantly nodded.

“Very well... BEGIN!” he yelled, and thus began the duel.

“Duston! Finish her off quickly! But do not kill her.”

“Masked Maid #2, finish him off quickly. Don’t accidentally kill him.”

Both fighters nodded, then moved to face each other in the center of the road. That was getting in the way of the traffic, but since Count Lodol was permitting this there was no problem with it whatsoever.

First, Niku stepped forward without drawing her weapon, instead holding out her hand—a clear request for a handshake. Duston saw that and, thinking nothing of it, shook her hand. But it was more of a trap than anything. The masked maid squeezed his hand in hers, then with raw strength threw him over her back and slammed him against the ground.

The crowd gasped. A small child had thrown a large adult man, in full armor no less, using just a single hand. It was so hard to believe that nobody could bring themselves to say anything.

But while everyone froze in shock, Duston included, the masked maid pulled his arm again and slammed him into the ground on the other side of her. Again. And then again.

Bang. Bang. Bang.

The sound was a bit more metallic and clanky since he was in a full set of armor, but he was being slammed against the ground like a bag of fruit being slammed against a table. Like a fish being hit on the floor of a ship to knock it out. Like a famed musician swinging a leek. The masked maid lifted her arm high in the air, and Duston in all his armor flew upwards before she slammed him down on the opposite side of her. Sometimes she slammed him sideways too.

Bang. Bang. Smash. Bang. Boom. Bang.

It was honestly quite the sight to see a tiny loli body in the center of a metal storm, the flashing gray of a giant metal suit being flung all over the place.

Y’know... It’s at this moment that I realize the ground is the most powerful blunt weapon of them all. I went ahead and put orichalcum in Niku’s Golem

supports, but to think she'd be able to use the ground as a weapon so effectively. I'd expect nothing less from Goren's strongest puppy. Oh, there goes his helmet, flying off into the distance. And his sword. Uh... I think his eyes are rolling to the back of his head. Guess that's what happens when you pound someone's head into the ground like a hundred times.

"Maid #2, that should be enough. Pretty sure he's about to die."

"I believe he will survive this comfortably, but understood."

Niku threw Duston to the side, and due to being unconscious, he rolled across the ground like a doll before eventually stopping. He didn't move after that. *He is alive, right...? He must be, since he didn't turn into DP.* And why was Niku so confident he'd survive? Is she used to smashing people into the ground until all their armor flies off? Dang, this loli has a lot of experience smashing armored dudes into the ground.

"...Wh-What in the world was that?!" Count Lodol demanded, looking at me with shock.

"Uhhhh. Us winning, I guess?"

"You? Ah, wait, WHAT?! No, this cannot be! This is impossible! It's not happening!" he shouted, but Duston was right there for everyone to see, out cold with his eyes rolled back. He was covered in lumps and bruises from being smashed into the ground.

Cid the witness rushed over and put a hand to his neck. "...He has a pulse, but he is completely unconscious."

That's good. I would've felt kinda awkward if he just up and died there.

"This does not count! Surprise attacks go against everything a holy duel stands for! She is a coward and a cheater!"

"The heck are you talking about? Lord Cid announced the duel's start."

"And what even is that child?! A female dwarf? I see, you tricked us into letting our guards down by giving her beast ears and a mask! It doesn't count! It doesn't, not in the least! I will not accept such an unfair representative fighter!"

"Can't really back out now that the duel's over. You recognized her right

before the start. Am I right?” I said, looking toward Cid Pavella.

“He is right. You accepted her as his representative, Count Lodol. And thus the duel was fair! The winner is Keima Goren!”

It seemed that the kid was a pretty trustworthy witness, and he announced our victory honestly.

“Y-Y-You fraudsteer! Gaaah...” Count Lodol groaned before suddenly falling backwards, unconscious. *So pissed you knocked yourself out, huh? Not gonna lie, I know how you feel. Even I would want to call bullshit if I saw a loli like Niku beating the crap out of a fully armored adult male.*

The unconscious Count Lodol was carried away by his steward and the guard I saw before. *Uhhh, you’re forgetting Duston, guys.*

“Hrm... I suppose I should cast some Restoration Magic on him. O Light, mend these flesh wounds... {Light Heal},” chanted Cid Pavella, having also been left behind. As expected of an heir apparent, he had already been trained in Restoration Magic. Maybe that was one requirement for being a witness for a duel.

Anyway, I’m not exactly sure what I should do now. Guess I’ll talk to Cid?

“Erm, excuse me. Lord Cid Pavella?”

“You may address me as Cid, Sir Goren. As I have no title yet, I am no Lord, and you do not need to treat me as one.”

“...Alright, Cid. Feel free to call me Keima. I’m still not too used to having Goren as a last name.”

“That will do just fine, Sir Keima. I believe I would like to be on good terms with you,” he said, and we shook hands while trying to get a feel for how close we should act with each other. *Don’t worry, I won’t slam you against the ground.*

“Aaah, how shall I put this... Ahem. The fight truly was stunning. All who saw it are at a loss for words,” Cid said, looking at the still-shocked crowd nearby.

“Uhhh, yep, and now it’s over. Can we just go home now?”

“I would rather like to talk a bit first... For example, is the girl who fought for

you a famous warrior? Er, I hope she is, but...”

Hm. I guess it’s hard for the son of Pavella’s Archduke to accept that a knight serving his nobles got dominated by a plain ol’ loli in a mask. Well, I guess a loli smashing a fully armored knight against the ground is out of ordinary to begin with. This Cid kid seems like a nice guy, so I’ll be nice and tell him the truth. That should buy us some clout with him.

“Hey, don’t sweat it. That’s one of my party members, Niku Kuroinu. She was there when we took down the Dragon. She’s our best fighter, actually.”

Upon hearing that, Cid’s eyes gleamed. He looked like a kid beholding a legend... *or, well, I guess he is a kid.* And he is beholding a legend.

“...So she is the legendary Ebony Guard Dog, Niku Kuroinu?!” Cid exclaimed, and a stir ran through the crowd.

“Yes. I am the Ebony Guard Dog—Niku Kuroinu,” Niku said, dramatically removing her stone mask to reveal her face. And while she was in fact expressionless, her tail was wagging in satisfaction. Beastkin had a culture of giving names that held meaning, and they instinctively sought to live a life that would bring it honor. Thus, as a beastkin Niku seemed to really love the wonderful nickname she had been given, which meant “black dog” just like “kuroinu” did in Japanese.

...Wait. It just hit me that the stone mask doesn’t change much when Niku’s expression never changes anyway.

“Wh-Why are you dressed like that?”

“Because I am Masked Maid #2.”

“I-I see... May I address you as Dame Kuroinu?”

Niku glanced my way. *Yep, that tail wagging means she wants to be praised as the Ebony Guard Dog even more. That’s fine with me. I’d like for her to forget the “niku” part of her name, or at least be fine with it meaning a frontline warrior. Please and thank you.*

“Sure, whatever works.”

“So decrees Master. Feel free.”

Cid, having been given indirect and direct permission, nodded. “I thank you. Listen, everyone! This maid is the Ebony Guard Dog and the defeater of Dragons, Dame Ni... Dame Kuroinu! Her fighting prowess earns that title a thousand times over! Now, praise the victor for her success!”

Cid really hyped Niku up. The uncomfortable, frozen crowd bought into it, and they all let out excited cheers. I got the feeling more than a few of them were relieved that it took a Dragon-defeating legend to take down a knight protecting the duchy.

And thus, we all went our separate ways... Or so I’d hoped. Instead, Cid summoned his guards from nearby to carry Duston to the nearby Dragon Footprint Inn. He then took us to the chief residence in Dragg, that being Count Lodol’s estate.

The count was still unconscious, and so we just up and used the parlor without his permission. I wasn’t sure if that was a great idea, but given that Cid was the heir apparent of Pavella, I decided it would be best not to protest. The steward was sticking with us anyway, as a resident of the estate.

“Now then. Sir Keima, I truly disrespected you back there. My apologies,” Cid said with a bow of his head.

...Wait, hold it, hold it. Should a noble kid, and an heir apparent at that, really be bowing his head to some random town chief?

“Uh, Cid. Not really sure what to do here, so I’ll just say you don’t need to do that. I’m not even sure what you’re apologizing for.”

“Hm, I see. Then if you’ll excuse me,” Cid said before lifting his head. “There are two things I would like to apologize for. One is my fault—the rudeness of the duel.”

Oh yeah, Wozma said something about a duel ordering you to come over the next day being impolite.

“As the witness, I should not have allowed such a crude duel to happen.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. I like getting pains in the neck out of the way fast and going back to sleep. Am I right?”

“Truly you are as compassionate as one would expect the pope of Beddhism to be...” Cid murmured with an impressed nod. “As for the other thing... This is about Count Lodol. It seems that he has been plotting to take over your town.”

“Well now. Is that so...” *Hm... But I don't really remember him doing anything to me. Right? Right. Nothing's coming to mind. I mean, he did build an inn to compete with ours, but I actually asked him to do that.* “Can't say that really clicks for me, but don't worry about apologizing for that either. Not like he did anything to us.”

“I-Indeed?”

“Well, basically. I just want our towns to stay on good terms. He built such a nice church and everything, so I've got no complaints.”

“I see... If that is how you feel, then I will continue to entrust Dragg to Count Lodol for now. Though naturally, I will keep an eye on him and put a stop to any foolish plots of his.”

Okay. But feel free to build more inns and take more work away from me, alright? I thought, and that was when I noticed Cid glancing Niku's way.

“By the way, Cid. Did you look into our Dragon hunting at all?”

“Ah! Th-The truth is, yes, I did. After all, this is a Dragon we're talking about. Of course I would be interested as a man of Pavella! In the distant past Tsia Mountain was once called Pavella Mountain, and even further in the past there were legends of the Red Dragon that protected this land! The Dragon is the subject of lullabies and tales all across Pavella! Its strength and awe-inspiring might is known by all! And in this age living legends were born that defeated this Dragon, and even made it serve them! Who would not be excited?!” Cid exclaimed, jumping from his seat and talking rapidly. “And that is why I agreed to witness the duel, so that I might see your true power. Still, I didn't think this woman would be the Ebony Guard Dog herself. After all, given her name, I thought... Given her name, I, er... I-I knew there were deep circumstances! You can guess what I am thinking!”

Oooh, Cid knows the sexy version of “niku.” Peeerveert. His face is bright reed. And that explains why he stumbled when naming Niku back there.

“Not to mention, there exists a man with the same name. He is betrothed to Maiodore Tsia, daughter of Tsia’s archduke. I thought he was the true Ebony Guard Dog, but to think she was indeed such a beautiful, ahem, such a cute, erm, such a pretty, no, um, to think she was such an alluring woman! I had no idea...!”

Uh, that’s actually the same person, I thought, but didn’t know if I should dump that info on Cid. I had actually kinda forgotten that Niku was betrothed to Maiodore on paper. And now that I thought about it, Bonodore had mentioned doing so to cancel an engagement in Pavella. I guess Cid used to be engaged to Maiodore, then.

This is probably stuff he’s better off not knowing. I’ll just let him keep his misunderstanding for now, then talk to Maiodore about this later.

“F-Forgive me. This sounds entirely like I am courting for Lady Kuroinu’s affections...” Cid murmured, his cheeks bright red. *Uh oh. Did he fall in love with Niku? Damn, my girl sure is popular.*

“Hey, any guy would find his heart beating fast around a Dragon-conquering legend, especially after seeing her fight up close.”

“I-Indeed, that’s right! There is nothing profound to this at all! The political resistance to me marrying an Avian girl was bad enough. I can only imagine how much pushback there would be to my marrying a dog beastkin slave such as Lady Kuroinu! Aaah, but as a Dragon-slaying legend, perhaps I could use her fame to crush such resistance...”



“Oh, look at the time!” I exclaimed. “Looks like we’ve gotta be heading back to Goren soon! Man, this happened so suddenly I had to leave pressing work undone. Definitely gotta get back soon.”

“Hrm, I see... A shame, and I would have liked to continue our talk.”

But no. Cid was starting to seriously think about marrying Niku, so I decided to cut the conversation short and hurry home. Considering how the duel was on such short notice, he wouldn’t be able to stop us if I said we had pressing business back home. *Not that we actually do!*

“Lady Kuroinu. In the future I would like to visit your town as well. Would you mind giving me a tour of Goren when I arrive?”

“...If Master permits,” Niku said, glancing my way. Cid stopped giving Niku a passionate look and shifted to giving me a pleading look.

“...If we have the time,” I replied, getting the feeling that if I didn’t grant permission here I would get caught in a “But thou must” loops until I caved. And with that done, we fled Dragg.

Count Lodol’s Perspective

“H-Hrmmm... Ah! I recognize this ceiling! So I was asleep all along... Thank goodness that was a dream.”

“...Milord? Milord! Finally, you’re awake!”

Count Lodol woke up to find a familiar ceiling and his trusty steward by his side.

“Hm? Ooh, yes, today is the day we deal the final blow to that fraudster. I must prepare... Guh.” Count Lodol got out of bed, but found himself wavering on his feet. The steward speedily moved to support him. “Goodness gracious, what an awful dream that was. I dreamt that my greatest knight, Sir Duston, was pounded against the ground by that strange masked maid. That... That was a dream, yes?”

“Unfortunately milord, that was not a dream at all. It truly happened...”

“This cannot be...” Count Lodol’s strength drained, and he stumbled. But still, he couldn’t believe it. He just could not process that Duston had truly been trounced in battle, like a fish being knocked out by a fisherwoman.

“So you’ve awoken, Count Lodol,” came Cid Pavella’s voice. Apparently he was also in the room. Count Lodol had missed him because he was so sma—ahem, because he was standing behind the steward.

“Wh-Why hello, Lord Cid. It is a pleasure to see you.”

“Indeed. I will not charge you for the Restoration Magic,” he replied. Apparently, the two of them hadn’t been in the room by coincidence, but rather had been administering Restoration Magic under the steward’s watch. “Now then, Count, we have business to discuss.”

“...And what might that business be?”

“I have decided to live in Dragg for now, to ensure that you show no disrespect to Sir Keima Goren, the living legend.”

“Come again?! Ngh, grrr... L-Lord Cid, you are being deceived!” Count Lodol exclaimed. Having no idea what else to say, all he could do was continue to treat Keima like a liar. But Cid just looked at him with exasperation.

“If Sir Keima had not forgiven you, I was considering confiscating your land. You would do well to thank him.”

“But why?!”

“If you truly do not understand, there is no hope for you. Keima Goren is a true man of legend. There is no doubt that may be cast on that.”

“Impossible! That man could never be a legend...! Ah, I see! The only impressive one we saw was that slave girl! The man himself is naught but a fraudster!”

“Even if that were so, Emperor Lionel celebrated his accomplishments and granted him a noble title. Will you cast doubt upon the emperor’s decision?”

Not believing in Keima would, in other words, be not believing the emperor himself. Cid spoke to drive that point home to Count Lodol. However...

“I am a noble serving the royal Pavella king. Thus, there is no need for me to

obey the emperor, and no need for me to accept a fraudulent legend,” Count Lodol spat out, twisting logic to his benefit.

One must understand that Pavella was once an independent kingdom. It became a duchy only after the Laverio Empire invaded and conquered it. The same was true for Tsia, and the royal families of both kingdoms switched to serving the empire, alongside their noble vassals.

However, that happened over a hundred years ago. That Count Lodol would bring up such ancient history to avoid accepting Keima was beyond exhausting.

Cid sighed. “The last Pavella king existed before I, my parents, and even you were born. What in the world are you even saying...?”

Still, it wasn’t unheard of for people to dredge up that ancient history to serve their needs, and Cid’s father had taught him a technique to use to deal with such people.

“In that case, know that I am the descendant of the last king, and that I accept Sir Keima as a true legend. If you say that I am being deceived, you are saying that the Pavella royal family itself are all fools. Are you prepared to die over this, Count Lodol?” Cid asked. There was no arguing with that. Count Lodol pushing his point would be disrespecting the Pavella royal family, and since they had their roots in pirates that conquered the coast, they traditionally dealt with disrespect by executing the offending party.

“...Your wish is my command,” Count Lodol forced out, bowing his head. He had no other choice.

Keima’s Perspective

The duel was finally over. I called Maiodore over to my chief residence to talk about how I should explain Niku to Cid. While she was there, I could also ask whether she and Niku were still betrothed.

“You may count on me. I shall rub in his face how close Lady K—ahem, how close Kuro and I truly are!” Maiodore declared. And so, I decided to let Maiodore take care of things when Cid came over to visit Goren.

“Putting that aside, there is something we must discuss, Keima,” she

continued.

“Yeah? What’s up?”

...Sadly for me, it was less that she wanted to discuss something and more that she wanted to loudly, thoroughly complain that I didn’t contact her as soon we got back. She came to Goren when Gozou and the others dropped by Tsia, but upon arriving here she realized she could have reunited with Niku much earlier, and boy did she really make me understand how mad she was about that. *I mean... Fair?*

“I am not made of free time! I am busy with my own studies and directing the tutors sent by the Dyne Company in the orphanage! And that is why! The time I spend with Kuro is very, very, very, VERY! PRECIOUS! TO ME!”

“Uhhh... Right.”

“ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME?!”

Ouch. Ever had a loli shriek into your ear? Let me tell you: It hurts real bad.

Anyway, it was only later after she left that I realized I forgot to ask her how I should explain everything to Cid, but, well, I could probably count on Maiodore to sort all that out. The less I had to get involved with that mess, the better.

And thus, several days later, Cid came to Goren as he had announced ahead of time. He was wearing normal townspeople clothes, but his hair and whatnot were so clean that anyone could tell he was a noble. His guard looked like a normal adventurer, at least, so they didn’t draw any suspicion.

“Hello there, Lady Kuroinu, Sir Keima. I’ve come to visit.”

“...Sure. Thanks for coming,” I said, welcoming Cid into the parlor of my chief residence. I went ahead and had Niku go get Maiodore.

“...Y’know, it just hit me that neither you nor Count Lodol speak in a Pavella Accent. I’ve got a lot of people from Pavella in my town, and I kinda thought they all talked like that.”

“Ah, yes. I follow the ways of the central empire. Although it’s known as the Pavella accent, nobles do not have it, and in our region it is known as the dialect of commoners.”

“Makes sense,” I replied. Apparently, his guards spoke thick with Pavellan accents to pass as proper adventurers.

It wasn't long before Niku came back with Maiodore.

“It is a pleasure to see you again, Lord Cidolfus Pavella,” Maiodore said while giving a curtsy. *Huh, guess Cid is just a nickname.*

“Greetings. Nice to see you as well, Mai... Ahem, Lady Maiodore. Feel free to call me Cid. My full name is tedious to say, I know.”

“Oh, no no, I could never address a man I'm not even betrothed to so casually. Surely you understand that, Lord Cidolfus.”

“Yes, but we are also childhood friends... It saddens me to hear you say that.”

“Hmmm. Well, Lady Kuro... ahem, Kuro. What do you think? Should I address a man I'm not betrothed to so casually? Would you consider that shameless?” Maiodore asked, looking at Niku.

“...I think shorter names are more convenient.”

“At Kuro's insistence, I will deign to shorten your name, Lord Cid. And as we are in fact childhood friends, you may call me Mai as well. But I am betrothed to someone else, so take care not to address me without a title.”

“Very well, Lady Mai.”

That conversation felt kind of above me, but it sounded like they had settled things on their own. Perfect.

“Well,” I interjected, “I remember you wanted someone to guide you around town, Lord Cid. And I think I have the perfect person for the job. Would you take care of him for me, Lady Mai?”

“Yes, you may count on me. Shall we go, Kuro? And you as well, Lord Cid.”

“Y-Yes, of course! Thank you for coming with us, Lady Kuroinu.”

“Okay. Goodbye for now, Master.” Niku gave me a small bow, then left with Maiodore to guide Cid around town.

...I should go ahead and make some hamburgers to give her later.

Maiodore's Perspective

At Keima's request, Maiodore was guiding Cid around Goren. Their engagement had only been considered when the tunnel through Tsia Mountain formed, and their families were close enough that it would be difficult for either to reject the proposition without a good reason for it. But the Holy Kingdom was close to Pavella, and due to its influence the coastal duchy had a populace somewhat prejudicial toward beastkin, which made Bonodore the archduke of Tsia hesitant to send his Avian daughter over to be wed.

That said, Maiodore knew that Cid himself wasn't prejudiced against beastkin in the least. They had played together at the imperial capital as kids before. She had no problem guiding him through town. In fact, it was like she was going on a walk with a neighboring kid.

"Now then, Lord Cid. I shall give you a tour of Goren. Please follow me."

"Indeed. Thank you, Lady Mai."

Maiodore took the lead, holding hands with Niku and guiding Cid. Incidentally, she was wrapping her fingers around Niku's as they held hands, turning it into what was commonly known as the "Lover's Handshake"—a hard to miss signal that they were close. Maiodore's plan was to shove their close relationship into Cid's face as soon as possible, and her success was so assured that Maiodore laughed to herself in confidence. After all, she had gotten straight to work showing how casually she called Lady Kuroinu just "Kuro." Her plan started off with a powerful two-hit combo.

"L-Lady Kuroinu. I see you aren't wearing your clothes from before."

"Correct. That's the inn's uniform."

"Oh, I see. Hm. It looked very good on you."

Nonetheless, Cid was talking with Niku casually. Or, well, maybe his cheeks were a bit too red to call it "casually."

"So, Lady Kuroinu, where will you be guiding me first?"

"...Where are we going, Mai?"

"Let me see... Where would you like to go, Lord Cid?"

None of them had thought that far ahead, however, so their questions looped in a circle. Cid fell into thought.

“I would like to see the shops first, I believe. I have heard much of the Goren Beet stands.”

“Not Goren Beets, Golem Beets. And might I say that I much prefer the Dragon Beets to them,” Maiodore said, correcting Cid’s mistake. However...

“Hm? I have heard that they were called Goren Beets as a fusion of Golems and Goren. Have you not heard of them?”

“...No, I haven’t.”

“This is the first time I’m hearing that name,” Niku added.

Neither she nor Maiodore had heard it before, but the merchants Cid had talked to had definitely spoken of Goren Beets.

“That is surprising. To think that they weren’t called Goren Beets despite being founded in Goren...”

“Sometimes mistakes are made,” Maiodore observed.

“Speaking of which, I’ve heard some people say they so rarely mention the town’s name that they forget it’s Goren entirely,” Niku added.

“Now that’s ridiculous!” both Maiodore and Cid said at the same time. Niku was, of course, referring to Keima. Though he was trying to use the name more and remember it now that there was a neighboring town.

In any case, the group went to Dyne’s store at Cid’s request.

“This is the Dyne Company. It’s the biggest store in Goren, and you can buy almost anything here,” Maiodore explained.

“Fascinating. I see there are not just daily necessities, but products aimed at adventurers as well,” Cid said while picking up a potion and holding it up to the sun to shine light through it. “The color is consistent without a speck of impurity. I see they deal in high-quality goods here.”

“Is that how it looks to you?”

“Yes. There are some exceptions, but in general the quality of a potion is

reflected in the depth of its color. A solid color such as this will perform quality healing... That said, I suppose I don't need to explain something like this to an adventurer of your caliber, Lady Kuroinu."

"Oh, no. This is my first time hearing that. I've never used a potion before."

"What? Truly?"

It was hard to believe that a frontline fighter like Niku could have survived without using potions. For a normal adventurer that would just mean not healing the wounds they received in battle, but Niku's body seemed free of any marks that could be considered scars or wounds.

"When I get hurt, Master casts {Healing} for me."

"I see. I forgot that Keima was a priest as well."

"Right. He used it the other day when a wooden sword gave me a splinter."

Cid considered that a little overprotective. Although she was a member of the party of legends that defeated a Dragon, Niku Kuroinu was still a slave. Or really, considering she was powerful enough to join such a party, it was unthinkable for someone to go out of their way and cast Restoration Magic on her over such a minor wound.

But Cid's thoughts were interrupted by Maiodore beckoning him over and whispering into his ear. "Kuro is, in truth, Keima's child."

"Ah...!"

It all came together at once. They both had black hair and dark eye colors, after all. If her mother were a dark-skinned beastkin everything would click into place. Keima seemed a bit young to have such an older daughter, but it wasn't rare for appearances to be deceiving.

"I-In that case, why does Lady Kuroinu have a slave collar?"

"Nobody knows. But even her name was given to her by Keima. There must be profound circumstances at work... Take care to tell no one of this, understand?" Maiodore said, and Cid nodded.

Next they went to a Golem Beet stand, or rather a Goren Beet stand.

“One dradragolgol, please.”

“You got it, miss! One dradragolgol coming right up!”

Maiodore smoothly ordered and paid for her food, having much experience doing so. A dradragolgol was slang for a set of two Dragon Beets and two Golem Beets.

“Lady Mai, I could pay for this.”

“No need. I shall treat you today. It may not look like it, but I am earning my own money.”

“Oh? Has the Tsia family started a business?”

“We have, but I am referring to the fact that Kuro and I work as adventurers together,” Maiodore replied, causing Cid to look at Niku. “That said... We are only doing quests that earn a minor amount of money.”

“I see. Still, it is impressive and admirable that you would work for your own money from such a young age. I imagine you’ll be safe with Lady Kuroinu at your side.”

“But of course. Incidentally, we have one more member in our party,” Maiodore said just as the beets were finished. Niku went ahead and got them.

“Mai. Here.”

“Thank you, Kuro. Ahaha. Dragon Beets always taste better when you give them to me.”

“Here, Cid.”

“Thank you,” Cid said before taking the Golem Beet and taking a bite. Niku went ahead and gave one to Cid’s guard as well, which Maiodore watched with a smile.

Indeed. That was why Maiodore had ordered four of them. It was a high-level technique that showed she and Niku shared the same ideas without even having to communicate them. All to shove in Cid’s face just how much th—

“Incredible! These certainly do taste better thanks to Lady Kuroinu handing them over!”

“Is it not because they are baked fresh?”

...Despite everything, Cid paid it no mind and spoke to Niku with a smile. Grrr. *I suppose I am being too subtle...* Maiodore thought to herself, grumbling but also finding the way her fiancée was nomming away on a beet to be cute. It felt like she had mastered the art of eating like a cute rabbit, which she had already been great at before.

“...Oh? Kuro. There seems to be one extra Dragon Beet.”

“He gave it to me for free. We can give it to Michiru later.”

“Hrm. Is that the third party member you spoke of?” Cid ask.

“Indeed. Which makes the church our next destination,” Maiodore said. And so the party went to the Beddhist Church with the Dragon Beet at the ready.

“So this is the main Beddhist church... Incredible. I never thought it would use this many magic tools.”

“Really? Is the church they built in Dragg really so different?”

“Very. Though there’s more empty space in there, giving it a nice breezy atmosphere inside. Hmm... I see the bookshelves here truly are filled with books. And you can read them as much as you like?”

“If you are a worshiper, yes,” Maiodore said before taking out a Beddhist holy symbol— a coin pendant with a hole in the center— from inside her shirt. Niku did the same, then clinked hers against Maiodore’s. It was the Beddhist greeting that had caught on at some point. Maiodore’s was made of silver, while Niku’s was made of bronze.

“I see. Then I can read them as well,” Cid said, taking out a holy symbol of his own. His was silver like Maiodore’s.

“My, my. I didn’t know you were a Beddhist, Lord Cid. But I’m afraid you didn’t go all the way. If you are undercover as a commoner, you must prepare a bronze holy symbol to wear.”

“Silver is fine, as this identity is a rich merchant.” Cid clinked his holy symbol against Niku’s and Maiodore’s.

I suppose that is smart. Better that than making holes in your cover, Maiodore

thought.

“Sniff sniff... Ah! I smell a Golem Beet! Or actually, a Dragon Beet! Can I eat it? I can! Yaaay, thanks Niku! Nomnomnom.”

Out of nowhere, the group of three children had become four children. Eating the Dragon Beet Niku brought was a pink-haired loli nun named Michiru.

“Wh, wh-wh-wha... What in the world are you wearing?!”

“Hm? Oh, I’ve never seen you before,” Michiru commented before looking down at her clothes. To her, they were normal old nun clothes. But through some mysterious power they clung tightly to her skin, had thin fabric, and had white parts at her chest and stomach that made it seem like her bare skin was being exposed.

“...Now that you mention it, Lord Cid, Michiru’s nun outfit does seem a bit out of the ordinary.”

“You think so? I’m pretty sure it’s normal,” Michiru said. Maiodore glanced around at the other nuns working in the church. Their outfits were all skimpy like Michiru’s, and due to their curvaceous bodies they were all feasts for the eyes. Perhaps this was the work of Pope Keima.

“The fabric’s thin because I’ve worn it so much! And the rest is because of that static electricity stuff. It’s like, really easy for the outfits to stick to your body. This is totally normal! I read about it in the books!” Michiru said, puffing out her chest with pride. Cid averted his eyes. “So, Mai. Who’s this boy?”

“Lord Cid, an associate of mine.”

“...I’m Cid. If I may, I would like to suggest you, ahem, have a little more shame...?”

“Hi, I’m Michiru! And okay, you like girls who are shy and pure! I’ll remember that!”

“What?! L-Lady Kuroinu, do not get the wrong idea! I didn’t mean it like that!” Cid stammered, trying to defend himself. Toward Niku, no less.

Naturally, Maiodore picked up on what that meant. The subtext behind it all. And also, she remembered she hadn’t been clear about something.

“Lord Cid. There is one thing I have forgotten to tell you.”

“Hm? What is it, Lady Mai?”

Maiodore locked arms with Niku. “Lady Kuro is my fiancée, so you can’t have her.”

“...What?” Cid blinked in surprise. “You aren’t betrothed to someone of the same name?”

“There is nobody in the world with this name but her.”

“...Is she a guy?”

“No, both she and I are girls. Don’t you know, Lord Cid? There exists a potion to change your sex,” Maiodore explained coolly as Cid floundered. Thinking back, he realized that Keima had never said a single time that the Dragon-slaying legend and Maiodore’s fiancée were different people.

“...Th-That may be true, but, er... What? You’re both girls, and... your status...”

“Lord Cid. The Tsia house has declared it acceptable for me to marry Kuro. And I agree. I believe it is right! In fact, I want it more than anything! Make no mistake, it is virtuous and socially acceptable!”

“Ngh...!” Cid took a heavy blow from Maiodore’s deadly serious proclamation, but he managed to stay on his feet. “I-I see... You have my blessings then, Lady Mai.”

“I thank you ever so much, Lord Cid.” Mai bowed her head.

The truth was, Cid had been thinking many things over the past few days. “I might want to hand the archduke seat to my little brother and rule Dragg with Lady Kuroinu,” for one. He fantasized all the time, like, “If I were to marry Lady Kuroinu... W-Would she become Niku Pavella? N-No, perhaps she would be Niku Kuroinu Pavella, and I would call her Kuroinu...” But in the end, it was naught but a passing dream.

And as Cid slumped in sorrow, Michiru leaned forward to sniff him. “You smell super tasty, Cid! If you want, I’ll comfort you! You’re cool and handsome, so I don’t even mind sleeping in the same bed!”

“E-Er, no need... I’ll be fine on my own.”

“Michiru, it would be best to leave him alone for now... Lord Cid’s heart has been wounded by losing his first love.”

“No, if we’re talking about first loves, that would actually be you.”

“Did you say something, Lord Cid?”

“No, nothing.”

Maiodore pretended not to hear, and Cid rolled with it to cover. It was honestly kind of brutal that the girl he had fallen in love with was betrothed to his first love. All he could do was try not to think about it before the reality cut too deep. Still, it was beyond shocking in more than a few ways.

“Hm? Are you okay? Do you need to rest?” Niku asked, tilting her head.

“E-Er. I appreciate the kindness. However, I think I will just go home for today,” Cid forced out. Ngh. Her head tilting was too cute.

“Cid, feel free to drop by the church whenever you want! We of Beddhism accept everyone, and we’ll be glad to listen to all your struggles!” Michiru exclaimed, a bright smile on her face. The fact that her smile did shine light on his dark mood showed that despite her small size, she was still a proud Beddhist nun.

And so, Cid trudged his way home on wavering legs, held up largely by his sympathetic guard. Maiodore reported to Keima that Cid had in fact been in love with Niku, and that she successfully stomped all over his heart to make him give up on her. Keima could tell how devastated Cid was, and thus decided to keep the events of the day top secret.

Count Lodol’s Perspective

Three days had passed since Cid had returned, depressed, and locked himself in his room.

“I believe now is our best opportunity to strike. What say you, good man?” Count Lodol said.

“No, no, no, no, Milord. You’re referring to your plan to conquer Goren, no? I think that would be unwise.”

“You fool! I was forbidden from doing so by Lord Cid! Silence yourself!”

“F-Forgive me, milord! What were you referring to, then?”

A grin came across Count Lodol’s face. “Indeed. I plan to learn from Goren and build similar structures. However, this is not intended to harm Goren whatsoever.”

“E-Erm? So, in other words...?”

“Truly you are slow on the uptake. I am saying that by building structures similar to Goren’s, some things may or may not happen that may or may not result in a tragic situation where I am forced to take control of Goren through no fault of my own!”

Building structures in the image of Goren was, in other words, a continuation of his former plot. Count Lodol was thinking about skirting around Cid’s control through clever phrasing. And that would probably work, given how depressed Cid was.

“I see! You truly are a genius, milord!”

“Bwahaha! So yes, I think it is time to approach an angle I ignored entirely before.”

“I see. And, erm... What might that angle be, milord?” The steward asked, waiting to hear what Count Lodol’s next plan was.

“I shall make a dungeon!”

“...A dungeon, sir?” The steward asked, unable to process what he had heard.

“Indeed. It is impossible to deny that Goren is built around its dungeon. And thus, I realized we would have no hope of beating them without one of our own.”

“Excuse me, milord. Is it possible to make dungeons?”

“Oh, you don’t know? Truly you are behind the times... Though that said, I only learned of this recently myself. It seems that the Holy Kingdom has

developed the technology to make artificial dungeons.”

That was news to the steward. “I see. If that’s true, the Holy Kingdom is quite impressive.”

“Quite! And to that end, I bought one using my connections there.”

“Aha... Wait, you bought one?!”

“Though it’s just a contract as of yet. And to be precise, I bought the seed for an artificial dungeon.”

That was also news to the steward. But he could guess that cutting edge technology wouldn’t be cheap. He would have liked for Count Lodol to have informed him of this decision ahead of time, since he did manage the estate’s budget.

“And I certainly got the deal of a lifetime. The seed would normally cost five thousand golds, but I bargained it down to five golds and a piece of junk gathering dust in the storage room!”

“Er, m-milord. Did you get scammed?! You didn’t trade the Lodol treasure passed down through generations, did you?!” the steward stammered. The base price of the seed was exorbitantly expensive, but the price cut was unnaturally dramatic.

“Do not think me so lowly! I can distinguish between my family’s treasure and random junk! I truly did give them a useless, old piece of junk that holds no value. But apparently the High Priestess of Light has some history with it, and she wanted it for a museum.”

That was an understandable reason, more or less.

“I see, but... Are you certain you weren’t deceived? There aren’t any catches?”

“At most, I signed a document saying that on the day I conquer Goren, I will allow them the right to destroy its Dungeon Core. When that occurs they will also give me a new artificial dungeon seed, so I can replace the Core as soon as the deed is done and keep things functioning.”

“I see. So in the end you will just be replacing a dungeon with an artificial

dungeon.”

It was a blank check for ownership of another dungeon. They were basically spending nothing to get it. The deal seemed too good to be true, but the Church of Light was founded on destroying dungeons. It made sense that they would put so much resources into the destruction of a dungeon.

“Not to mention, it seems that the difficulty of an artificial dungeon can be modified by hand! It will be a new era of dungeons regulated and controlled from above!”

“Goodness, that sounds fantastic. Almost as if this is a dream!”

“When I acquire two more seeds in the future, I will line up dungeons of low, medium, and high difficulties right next to each other! Impressive, no? The future is bright!”

“It will become a holy land where adventurers from all over gather!”

The fact that he would have to pay five thousand golds for the third seed had escaped Count Lodol’s mind completely.

And so, it came to pass that Count Lodol would be buying his own dungeon. But there were various restraints with artificial dungeons, and the Holy Kingdom sent over an expert to bring everything over. That expert’s name? Alca, the High Priestess of Light. Count Lodol had met her by chance in the past.

“Oooh, if it isn’t her holiness Lady Alca Lu Ri Chium Nicke Hydride. Thank you for coming.”

“...Allow me to correct you. The former High Priestess of Light is dead. My name is Alca Lu Nicke Hydride, and I have nothing to do with her. Please feel comfortable addressing me as Alca.”

“Yes, yes. Of course, Lady Alca. How could I forget?”

Alca the High Priestess had been forbidden from entering the empire. But that ban was for the former High Priestess, Alca Lu Ri Chium Nicke Hydride, and not the current one. Or that was her cover story, anyway. Given her importance in the Holy Kingdom, the steward elected to believe her entirely.

“I am truly grateful that you would accept my humble proposition, Count

Lodol.”

“Bwahaha! What can I say, it sounded like a good idea to me, so why not go through with it? But truly, it is an honor to meet you again, your holiness... oh, excuse me! I forgot that this was our first meeting!”

“Indeed. But my predecessor also expressed her thanks to you. That I can promise,” Alca said with a smile. They both knew well what she really meant by that.

“Is this what you were looking for?” Count Lodol said, gesturing to the item beside him.

“Yes. Thank you very much,” Alca replied, and Count Lodol handed her the bag with the junk she wanted. She put it into her {Storage} without even looking inside.

“...You’re not going to check the bag?”

“You have my full trust, Count. Now, although this is a bit hasty, I say we go plant the artificial dungeon,” Alca said, standing up from her seat. Count Lodol also wanted his dungeon as soon as possible, and thus headed outside his estate, then outside the town entirely.

“There is a trick to finding a good place to establish an artificial dungeon. Mana flows through the earth, and you want to build it in a pure place, where the mana is not too thick.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yes. In opposition to standard dungeons... shall we call them natural dungeons? In opposition to natural dungeons, these are proper dungeons that do not block the flow of mana, so it is necessary they be placed in clean areas without thick mana present,” she said, narrowing her eyes and looking at things that Count Lodol couldn’t see. She kept walking, which meant the area around the town wasn’t suited for it. Count Lodol followed after her.

Eventually, some distance away from the town, she found what she was looking for.

“We shall build the entrance here,” Alca said while taking out a glass bottle

from her chest pocket. Inside was a black, round, squishy-looking thing.

“This is the seed of an artificial dungeon... a Dungeon Seed.”

“Oho... It seems to be a black Slime of sorts.”

“Ahaha. If left to its own devices it will become an Artificial Core, then build an artificial dungeon around it.”

She opened the bottle and dropped its contents to the ground. The black Slime-looking thing melted the ground and absorbed the dirt while digging down until it was out of sight.

“The control room should be finished by tomorrow. We shall continue then.”

“Are the controls simple?”

“Of course. An artificial dungeon is a proper dungeon, run by humans in an effective manner.”

The next day, they returned to where the Dungeon Seed had been dropped, and found an entrance leading underground. A new dungeon had been born beside Dragg.

Keima's Perspective

Some strange news reached me through the Adventurer's Guild. Cilia, the receptionist slash chief of Goren's Guild branch office, was visiting my residence's parlor due to them having a quest specifically for me. According to her, a new dungeon had appeared beside Dragg, and they wanted me to investigate it.

“... A new dungeon? Right by Dragg?” I asked. I didn't remember making a dungeon over there. Maybe Ittetsu had stretched out his dungeon to give Igni a place to play, but a quick check confirmed that wasn't the case.

“Indeed. It seems that Dragg *developed* it themselves.”

“Developed, huh? That's a weird way to word it.”

“Reports indicate it's an artificial dungeon built using the Holy Kingdom's technology. They refer to it as a new, *proper* kind of dungeon that is entirely

managed by humans.”

When she said ‘Holy Kingdom’s technology,’ the first person I thought of was Alca the High Priestess, who had been forbidden from entering the empire ever again. She was a dangerous woman that once used the opportunity of a Black Slime (Wolf) occupying a room of the [Cave of Greed] to try and destroy our Dungeon Core.

And now, her kingdom was introducing artificial dungeons. That was suspicious. A little too suspicious. Why would a kingdom literally built around destroying the crap out of dungeons go out of their way to develop the technology necessary to make dungeons of their own? They had to be plotting something. There wasn’t a doubt in my mind.

“I imagine,” Cilia began, “that considering how dungeons give birth to infinite wealth, they as a society were unable to keep denying their gifts.”

“And that’s why they made their artificial dungeons—‘proper’ ones, according to them.”

“That is the most likely explanation,” Cilia said, pushing her glasses back up. “Putting aside whether they are truly artificial, as a dungeon it needs a difficulty ranking set by the Adventurer’s Guild. What we’ve confirmed so far is that, erm, strangely weak Iron Golems can be found within.”

“Strangely weak, huh? Is that ‘cause the dungeon’s artificial?”

“That is one possibility, but we had an alchemist investigate and they concluded that the iron within them is of extremely poor quality. And while it is of a fairly low amount, there is a mineral within the iron that is poisonous to the human touch.”

Uh, that’s pretty scary.

“Is that, like... fine?”

“The metal must be handled with care. As the Adventurer Guild’s representative, I have decided we will need to put an outpost by the dungeon entrance to inspect and purchase the metal right away. It is already being made posthaste as an in-progress quest.”

Incidentally, the Iron Golems in Goren's [Cave of Greed] were known for their immensely high level of quality, and you couldn't find better iron anywhere.

"So basically, you want me to check it out myself, just to be safe."

"You do have a spotless track record in this regard. Who better to do the job?"

It was true that my accomplishments included covering every inch of the [Cave of Greed], down to the bottom-most floor, and making a perfect map of the [Flame Caverns'] first five floors. *But those are all built on fraud! Under-the-table coordination! And so, I'm going to reject this quest. My B-Rank is just for show!*

"I would like to refuse if I can, given how busy I am with my town chief and pope work. Surely other adventurers will be more than capable of this."

"...If you insist, then. Given that the dungeon certainly is managed by humans, it is unlikely that it will be all that dangerous, and sending others should be fine," Cilia said with a sigh. She sure backed off quickly. "If need be we will post a rescue mission for you to complete."

"...Sure, alright." *I wouldn't mind that if the dungeon really was being managed by people. But make no mistake—I know this artificial dungeon's gonna fly off the handle and Dragg won't be able to control it. I'm kind of an expert on these kinds of things.*

Oh, I should go talk to Ittetsu about the artificial dungeon. And I definitely need to give Haku a report on this...

Anyway, the next day rolled around. I backed down on being too busy for the quest and went over to Dragg's artificial dungeon. With me were Ichika, Niku, and Igni as an investigator from the [Flame Caverns]. The four of us would be heading into the dungeon. Ichika was in her masked maid outfit.

Haku knew about artificial dungeons as a concept, but she didn't know how they functioned whatsoever, and Ittetsu hadn't even heard of them at all—either way, I didn't learn anything new from either of them. In fact, Ittetsu said he was feeling kind of off, and wanted to know if the artificial dungeon was at fault. That was why Igni was with us. On the surface she was fulfilling a

bodyguard quest to help us, but she was stronger than any of us all on her own, so we'd be relying on her if the time came.

We showed our quest slip to the guild members at the under-construction office by the entrance, then found an abrupt set of stairs heading down. It reminded me of the rabbit dungeon, which also had a random staircase in the middle of a grassy plain.

"Hm. Seems like this dungeon is pretty new. There're no cracks in the staircase, and no moss is growing."

"Master, my man, I know you're just copying what that veteran adventurer did back at the rabbit place. Plus we already, like, knew this was a new dungeon, remember?"

Look, I just wanted to try it too! Give me a break!

We started climbing down the staircase, and soon found a door on the right with an "Employees Only" sign on it. The dungeon proper was farther down the stairs, with the "control room" and the Artificial Core being on the right.

...Igni pulled on my sleeve. "Uncle, I wanna look in that room. Can we?"

"We can since we have guild permission, but they told us not to touch anything. Alright? Just look, no touching."

"Okaaay!"

And so, we entered the control room. Inside was indeed a Dungeon Core. But it was pure black. It didn't shine white like a normal Dungeon Core, instead having an all-consuming darkness that seemed to suck you inside of it. Honestly, one had to question if this truly was the Core of a "proper dungeon" as the Church of Light called it.

Not to mention, there was a cable connected to the black Dungeon Core, leading to a crystal screen monitor thing. The only problem was, the monitor was pitch black too. I could imagine that some things related to managing the dungeon would pop up there, but...

"Just looking! I'm just looking!" Igni declared while sticking a hand into her shirt and pulling out a sharp, angled rock. It looked like any old rock you might

find on Tsia Mountain.

“What’s with that rock?”

“It’s not a rock! It’s a Rock Bug! I brought the smallest I could!”

Reptile legs extended from beneath the rock. It sorta resembled a crab, and apparently it was a monster type in the [Flame Caverns]. *Oh yeah. They told us not to touch anything, but never anything about not leaving anything. That thing’s a living spy camera.*

...But speaking of which, we were in a dungeon ourselves. It was possible our own actions here were being spied on. At the moment we couldn’t see anything, but with a monitor over there they could potentially be recording everything we did. *Oh shit.*

I hurriedly snatched the Rock Bug Igni was trying to set on the ground. “Hey, hey, hey! Don’t play pranks like that. I’m the one who’ll get in trouble here.”

“Wha! Quit it, uncle!” Igni hopped on the ground to try and get the bug back, so I leaned forward and whispered into her ear.

“...Igni, it’s a bit late for me to say this, but be careful about what you do and say here. This is technically a dungeon.”

“Wha...? Oh!” Igni fell silent, and I gave her the Rock Bug back. She put it away sadly. *Yep, yep, she looks just like a kid who got scolded for a prank. Perfect.*

That said, I did want a spy camera in the control room. Hm... Maybe I could send in a spider later. It wouldn’t be strange at all for a little bug to slip into a room people were going in and out of.

We left the control room and got back to exploring the dungeon. Next would be a place all adventurers could enter, rather than an employees-only section.

“Hey, hey, tiny girl. They said this place has Golems, right?” Igni asked.

“Yes, that’s what I heard,” answered Niku, and at that moment a Golem turned the corner we were about to reach, entirely as if it had been waiting for that question to be asked. Igni sucked in air, then—

“{Breath}...! Okay!”

—exhaled fire that melted the Golem in a split second. The pungent smell of rotten eggs filled the air.

Eugh, that actually hurts my nose. Is this, what, hydrogen sulfide? I thought, casting {Purification} while avoiding breathing any in.

“...Igني, don’t breath fire here.”

“Wait, why?”

“It stinks and I’m pretty sure the Golem air is poisonous. I kinda want a gas mask... Wait, Niku, are you okay?” I looked her way and saw that for once she was actually expressive—her nose was scrunched up and tears were in her eyes. Looked like the smell was a bit much for a beastkin nose.

“I’m not sho good...”

“You’ll probably get a bit used to it over time, but it did seem kinda poisonous... Hold your breath, I’ll cast {Purification},” I said before doing just that to cleanse the inside of her nose. Niku twitched and trembled for a second, then went back to normal. Meanwhile, Ichika and Igني investigated the Golem corpse. Ichika, the absolute mad ladette, ground a thumb against the Golem, then licked it.

“Oof. Most of this is iron, but it’s got a lotta other junk mixed in too—arsenic, lead, sulfur, and bronze for sure, and that’s just what I tasted from one lick.”

You can tell all that from the taste? What, does Ichika have a skill that lets her identify things from what she eats?

“Uh-huh, it tastes kinda good!”

“...Igني, girl, you eat Golems?” Ichika, the biggest hypocrite alive, asked.

“Uh-huh! I... u-um, not me, but Dragons! Dragons love eating these kinds of things!” Igني said, switching some words around after remembering my warning.

“Riiight. Reminds me of that weirdo wolf Slime that liked eating white plates. Guess monsters just, like, love eating things humans don’t.”

“My mom said poisonous stuff gives a nice sharp flavor that goes well with beer!”

“Girl, you know that poisonous metals, like, stick around in your body for a long time, right?”

Monsters were so biologically different from humans that they weren't a very good reference when poison got involved. Living creatures were one thing, but Slimes and Ghosts were in just another realm entirely. I wouldn't be surprised if Dragons could just excrete mineral poisons through waste or something.

“Either way, Master, looks like the report about the Iron Golems being hella poisonous was right on the money,” Ichika said. The Iron Golem we had just encountered did have more iron than anything, so it still counted as such. It was so weak because all the impurities impacted its structural stability.

We put the Golem's corpse in {Storage} and continued our exploration, but all we encountered were more Golems.

“What's with the lack of traps, for real? I know they said there wouldn't be any, but this is kinda wack,” Ichika said, scouting ahead with a hand tapping the walls.

“Igny, can you feel anything?” I asked.

“Mmm. Dunno. It does kinda feel like it's pushing into the [Flame Caverns'] territory, though?” she said, and with that in mind, the artificial dungeon was definitely to blame for Ittetsu feeling off. Given that he felt us opening a hole in his dungeon and came charging right over, he probably felt his body was being opened up from the side.

“How're you holding up, Niku? Ah... Okay, no need to answer. Want me to carry you?”

“...Forgive me, Master. I am nothing but dead weight...”

I carried Niku on my back since she was still groggy from the Golem stench. *Well, it's thanks to Niku reacting so fast that I managed to cast {Purification} before really smelling it myself, so I guess she actually is useful? Don't worry, Niku. And either way, my {Storage} is filling up so we'll probably be going back soon.*

The investigation concluded unremarkably. We cast {Purification} on our bodies, delivered the Golems to the Guild, and got our money. They gave us a

third as much as the Iron Golems in the [Cave of Greed] did, but considering the low quality of the metal that was only fair.

...Also, I kept one of the Golem's fingers to give to Igni. Looks like nobody noticed. These Guild workers sure are slackers. But you can't really expect too much from humans.

Anyway, the plan was for us to go back there tomorrow, but...

"It is nice to meet you, Keima. I am the High Priestess of the Church of Light, Alca Lu Nicke Hydride. You may call me Alca."

"...Uh, I'm pretty sure we've met before."

At the dungeon entrance awaited a familiar green-haired woman—Alca, the High Priestess of the Church of Light. *The heck is she doing here? Wasn't she banned from entering the empire? Haku told me that herself.*

"Ahaha, I see that I could not fool you, Keima... Truly, this is the power of love. But due to tragically unfortunate circumstances, we cannot presently engage in a holy union."

"No, I mean, I'm pretty sure literally anybody could recognize you."

"Incidentally, the official story is that I and the deceased *former* High Priestess, Alca Lu Ri Chium Nicke Hydride, are entirely different people. Please take care not to confuse this in public. Oh, and the name of the High Priestess is passed down from generations, so there is nothing suspicious about our names being similar."

Man, she's really just flat-out talking about her cover story here. I've gotta go tell Haku about this. Also, what do you mean "deceased?" You revive when you're killed. I didn't just forget about that.

"So, what brings you here, High Priestess?"

"Ahaha. The artificial dungeon, of course. I am in the process of managing it."

"Ah, right. I did hear it was made in the Holy Kingdom."

"Indeed. Shall I plant one by your town as well, Keima? So that your people may be blessed with a proper dungeon, instead of the demonic hellhole currently plaguing them."

“No thanks.”

“...Ahaha. You are the same as ever, Keima.” Alca put a hand over her mouth and giggled in amusement.

...Yeah, this is gonna be a bit confusing since Beddhism has its own High Priestess. I hate to say it, but I’m gonna have to consider calling her by her name.

“Uncle, who is this person? Do you know her?” Igni asked, interrupting my thoughts with some pokes.

“Hm? Oh, yeah. She’s the High Priestess of the Church of Light. The farther you stay away from her the better,” I said. Igni moved to hide behind me, but Alca slid right past to talk to her. She held out her right hand with a ridiculously fishy smile on her face.

“I am Alca. It is a pleasure to meet you, young lady.”

“...Okay?” Igni tilted her head and shook Alca’s hand.

Alca then turned to Ichika in her mask and smiled. “Ahem, you are Ichika beneath that mask, no? What might be compelling you to disguise yourself?”

“Y’know, circumstances and all that. Pretty sure it’s something similar for the both of us,” Ichika replied. She had spent a lot of time serving the High Priestess back at the inn, and apparently they had gotten close enough for Alca to recognize her despite the mask.

In either case, Alca accompanied us on our second day of exploration. Just like the first day, we encountered only fragile Golems, and there were no traps to speak of. Alca took the lead and smashed through all the Golems with her massive battlehammer, which meant we didn’t have to fight any ourselves.

“Hammers truly are the best for fighting these Golems,” Alca commented. She didn’t use a hammer like that last time I saw her, but as the High Priestess of a religion built around fucking dungeons up, she had mastered all sorts of weapons and selected which one to use based on the foes she was fighting.

“Do you understand how safe this dungeon is now?”

“...Well, the Golems do seem pretty poisonous.”

“You think so? Their poison is nothing to one with a little resistance,” Alca said while hefting a Golem corpse. “If you are still worried, I can make special arrangements and show you the dungeon actually being managed, Keima. Special arrangements *just* for you.”

“Oh, you don’t mind?”

“Of course not. You and I are bound by fate and love. This is very... mmm, *special* treatment indeed.”

Alca’s suggestion came out of left field. We followed her into the employees-only control room from before. Just like yesterday, there was the black Dungeon Core with a cable connecting it to a stone tablet connected to a crystal monitor. Alca pressed a hand against the tablet without a moment’s hesitation, and within seconds a clear screen like a dungeon menu floated off the tablet. *Oh, so that’s how it works. Neat.*

“What do you think? This is the magic tool that controls the dungeon.”

“Consider me surprised. I didn’t think it was a magic tool at all.”

I leaned forward to look at the screen and saw that there were three gauges. One was for spawn type, one was for spawn rate, and one was for difficulty. They were set to lowest, medium, and lowest, respectively. *I see. So the dungeon’s set to a pretty low level right now.*

“This does seem to be good for managing a dungeon.”

“Wonderful, isn’t it? With this we can create dungeons ruled by human hands—proper dungeons, functioning as they should.”

“I see...”

It seemed like there wasn’t any way to precisely control the dungeon. In fact, there was no way to control the items or monsters specifically, and there didn’t seem to be a monitor function. Though it was still possible that they were just hidden somewhere I couldn’t see.

“Is there an option to see a map of the whole dungeon?”

“There is. You can even modify the dungeon’s structure to some extent if you attempt to do so,” Alca replied while turning off the menu.

Hm... There are still a lot of things I'm curious about, but I think I should be satisfied with just seeing how they run the dungeon for now, I thought, and despite our hesitation we decided to leave the dungeon for the day.

And so the second day of our investigation came to a close. I once again had Ichika write up a report and deliver it to the Guild. There were no traps, and the only monsters were weak Golems. It was safe to say that the dungeon was being properly managed at the moment, and if there were no problems with it, normal adventurers would probably be let in after a few more days.

As for Igni, she, as part of the [Flame Caverns], wanted to go in and investigate once more. *As for me, I'll go send some spiders into the artificial dungeon once I've finished writing a letter to Haku.*

And so, while getting Haku to protest that the High Priestess was the same person with a different name, I spent the next few days just observing the artificial dungeon.

Count Lodol's Perspective

Several days had passed since the artificial dungeon, the [Golem Graveyard], was opened to the public. A branch office of the Adventurer's Guild had been built nearby just as Count Lodol hoped, but the dungeon itself was quickly turning into a Goblin's nest due to the lack of traffic—or rather, it would be if it weren't for the poison driving even Goblins away.

“But why?! Why won't those foolish adventurers go to my dungeon?!” Count Lodol complained while slamming a fist against his desk.

“M-Milord... I believe the problem lies with the unnatural nature of the Golems.”

“Is it not ideal for the enemies to be weak?! What, do they want a sense of pride and accomplishment or something?! Why must adventurers always crave such foolish things?! Money, it's all about the money! You do work for money and nothing else! Do your jobs, adventurer scum!”

“Er, they are doing their jobs, milord. Just in Goren's dungeon instead...”

“But why?!”

“Er, ignoring the monsters being weak, I believe the poison may be a problem?”

“Gr, grrr...!” Count Lodol grunted. He couldn’t very well argue against people disliking poisonous areas. And personally speaking, he wasn’t a fan of the name [Golem Graveyard]. It sounded entirely like undead monsters would appear there.

“I will never make my money back at this rate! Maintaining a dungeon is not free, you know!”

Indeed. It had been a great deal to establish the artificial dungeon for only five golds and some junk, but there was an operating cost to keep the dungeon running. In particular, it was necessary to feed the dungeon corpses—be they Goblins or animals—which hurt. Goblins could be found throughout the dungeon or within forests, but it was adventurers who hunted those. As manager of the dungeon, Count Lodol would have to go out of his way to buy them.

With the mountain of problems, Count Lodol decided to discuss matters with Alca the High Priestess, as she had been assigned to help him run the dungeon.

“Lady Alca! Is there anything you can do about this?”

“I sympathize with your plight, but the artificial dungeon needs energy to return mana to its proper place.”

“Can truly nothing be done? There is no end to the farmers complaining about us stealing the Goblin corpses they use as fertilizer.”

“Hm... A difficult issue indeed. The truth is, if many people enter and spend time within the dungeon, it will need fewer corpses to eat.”

“Truly?! But this is a problem precisely because nobody is visiting the dungeon!”

“What I am saying is that all your problems will be solved if only people were inside the dungeon. All I can say is, try thinking of a way to gather people within it.”

Count Lodol fell deep into thought. He thought, he thought, and finally

inspiration struck.

“I’ve got it! Thank you, your holiness! The divine light of innovation has struck me!” Count Lodol exclaimed before rushing back to his estate. “Steward! Come forth, steward! Lady Alca has given me a hint to solve this! I need only buy slaves and stuff them into the dungeon! As for their food... We can have them hunt Golems and earn money from the metal! Bwahaha, this will make the dungeon turn a profit, an enormous profit!”

“Oooh! Is that so?! What a genius idea!”

“Indeed! Now, go buy them at once. Ah, and criminal slaves will do just fine. It will be best to buy cheap slaves who can die without issue.”

“Yes, milord, at once!”

And so, a bunch of criminal slaves were gathered into Dragg’s artificial dungeon, the [Golem Graveyard].

Keima’s Perspective

Several days had passed since the [Golem Graveyard] opened to the public, but Ittetsu wasn’t having any further problems besides feeling off. Apparently, he had gotten so used to it that he didn’t even notice it anymore.

But despite the fact that only easy-to-defeat Golems were spawning, the poison within them made few adventurers eager to actively hunt them. They had gone so far out of their way to establish their own dungeon, and it wasn’t even earning them any money. The solution Count Lodol eventually came up with was to buy criminal slaves to explore the dungeon for him. Minus the fact that he was completely skirting around the core problem of his customers not visiting the dungeon, it was actually a pretty solid move. (Due in part to the Guild office by the dungeon—only adventurers were allowed in—but Count Lodol had registered all of the slaves as adventurers.)

“.....”

Anyway, they got slaves not just from Pavella, but from Tsia as well. Through one of my spiders, I could see the room in the [Golem Graveyard] that they were all stuck exploring, and suffice to say, something caught my eye. Most

criminal slaves had nasty looks in their eyes and hardly listened to orders. They weren't the happiest bunch. And yet, half the slaves in the dungeon were actively hunting Golems, each with bright, eager looks in their eyes.

They were the slaves from Tsia. And, to be clear, they were remnants from the Last Commune, that criminal organization I busted some time ago. And, to be even more clear, just in case, they were the people who I (as Succuma) had charmed to work hard and make up for their sins by doing good deeds.

"What's wrong, Keima? You look upset," Rokuko said, hugging me from behind as I looked into the [Golem Graveyard] in my room.

"Rokuko. Nothing much, I was just thinking about how the sins of my past have finally caught up to me."

"Sins of your past, hm? Do those criminal slaves have something to do with it?" Rokuko asked, peering at the monitor I had up. She was close enough for our cheeks to rub against each other. I closed the monitor, feeling a bit thrown off by her softness and sweet smell, neither of which I was entirely used to yet.

"W-Well, pretty much."

"Hmm. Are they connected to the criminal organization you brought down, I wonder?"

Ngh, she's sharp. Rokuko's been so smart lately it's actually kind of a problem. That theory about the complexity of a dungeon being to a Dungeon Core like wrinkles on a brain are to humans is holding a lot more weight now...

Given that the criminal slaves were split into groups based on where they were bought, with only one group being sent in each day, it wouldn't be too hard to make contact with just the Tsia side.

"Guess I should go see how things are myself..."

"Wait, won't you get kidnapped again? Are you sure you'll be okay?"

"...Hahaha, I don't think that'll happen again." But I should bring my Succubus ring just in case, anyway. Worst case scenario, I can use it to control them...

Yes, there was a time when I so foolishly thought that.

"Sister... I love you! I love you so much! Sniff sniff!"

“My lovely little sister! You came to visit me because I’m working hard just like you told me to, right?! I’m moved! Sniff sniff!”

“Mommy! Aaah, mommy! I’m so happy I get to see you again! Sniff sniff sniff!”

Yeah, yeah, here I am. It’s everyone’s cute idol, Succuma. Siiigh...

Like anyone else could have seen coming a mile away, I was surrounded by thuggish-looking guys sniffing my hair. I forbade them from touching anywhere else, but it still sent shivers down my spine.



I fucked up. Like, alright, here's how it went down. I went to the dungeon to check things out, hanging some distance away from the dungeon's entrance so I could spy on the criminals from afar. But as they left to return home, one of them noticed something.

"This smell... Big sis?" He said, and instantly every single one of them narrowed their eyes. They wore the looks of hunters searching for their prey. I ran away. At the time, I had thought I'd had a good idea, but the direction I fled in was the worst possible choice. If I had at least gone to the [Cave of Greed]'s territory, Rokuko could have picked me up, but instead I fled to a nearby forest. I was being hunted by criminal slaves who were used to capturing people in more ways than one, and I fled to a forest. Despite my golem assistance, they surrounded me in no time, providing me with no escape.

Once surrounded, they spoke quickly. "He looks familiar." "No way... Could it be?" "Maybe it's her, changing form?" "That's possible." "S-So this guy is actually her?" "Sister?" "My sister?" "My beloved daughter!" "Honey!" "My queen!" and so on. They called me by different titles, but still, they knew who I was. Criminals could be so perceptive it was scary. Maybe it was due to them always carefully observing their prey.

Having no other choice, I used the fact we were deep in a forest and away from prying eyes to transform into Succuma, which was so convenient and powerful of a form that my emotional resistance to it had fallen pretty significantly. Unfortunately, everyone lost their minds and immediately leaped right at me.

"H-Halt! Sit down, stay!" I shouted, and all the criminals froze with bloodshot eyes. But their restraint was like a thin string about to burst at any moment. I had to do something to calm them down, and that was how I got into my current predicament.

"Aaah, my lovely sister... Must I content myself with just your hair? Please, allow me just a brief touch of your skin...!"

"N-No, big bro. You're still in the middle of making up for your crimes!"

"I-In that case, mommy, can I cut off some of your hair and bring it home with me?"

“I’m afraid not, son. You are still in the middle of (etc).”

“Big sis, can I lick your hair?”

“No, you are (blahblahblah).”

“Honey! Please give me headpats!”

“No, darling, you (blahblahblah).”

“My queen... Please step on m—”

“Nooope, (blahblahblah).”

And so, once they finally cooled down, I got to actually talking to them. *Man, I want to cut off all this hair now, but I feel like they’d just take it all home with them. This sucks. Why don’t they feel off about all of them calling me different things? Wait, all of humanity is connected as part of a greater whole? All is one and one is all, so it makes sense I would have so many titles? Uh, this is a little too deep for me.*

“So, mommy, what’re you doing here?” one of the thugs asked me with glittering eyes.

“...Ah, uh, I just saw you were all working hard and wanted to go check up on you.”

“Oh, wow! We are working hard! Are you proud? Are you? Are you?”

“Er, yeah, very proud. You’re all good boys,” I said half-heartedly, and they all smiled with sincere joy. It was a bit weird to see so many thugs smiling like that. *Well... Guess I should use this opportunity to ask them about the artificial dungeon.*

“So, about that dungeon over there. Is there anything strange going on there?”

“Why?”

Asking why, huh? Well, it should be easier to get the information I want out of them if they know what perspective I’m coming from.

“An artificial dungeon, of all things, popping out of nowhere has really got me worried.”

“I see. Sister, fear not. Your big brothers have been given work hunting Golems in the dungeon, but the only thing that’s dangerous there is the poison.”

“So you’re worried for us...! What a kind big sister...!”

“That dungeon’s real bad for making mommy worried!”

“Hold it, hold it,” I interjected. It felt like they were getting off track and taking things in a direction I didn’t want. *Not like I ever expected too much from slaves being put through hard labor and everyth—*

“Speaking of which, my queen. The amount of pure iron within the Golems has been steadily increasing over the past few days, although the price the Guild pays for it has been set to remain the same.”

“...Are you sure about that?”

“One hundred percent. It seems that they are steadily approaching the internal composition of Tsia Mountain’s lava.”

...And out of nowhere, the thug who called me a queen had given me some pretty valuable information. Apparently, he used to be an alchemist, and he had the knowledge to identify that sort of thing. He checked the internal composition on a whim after noticing that the weight of the Golems was changing each day. *I dunno why a guy that smart was working as a bad guy in the slums, but, well, I’m not gonna ask. I feel like he’s giving me a long story I don’t care about.*

“Nice. That’s some good info. I shall reward you.”

“Th-Thank you very much!”

I gave him a sharp slap across the cheek. *Look, he actually likes this kind of thing, alright? I can tell through the power of my Succubus eyes.*

“God, I wish that were me! Uhhhh, err... Ah! Sister, the Golems have been increasing in number a bit! Yesterday there were five, but today there were six!”

“No fair, no fair! Big sis, the Golems have been getting more slender too. That might have something to do with it.”

“They told us to regularly throw Goblin corpses into the dungeon! Did you know that, mommy?!”

“Right, right! Honey, the corpses just get sucked right into the dungeon floors! It was so shocking I want to show it to you sometime!”

“I licked the dungeon walls, and they’re undoubtedly of the Darkness element. They weren’t poisonous themselves, but they weren’t good for the body. I suggest not resting with your back to the walls, my beloved daughter.”

And so, the thugs hit me with a flood of surprisingly useful information. *They sure have an eye for detail! Seriously, why are they so competent? If they’d just used these skills for good instead of evil, they probably wouldn’t be criminal slaves right now...*

Ultimately, I ended up giving each of them rewards—head pats, hugs, slaps, stepping on them, and so on. The cost of all the valuable information was getting a heavy blow to my sanity. I would once again be sealing Kosaki away for my own mental health. *I’ll give her to Niku for now... This power must never be used by humans. I’m gonna... I’m gonna have Rokuko cheer me up once I get home.*

Former Last Commune Member’s Perspective

Heya! I’m Wonome, the lost sheep! I’m in a pretty good mood, can you tell why? I’m sure you can! Indeed, it’s because I just met my beloved little sister again! She wept over my doing bad things in the Last Commune, and asked us to work to make up for my sins, so yeah. We ended up becoming criminal slaves to make up for everything! How long are we going to be slaves? I care so little I don’t even remember! Ten years and a hundred years are the same to me if it means cheering up my little sister!

And guess what! My little sister... she, she, she really came to see us! Aaah, I’m so happy! She’s the most beautiful girl in the world, and she calls me “big bro” in that cute voice of hers. That alone’s enough to give me the courage to fight a Dragon head-on!

She showed up disguised as a guy at first, but that’s all just a surface thing.

She was probably just shy—once we got her alone, she immediately showed us her true form. Ah man, that was bliss... She cried about being worried for us as we smelled her, and honestly, I could die now and be happy. But that's not gonna happen! I gotta keep working, for her sake!

Incidentally, I'm pretty sure she's the Goddess of Beddhism. After all, a Beddhist holy symbol was hanging from her neck when she transformed. No way is she just a believer. Oh, I used to believe in the evil god, but I quit all that a long time ago. After all, there's no god worth worshiping more than my little sister! Obviously!

When everyone noticed we felt the same way, we briefly had an argument over whether she was a goddess or a saint or a holy mother, but in the end we settled on "holy mother" due to her compassion and occasional strictness. Is there anything better than your little sister being a holy mother (mama)?

...Speaking of which, Hugo always used to call her mama. I wonder what he's doing now? Eh, who cares. I need to get to work atoning for my past sins again! That said, we're doing work in an artificial dungeon. My little sister didn't look too happy about that. She didn't put it into words, but I sensed the hostility in her. I'm good at noticing that kind of thing. Mmm, if she did ask me to destroy it, I'd ignore the collar on my neck and go all out on attacking it. It'd be the start of a holy war. My first target would probably be the employees-only room since there's no boss rooms or anything in the dungeon.

Wait. Count Lodol's lackey, a knight named Duston, strutted into the room where I was and looked down at me arrogantly.

"There's a spider's nest in the control room, go clean it up. Don't do anything unnecessary!" he said.

Oooh. This seems like a good opportunity. Thank goodness for those spiders!

And so, with cleaning tools in hand I entered the employees-only room with the full blessings of its owner!

Oooh, is that black ball in the center that nasty little thing worrying my sister? Let me hit it a few times. Hmm, the black stuff isn't coming off. That's part of my cleaning, so this isn't unnecessary at all. Let me really pound it with my fists.

Nothing happened. Really, it's not my fault this pitch-black ball needs to be cleaned. Let me bust out this Gold Golem shard and grind it against the ball. Mmm, that put a crack in it, but looks like the ball's black all the way on the inside too. Guess that means the ball isn't dirty at all. I should leave it at that.

Actually, is this ball just for show or what? Meh, I guess it doesn't matter. I'm just scouting out the enemy here. I need to be ready to attack the second my little sister asks me to!

...But for now, I'll just finish cleaning. Let's just swipe away this spider's nest.

Also, what's the weird tentacle thing stuck to the black orb? It's kind of getting in the way of my cleaning. In other words, it's necessary for my cleaning to get rid of this... Hmph! Hmmppph!

Guh, it's creaking and stuff but I can't get it off the ground. Enough of this, I'm just gonna leave it at that for today. Clean, clean, clean, clean...

But seriously, this black ball is pretty unnerving. If it's gonna be black, it should at least be as beautiful as the night sky like my sister's black hair is. Yeah, the fact that I just kicked it as hard as I can was a complete accident, not my fault. Too bad it didn't shatter on the spot.

And so, after memorizing the layout of the room well enough to hit any spot of it with magic from the outside even with obscured vision, I finished my cleaning. Hm? I should go give my boss a report? He didn't say anything in particular about a report, so I'll just tell him I finished cleaning without any issues. Huh? You think there were some issues with what I did? Nah, I disagree. I was just doing my due diligence.

So yeah, sister! Your big brother's gonna work hard to make up for his sins!

Chapter 3 — Count Lodol's Perspective

One night, Count Lodol was throwing a celebration alone in his office.

“Bwahaha! The dungeon's finally earning me money,” he declared while pouring expensive wine into a glass crafted by an artisan. He swirled it in front of his magic tool lamp, watching the red liquid tremble with beautiful fragility as he inhaled the ripe grape scent. With all of his senses satisfied, he finally took a hefty swallow.

“Mmm, as delicious as ever! This wine is well worth the two golds per bottle!” he said, pouring himself another glass while enjoying the flavor lingering in his throat. Count Lodol was in an exceptionally good mood. After all, the dungeon was finally earning him money rather than losing it. Why wouldn't he be in a good mood? Especially considering the dungeon needed fewer Goblins to sustain itself.

The key to this was the slaves he bought being surprisingly hard workers. He split them into the Tsia group and the Pavella group, but the Tsia group worked so hard that he rewarded them a bit with better accommodations. Seeing that, the Pavella group worked a bit harder as well. The end result was the slaves earning back the money he spent to buy them, then making progress on having the dungeon pay for itself.

“...Fwaah, aaah! I feel fantastic. Bwahaha.”

On top of everything, Cid the heir apparent of Pavella was still as depressed as ever, and now he was spending his time in Dragg's Beddhist church. His presence still prevented Count Lodol from going too far, but even in regards to the artificial dungeon, he didn't kick up too much of a fuss. “You did such a thing without asking my permission first...? I do not look well upon that, but I suppose you did what you had to do,” Cid had said in a defeatist tone. In the end the deciding factor was that Alca the High Priestess was observing things until the dungeon stabilized, and would remove the dungeon if there were any problems.

Count Lodol picked up one of the Golem Beets he had prepared as snacks and bit into it. Soon, all of the beets would be his. He was sure of it. And then, a thought occurred to him.

“Ah, of course. I could make even more money faster if I boosted the spawn rate,” Count Lodol mused. Thanks in part to the alcohol flowing through his veins, the idea seemed genius to him. Of course, he had already been raising the spawn rate slowly under the guidance of the High Priestess, but it seemed to him that the slaves could be comfortably pushed much further. They wouldn’t have any problem with a couple more enemies.

He settled on the idea immediately. At once, he set off and stealthily headed to the [Golem Graveyard] on his own. There was a fence surrounding the area to stop people from entering without permission, but he used his town chief key to open it and enter the dungeon. As an employee, he casually strode into the control room without any hesitation. Inside was the same black ball sitting in the center, connected to a stone slate the High Priestess referred to as a ‘monitor.’

“Erm, I believe it worked like this...” He pressed a hand on the slate and activated it. Count Lodol was registered as an operator, so the familiar old setting screen appeared with no problems whatsoever. The three gauges—spawn type, spawn rate, and difficulty—were currently set to lowest, somewhat high, and lowest.

“Let me just modify the spawn rate... Wait, what? My hand must have slipped.” He tried to modify the spawn rate, but for some reason the difficulty went up instead.

“I must put it back at once... Hrm? Hrrrm?” He tried lowering the difficulty, but spawn type went up instead.

“What in the world is going on?” Now spawn type wouldn’t go back to normal either. None of his inputs were working.

“Hrm? I am certain this is how you control it...” Experimentally, he tried to raise the spawn rate again, but all it did was raise the difficulty like last time. He tried lowering the spawn rate, but nothing happened.

“T-Truly, what is happening? Hrm? Hrmmm?” Count Lodol murmured, not

noticing that the cord connecting the monitor to the slate was making sparking sounds. He was focused entirely on trying to get the controls to work properly.

Bzrt. The screen disappeared.

“What?! E-Er, come back!” He struck and rubbed the stone where the screen had been multiple times, but nothing happened. The cord was sparking even louder than before, and a huge crack was forming in the black ball.

“What? Ah!” It was then that even Count Lodol noticed something very bad was happening.

“I-It broke without me doing anything! This isn’t my fault!” Count Lodol exclaimed before attempting to flee the control room. That was when a pitfall appeared beneath his feet.

Keima’s Perspective

“Uncle! HEEELP!” Igni burst into my residence, smashing the front door to pieces in the process. “UNCLE, UNCLEEEE!” she sobbed as she broke through door after door on the way to my room, the locks providing no resistance whatsoever. It was so loud, I woke up in no time and hurried out of my room—I was a bit mad about being woken up, but I knew something serious was going on.

“Calm down, Igni! What happened?!”

“UNCLEEE! Dad’s... Dad’s in trouble! Help him! Follow me!”

I looked down and saw that Igni’s feet were Dragon claws. *This isn’t good.*
“Alright, I’ll go. Just calm down and tell me what happened.”

“Sniff... Dad, um, he was really sick this morning, so...!”

“Ittetsu’s sick? In what way?”

“H-His forehead’s super duper hot! Mom’s looking after him right now, but she told me to go get you!”

“Alright. Let’s go right away.”

Apparently, Ittetsu was in such a bad state that he couldn’t use the place

function, so Redra was looking after him in the bottom-most Boss Room. After telling Rokuko I was dropping by the [Flame Caverns], Igni carried me on her back and headed to the top of Tsia Mountain. Once there, I used the hidden passage built during the Dungeon Battle to go all the way to the bottom-most floor and then the Boss Room where Ittetsu and Redra were.

Eugh, being carried like that made me kinda nauseous... Dang, it's crazy hot in here. It's like the air is actually burning me. Kinda reminds me of a deadly sauna. I don't want to spend too long in here.

"Dad, Mom! I brought Uncle!" Igni shouted as she put a hand on the red door. *Wait, hold on. I can feel some insane heat coming off that door,* I thought, but it was too late.

"Igni, ya idiot! Shut the fuckin' door!" Redra roared.

"What? Eep!"

Igni opened the door just as Redra yelled at her not to, and a pillar of fire burst out of the room. Both she and I were enveloped by it, but only I burned to ashes.

"U-Ugggh..."

...When I woke up, I was lying on my side, completely naked. Or, well, I had a wool robe laid over me. It seemed my {Ultra Transformation}'s revival function had saved my bacon again. *Whew, thank god I'm always transformed into myself. I would have died otherwise. Or, well, I did die, but you know.*

"Ah, Uncle! Are you okay?!"

"H-Heya, Keima... You fuckin' doing alright?"

Igni peered at my face as Ittetsu spoke through the door. The weakness in his voice came either from the guilt of killing me, or just him being sick.

"...How long was I out?"

"Not even five minutes. Igni shut the door and you were fuckin' back in thirty seconds. The hell's goin' on with that? Glad you're alive, but man..."

Huh, that's surprisingly fast. Whew. That surprised me.

“So I died, huh...? What were you thinking, Ittetsu?”

“Er... Sorry ‘bout that. I’m feelin’ sick, y’know?”

On second thought, Ittetsu the great spirit of fire was sick, so much so that Igni the Flame Dragon would describe his forehead as feeling “super duper hot.” It was only logical that a normal human would die just from getting close. And I sure did. *Man... Dying never feels good. Feels like a chill runs down my spine when I think about it. Fantasy worlds sure are filled with danger.*

“Sorry, Uncle! I forgot fire is your weak point!”

“It’s less of a weak point and more something that kills most things... But I guess a pillar of fire is nothing to a Flame Dragon like you.”

“I didn’t think it through! Sorry!” she said, and that was when I realized it didn’t feel hot like a sauna anymore.

“My fuckin’ bad, seriously. Gotta say, I felt like shit when I thought I killed you for real. But don’t worry. I got Redra to give you her protection. You won’t die from fire ever again as long as Redra’s still alive. Only reason you’re on the other side of the door is for safety’s sake.”

Oh yeah? A Red Dragon’s protection seems kinda rare. It’s pretty long-term, too.

“My robe has the same thing, Uncle!” Igni said, at which point I realized that despite being hit by fire that burned me to ashes, the robe was just fine. *Hm... Maybe she just gives her protection to all sorts of things?*

“But yeah, I fuckin’ burned your clothes, so you can have that instead.”

“Oh, the robes? I’d feel kinda awkward about wearing robes while naked,” I said, instead buying underwear and a jersey with the DP I keep on me at all times. *Uhhh, they seem to be sparking a bit... Is the room even hotter than it needs to be? Enough to start fires just by existing?*

“I’ll give them my protection! Hyah! Okay, that should do it, Uncle.”

“Oh, thanks, Igni.” I changed into the jersey now that it wouldn’t catch fire. *As for the orichalcum support... Welp, it sure is a puddle in front of the door. Let me just put that into {Storage}. And honestly, if it’s hot enough to melt orichalcum I*

can't say I'm surprised I died instantly. Good thing I gave Kosaki to Niku. In retrospect, I really didn't think things through, coming here. I'll need to be more careful in the future.

"So, you're feeling sick?"

"Yeah. It's like my power is being sucked away, that kinda thing."

"...Why's it getting hotter in here, then? Seems to me that you're getting more active."

"When my power started gettin' sucked away, the first thing I lost was the power to hold shit back."

"Uh-huh?" So he was getting dangerously active.

"At this rate, Tsia Mountain's gonna erupt."

"Erupt...? Uh. Wait, what?"

According to Ittetsu, Tsia Mountain was actually an active volcano on the verge of erupting violently, but he had been keeping it under control by turning the overflowing fire into DP, eating it, and so on. But now, his dungeon functions were being sealed, and he couldn't hold it back any more.

"Putting aside the eruption, your dungeon functions are getting sealed? Sounds like the Dungeon Eaters again."

"Yeah? That's the bug things you killed a while ago, yeah?" Dungeon Eaters had been discussed by Father at the last gathering, so they were steadily becoming better known throughout the dungeons.

"Rokuko got sick when the Dungeon Eaters attacked, and her dungeon functions got sealed too."

"Huh. You sayin' there's Dungeon Eaters in my dungeon...?"

"Nah. It's possible, but I'm pretty sure something else is to blame here."

"Yeah... I can kinda guess what's causin' the fuckin' problems too."

There was no point dancing around the obvious. Barring some insane coincidences, the artificial dungeon was clearly at fault. If anything else was causing this, that would be the real problem.

“But we do want to rule out Dungeon Eaters if we can, so do a check for them. Redra, Dungeon Eaters do show up on the map, but only after you get visual confirmation of them. You might want to get some subordinates to look around the dungeon closely and make sure nothing’s off.”

“Alright! 112, I’m gonna make sure you’re alright!” Redra roared from behind the door again.

“Keima. Can I fuckin’ ask you to take care of the artificial dungeon for me? Take Igni with ya if you need her. She’s good at fuckin’ shit up.”

“You got it. The only problem is why things got so much worse for you so fast.”

Out of curiosity, I brought up my monitor and looked through the eyes of the rats and spiders I had by the artificial dungeon.

“...What the hell?” I said. The entrance to the artificial dungeon was unrecognizable—it had grown so massive that it swallowed up the fence and branch office that had been positioned close to it. *Yeah, they definitely lost control of this dungeon. It’s clearly going berserk.*

I had the rats search for the control room, but they couldn’t find anything. What they did find, though, were traps. Apparently, the structure of the dungeon had changed pretty dramatically. We couldn’t just invade the place and stealthily destroy the Core in the control room.

“Ittetsu, how long can you hold back the eruption?”

“To be honest, I don’t fuckin’ know. Redra’s here and could hold it back for a day without me, but if I die she’s fucked, too. We don’t got much leeway here. ‘Specially since Igni doesn’t know how to hold back the eruption...”

If Ittetsu died, Redra would die too as his Dungeon Master. The eruption would follow not long after.

“Alright. I’ll make this fast, then.”

“I owe ya one... And my bad, but you’ll have to leave the dungeon on your own.”

With that settled, it was time to go back to my chief residence. We returned

to the secret path and Igni raced to the door connecting the [Flame Caverns] to the [Cave of Greed] while princess carrying me. Once we were in [Phenny's Playground,] we found Elulu the elf ghost I had put in charge of managing the dungeon. *Oh yeah, she spends most of her time here in case Igni visits unannounced.*

"Ah, hello there, Igni. And welcome back, Master?"

"Hi, hi, Elulu! But sorry, I don't have the time to play right now!"

"Hey. Elulu, place me in the chief residence. Igni, you go to Dragg ahead of me."

"Okay! See you later, Uncle!"

"Mmm? I'm not really sure what's happening, but okay. I shall place you."

And so, Elulu used the dungeon function to place me back in Goren. Rokuko was waiting for me there.

"Welcome back, Keima. You have a visitor waiting in the parlor."

"A visitor? Who is it? I'm in a hurry."

"It's the Guild receptionist."

Cilia? She was probably here about the artificial dungeon. I went straight to the parlor to see her.

"Ah. I see you are safe, Keima," Cilia said, looking relieved. Apparently she saw the wreckage of all the doors Igni broke and thought I had potentially been attacked.

"Sorry for worrying you. What's up?"

"We have an urgent, high-priority quest for you. The quest is to save Dragg's town chief, Count Lodol."

"...Uh, what?" *That wasn't what I expected.* "Why does Count Lodol need rescuing, and why is the quest for me?"

"It seems very likely that he was eaten by the artificial dungeon," Cilia began before giving me the details. Apparently Count Lodol headed off somewhere last night, and by morning the artificial dungeon was a mess. The Count himself

was nowhere to be seen. Seeing an obvious connection between the two, Cid gave the Adventurer's Guild a quest to rescue him.

On top of that, I had previously agreed to complete a rescue quest in the event of something happening. *Though I said that in reference to the initial exploration of the dungeon, and then I took it back and did the exploration myself, so I don't actually have to take this quest if I don't want to.*

"...I'll give the quest a shot, as long as it's okay if I can't actually rescue him safely."

"That is fine. All rescue quests are given with failure as a possibility."

And so, I got permission to enter the messed up artificial dungeon. *That said, I don't have a spare life from my {Ultra Transformation} right now. Even considering that Tsia Mountain's about to erupt, I don't want to push myself too far... Oh. I should probably tell that to Cilia.*

"Oh, right. Be careful. Tsia Mountain might be erupting soon."

"Ah?! Wh... What?! Is that true?!" Cilia shot up from her chair in shock.

"An expert on the [Flame Caverns] just told me all about it. All the broken doors you saw here were his daughter rushing to inform me as soon as possible. I went to check out the caverns myself this morning, and things definitely did not look good. It's not holding back the eruption energy like it used to," I explained honestly.

"...Is the artificial dungeon at fault?"

"I can't imagine it being anything else. I'm gonna go destroy it."

"W-Wait just a moment. I know it is an artificial dungeon, but destroying a dungeon without proper investigation first will surely be—"

"It'll be too late once the eruption happens. I'll make sure the higher-ups know this. And I'll take responsibility for whatever happens." *Though I already know Haku will approve since doing anything else would put Rokuko in danger. She told me to keep my eyes open and watch for now, but that also means to destroy it if there's any problems.*

Cilia looked at me with dubious eyes for a second, then caved and nodded in

agreement before leaving.

Alright. It was time to conquer the rampaging artificial dungeon.

“First of all, how’s the inside of the dungeon looking?”

“I sent some rats to investigate. Want to look? It’s kind of crazy,” Rokuko said while bringing up her monitor. “First off, there’s swarms of Golems and Goblin Zombies. There’s a ton of traps too. The structure of the dungeon is changing constantly. If I’m being honest, it’s just completely bizarre.”

Goblin Zombies, huh? I guess they were dumping Goblin corpses in there. Must be due to that.

“The Golems are all misshapen and a lot of them are falling apart. I guess they’re kind of like Golem Zombies in a way. Not really sure if Golems are alive, though.”

So it’s like the monsters are bugging out. Spooky.

“Anyway, that seems like a little too many for us to just invade without a plan.” *Igni could probably sweep through most of them, but the problem is getting Igni into the dungeon in the first place. She’d have to come with me, since I have permission to go in the dungeon.*

.....

Eh... I really don’t want to go into that monster house with zero spare lives.

“Keima. Leave this to me—I have a good idea.”

“You do?”

“Yes. Watch this!” Rokuko declared before slamming a hand down on her menu. Moments later a transparent window appeared that said, *Dungeon Battle Request... Accepted.*

“Looks like it went through. Impressed, Keima? I challenged the artificial dungeon to a Dungeon Battle!”

“Uh?”

Rokuko puffed out her chest with smug pride as the menu turned into a countdown with 59 minutes and 55 seconds left. *Wait. Wait, wait, wait.*

“Now we can send as many monsters as we want into the dungeon! Now, Keima, hurry up and spend the next hour preparin— Ow, ow?!”

I flicked Rokuko’s forehead. “Seriously, Rokuko?”

“Wh-What? Keima, didn’t you not want to go inside their dungeon yourself?!”

“I didn’t, but it wasn’t something I had to avoid at all costs. This Dungeon Battle’s going to put you in danger! What if something happens to you?!”

“It’ll be fine. Our dungeon would never lose to those lame zombies, would it?”

“This Dungeon Battle might get you sick again, like before!” I said, and Rokuko averted her eyes awkwardly.

“...Ahhh, w-well, I didn’t consider that.”

Here I am thinking she’s been smarter lately, then she pulls this junk. Sheesh!

“But Keima, it doesn’t matter if I get sick as long as you crush their dungeon. This is still the best option in the end,” she said, and it was hard to argue that this wouldn’t be the fastest path to victory.

“...But, still. I don’t want you in danger.”

“Well, I don’t want to lose you either, okay? Let me carry some of the risk too. That’s what partners do, isn’t it?” Rokuko said before embracing me tightly. “You do know I love you, right? I’m not joking around.”

“...R-Right,” I replied, my cheeks growing hot from her whispering into my ears. I could feel Rokuko’s heartbeat thumping against my chest. “Sheesh. I might just have the best partner in the world. And either way, what’s done can’t be undone. Let’s just pray their gate will be inside the dungeon.”

“Ah, r-right... I forgot about that too,” Rokuko replied hurriedly. *But, well... With her luck, we should be fine.* I patted Rokuko’s head gently where I had flicked it a second ago.

We had one hour to prepare. I told Igni we’d be able to get her into the artificial dungeon from the [Cave of Greed] and had her come back to our dungeon.

“If you can do that, just tell me to come here from the start, Uncle.”

“Sorry, things changed a second ago. Our gate’ll open in the coliseum area, so just wait there with the Golems.”

“Okay!”

With that done, I started casting {Create Golem} over and over to mass produce Golems. I killed all the Iron Golems from the spawners at once to get their materials for {Create Golem}. Each Golem could be made into five more hollow ones that were under my direct control, and with this plan I could have an army of them made much faster.

“Ichika, here,” Niku said.

“Roger dodger. Masteeer, I got some more for ya.”

“Thanks, Ichika.”

I gathered all the Iron Golem spawners from across the dungeon into a room close to the coliseum, then waited for more to spawn. The second they did, Niku killed them all, and Ichika brought me their remains using the Dai-Frame I made for her a while ago. Then I used {Create Golem} to remake them. The Golems now under my control moved to the coliseum to wait.

I should be able to make plenty of these in an hour. Or, well, even once the battle starts, I can just send in more reinforcements with {Summon Skeleton} and {Summon Gargoyle}. Those are convenient since they don’t need resources like this.

“Y’know, Master, what’s gonna happen to that Lodol guy if we flood the dungeon with Golems like this? If junk goes bad, he could get, like, crushed by our Golems, or he might figure out we’re controlling them.”

“Our first priority is destroying the artificial dungeon core. He can come afterwards, if he’s lucky. If not, well, no skin off our backs.”

“Oh man, you’re friggin’ pissed that he put Rokuko in danger, huh? Lemme guess, if he’s too smart for his own good, he’ll *tragically* die before we reach him, right?”

Hahahaha, what’re you talking about, Ichika? I’m not mad at all. It’ll just be

easier to find him if we take care of the artificial dungeon first. It's just logical.

“Doesn't seem like we'll be able to use the Boss Spawner this time. One hour wasn't actually enough, I think. Sorry, Keima,” Rokuko said through a call, since she was in the Master Room.

“Don't sweat it. Now's not the time to be experimenting with weird other monsters.” *Not to mention this is actually going pretty fast. These are pretty basic Golems I'm making here, so I can finish each in about ten seconds. That said... While at this point I have way more mana than this kind of thing will ever take, it's kind of mentally draining to just sit here and pour out mana non-stop.*

In any case, I produced two hundred Iron Golems in thirty minutes, at which point I took a break.

“Wow, Keima. Iron Golems usually cost 500 DP each, sooo... That was about 100,000 DP worth of Golems you made in thirty minutes.”

“Heh. Yeah, we're making a killing here.” *We sure could crash the price of iron by dumping all of these Golems on the market at once. Once we've finished up with the artificial dungeon, I'll get rid of these by offering them up to my dungeon.*

“By the way, I finished making my own pawns to help with the exploration,” Rokuko said.

“What'd you settle on? Rats?”

“Mhm. Dragg had so many rats, they ended up having to use all that poison to finish them off, so I don't think they'll be suspicious at all even if there's a ton of rat corpses inside the dungeon.”

Huh, I didn't think of that. Rokuko suuure is getting a lot smarter.

And so, our one hour of prep time ended in the blink of an eye. Rokuko and I were standing by in the Master Room. We were going to have Rei, Kinue, Neruneh, and Elulu help with the dungeon battle alongside Niku and Ichika. One could say that every member of the [Cave of Greed] was participating, aside from the Silkies at the inn... and Rokuko's pets, and the Succubus nuns. (Gobsuke counted as a pet.)

Niku would control the rats for scouting, while Ichika and Rei would command a hundred Golems as our main combat forces. Rokuko and Neruneh would direct the Gargoyles I summoned in the Master Room to provide support. Kinue and Elulu would control the remaining one hundred Golems to defend the dungeon.

“I’m impressed you all got ready so fast.”

“But of course, Master! We could hardly call ourselves the pillars of your dungeon if we were not always ready to stand and fight at a moment’s notice!” Rei responded eagerly as their representative, unable to contain her excitement. As a dungeon monster, she was probably excited to have an opportunity to show what she could do.

“Right after the battle starts, Rokuko and I are going to check and make sure the dungeon is functioning like normal. We’ll be counting on you all in the meantime.”

“Right!” Rokuko interjected. “Everyone, fulfill your duties!”

All those present nodded, with Igni shouting, “I’ll help too!” in the back. Good to see that everyone was motivated.

A gate appeared, signaling the start of the The Dungeon Battle. Through it we could indeed see the inside of the artificial dungeon. I looked inside through the monitor while thanking Rokuko’s good luck, and before long some Goblin Zombies and zombie-esque Golems came marching out. They surged into our dungeon all at once, like waves crashing against a shore.

“Uncle! I’m gonna breathe some fire!”

“Yup, go for it.”

Igni inhaled, then spat out a wave of fire from side to side, burning nearly a hundred zombies to ashes in a single breath.

“I’m sending the scouts,” Niku said, maneuvering the rats beneath the legs of the surviving zombies to spread them through the dungeon. Rokuko and I checked the dungeon functions while watching the map get steadily filled out.

“Object creation, good. Monster summoning, good. Traps, item creation,

good.”

“Monitor functions, wall creation, and room creation are all fine. Keima, you know what to do.”

“Alrighty. {Summon Gargoyle}.”

“Registered as a subordinate, placed. Okay, all set.”

For now, it seemed we wouldn't have any problems during the Dungeon Battle. We shifted our focus back there, with all our functions confirmed to still be working.

“...Whewee, now that's a married couple for you. They're totally in sync with each other,” Ichika whistled.

“Eheheheh. Feel free to say that again,” Rokuko replied. *I dunno, I think she was just saying that to tease us... Eh, whatever. Rokuko looks happy, so it's fine.*

The rats advanced through the dungeon, soon finding a stairway upwards. That would lead outside the dungeon—in other words, toward Dragg. Better we just ignore it for now.

“Ichika, leave some enemies and form a wall. Don't let anyone invade from the outside.”

“Sure thing.”

“Rei, no need to hold back. Get in there and beat the crap out of anything you see.”

“You may count on me! Go forth, Golems! Charge!”

Ichika controlled the Golems precisely while Rei was much more aggressive in fulfilling her orders. *Yeaah, feels kinda like Rei is blowing off some steam here. I might be working her too hard as the High Priestess of Beddhism. I'll try to get her some more vacation days once all this is over.*

“{Summon Gargoyle x 10}... Rokuko, Neruneh.”

“Right, right. Place, place.”

“Okaaay, here's some reinforcemeeents.”

Rokuko took control of the Gargoyles and placed them in the dungeon, while

Neruneh sent them marching through the gate. *Y'know, actually... Do we even need to send reinforcements? Things are going pretty well. The enemies only go after us when we attack them, and even then they aren't swarming us or anything. So far our only casualties are from traps.*

"Sure feels like they're sandbagging here."

"Hm? Keima, what do bags of sand have to do with anything?"

"They're punching bags you can hit as much as you want with no repercussions. It also refers to someone losing on purpose. This is just going way too well..." *I mean, Kinue and Elulu have nothing to do on the defensive side. They're just gathering up corpses to clean, at most. I guess that's what I should expect if the dungeon's just mechanically producing monsters and traps without a Core or Master helping them.*

"Master, I've found a stairway down. I will continue my exploration there."

"Go for it, Niku. But I hear that if left alone, the dungeon will morph on its own. We should leave some monsters along the way to secure a route. Neruneh, make it happen with some Gargoyles."

"Okaaay."

If they were changing the structure of rooms with dungeon functions, we could block them by leaving some of our subordinates nearby.

"...Master, I found a stairway down."

"Huh? Another one?"

"Well, it's the second one on the same floor."

"Huh, well, nothing too crazy about two stairways on the same floor. Could be a labyrinth or something."

"Ah! Master, there's a third... no, a fourth stairway!"

"Master, my man, there's staircases popping up in the halls Niku just went through. And, like, they're totes going up instead of down," Ichika chimed in.

"...Wait, really?" I glanced at the map and saw several icons indicating stairways.

“Uncle, what should we do? Where should I go?”

“Uhhh, hold on a sec, Igni. I think we just have to... let Niku keep scouting...?”

“Ah! Uncle, a wall! There’s a wall here now!”

“Wait, what?” I looked through the monitor and saw that our secured route actually had a wall blocking it midway through. *The heck is this? We definitely had Gargoyles in place to stop this.*

“Keima. Call Igni back for now. We don’t want her charging in and getting buried by walls,” Rokuko suggested.

“Good point. Igni, come back for a second!”

“O-Okay... Um, which way was back again... Over here, I think.”

We needed to form some kind of plan in the time it took Igni to get back.

“The dungeon structure’s changing even though there are enemies inside. Thoughts, Keima?” Rokuko asked.

“The only thing I can think of is that the dungeon functions are bugging out... Or, well, we’re dealing with a dungeon that doesn’t have a Core or Master. Maybe it’s not even registering us as invaders?” I suggested. The monsters didn’t move at all before we attacked them. That could be a sign the dungeon wasn’t recognizing us as enemies.

“That’s it, Keima! We need to figure out a way to stop their dungeon from morphing despite that bug. Otherwise, we’ll never reach the end.”

“...Yeah. Hopefully there’s something we can do,” I said, but my plotting was interrupted by Ichika letting out a loud “Oh shit.”

“What’s up, Ichika?”

“The High Priestess is busting in, my dude.”

“Wait, me?”

“Not you, Rei. The Light one.”

I glanced at the monitor and saw the High Priestess, fighting not the artificial dungeon’s zombie monsters but our Iron Golems and Gargoyles. *Now this is some crap timing... Or actually, on second thought, of course she’s here. Alca is*

the artificial dungeon's managing employee or whatever it was. Of course she would take action to rescue Count Lodol.

Wait. Alca, the High Priestess. That reminds me...

"I just had a good idea. I'm heading out too."

"What're you talking about, Keima?! It's dangerous down there!" Rokuko exclaimed.

"It has to be me. Nobody else can do this. Sorry, Rokuko. And also, could you call the Gargoyles back?"

"F-Fine. But I'll be really ticked if you don't come back safe, okay?!"

Rokuko placed me right by the gate, and I infiltrated the artificial dungeon just as Igny left. I sprinted straight to where the High Priestess was, avoiding walls and traps along the way. *I borrowed Niku's orichalcum supports, so I've got at least a little firepower. Yeah.*

When I got close enough, Alca must have noticed my presence, as she called out to me first. "Oh? If it isn't Keima. Fancy meeting you here."

"Yeah, *cough*, heya, uh, Alca. Excuse me, I, uh, my Gargoyles sure wasted your time, *cough*." Despite coughing from rushing over so fast, I sent back the Gargoyles I had summoned earlier.

"Aahh. So those were your summons?"

"Yeah. Haaah, haaah... I had them attack everything on sight since I thought nobody else was here. Are you here to rescue Count Lodol too?"

"Yes. I see we are here with the same goal, though I am also here to stop this madness. Such is my responsibility as the dungeon guide. I think this is a mere paradigm shift, but... One moment," Alca said before smashing one of the artificial dungeon's Golems to bits with a massive hammer. A paradigm shift for a normal dungeon would refer to a bunch of monsters flooding out in preparation for a Dungeon Battle. Given that one was going on, she wasn't entirely wrong.

...I sucked in a breath. *G-Guh, so much poison... Not to mention the Zombie Goblins smell awful. This place sucks.*

“Are you alone, Keima?”

“Yeah. It’s easier for me to work alone when I’m serious,” I said as an excuse. It was natural to question why someone with a party like mine would rush into a situation like this alone.

I thought that excuse would just make her more suspicious, but Alca was so used to working by herself she agreed with me. “Better there not be any dead weight dragging you down, yes. Especially in pressing matters such as this, where there is no time to waste.”

...Yeah, that’s a pretty common attitude for super-strong people.

“Oh yes, Keima. Would you assist me in conquering this dungeon? I am certain a man of your caliber would be far from dead weight,” she suggested, and that would be more than convenient for me—I needed to stealthily guide her away from the gate connecting to the [Cave of Greed], and get her help with something else.

“Sure. I was just hoping I could get your help, honorable High Priestess.”

“A splendid answer. Ahaha, and now we truly are bedfellows.”

That wording sounds like you mean something else entirely, so I kind of wish you wouldn’t use it, I thought but didn’t say because I didn’t want to make her angry.

“Anyway, High Priestess, we should get back to the surface. We’ll need to prepare to dig any deeper into the dungeon.”

“You mean plans for the undead? They certainly did come from nowhere. Here, have this.” Alca handed me a potion bottle filled with some kind of amber liquid. Judging by how it sloshed around like water when I shook it, the liquid wasn’t particularly thick or viscous.

“What’s this?”

“Holy water. Feel free to use it if undead appear. It is taken from a holy being, so it will be effective against undead.”

“Holy water from the Church of Light, huh? How do you use it?”

“You may spray it onto your weapon or the undead. The smell might be a bit

strong, but pay it no mind. And, ahem... Freshly made holy water can potentially be drunk, but this is aged holy water and is not for drinking.”

“Alright. I’ll take it, just in case..” *Into {Storage} you go.*

“Let us continue, then. We have more holy water than we will ever need, thanks to my large stores of it.”

“Er, well, that’s not actually what I meant. The problem here is that the dungeon changes form,” I called out, stopping Alca from advancing.

“The dungeon changes form?”

“Yeah, I’ve found five stairways down on this floor alone. I found one in a place it didn’t used to be, not to mention that paths are disappearing and walls are coming out of nowhere.”

“I see. Either the stairways are moving, or they are increasing... Regardless, a map will serve no purpose here.”

“Add a flood of monsters to that and there’s not much chance of us getting Count Lodol out of here safely. We might even end up buried inside walls.”

“Buried inside walls, oh...? You certainly know some rare trivia. Few know that is possible.”

“Yeah, and me knowing things like that is exactly why I was given the quest to explore this dungeon.”

Alca’s eyes narrowed and she looked me over, as if searching for the truth behind my knowledge. In fact, that was exactly what she was doing.

“Keima. I happen to have a method for containing situations such as this,” she said, bringing out her High Priestess trump card.

“Oh... The ultimate technique of the High Priestess of Light?”

“So you did know... I would expect nothing less of you, Keima. Indeed. So you agreed to help seek in order to use this ritual of mine. Ahaha, what a sly man you are.”

“Hah, well, you got me there. As thanks, I’ll treat you to a shortcake once this is all sorted out.”

“Oh! Now that I am looking forward to. I would also like to stay in that grand suite of yours again.”

“No problem, as long as you pay.” I honestly didn’t want her to come at all, but as the town chief I couldn’t exactly say that out loud.

Either way, the negotiations were a success. Alca and I temporarily headed back to the entrance of the dungeon at the surface.

“Fuck dungeons destroy dungeons die die fuck Cores die dungeons fuck destroy die all enemies of the God of Light should die fuck dungeons destroy them may the God of Light’s seal aid me in destroying this dungeon fuck die die Dungeon Core die,” the High Priestess murmured to an altar by the surface. It was as violent an incantation as I had ever heard. “In agreement with the divine pact of the Gods, I seal this dungeon for three days — {Treaty}.”

The final keyword sealed the deal. I didn’t feel any earthquake this time, maybe because it wasn’t my dungeon.

Alca the High Priestess’s {Treaty} was ritual magic. The {Treaty} I knew was contract magic, but judging from the difference in incantation hers was a treaty sealed between the gods themselves. Either way, if it worked it should have sealed the artificial dungeon’s functions.

“And so it is finished. I did feel some resistance, so we can expect at least some of its bizarre nature to have been contained.”

“Thanks for letting me see such a big-deal spell.”

“Oh, but of course. Thank you for the delicious cream puffs. I can only stay here for three more days, but once we have this settled I believe I will visit your inn before I am chased out of the country. I am quite looking forward to that shortcake,” Alca said with a smile. Bribing her with cream puffs had been quite an effective strategy indeed.

“Now, I shall retrieve some goods for conquering the dungeon.”

“Alright,” I agreed, and as we walked I found an opportunity to stealthily contact Rokuko.

“...The artificial dungeon should be unable to modify itself right now.

Continue exploring it.”

“Roger. Also, Keima, our dungeon’s completely unsealed. We can still use everything.”

“Master,” Niku chimed in, “The monsters are attacking now. Be careful.”

With both of their reports in mind, I reentered the artificial dungeon alongside Alca. Exploring dungeons was usually equivalent to putting your life on the line. That was true for normal dungeons, and it was even more true for a crazy artificial dungeon overflowing with monsters and traps. However, it was safe to say that things were a little different for me and her.

“Keima. I shall take the lead. Please follow behind me.”

“Okay.”

“Keima. There is a trap there, be careful.”

“Okay.”

“Keima. There is an enemy. As it is a zombie, I will use holy water on it. Stand where you are.”

“Okay.”

“Keima. There is a chest there, but treasure is not our objective so we will not be opening it. I hope you understand.”

“Yep.”

With Alca the High Priestess leading the way, she pretty much took care of everything on her own, and since she even took extra care to accommodate me, I had basically nothing to do at all. Not to mention...

“Keima, take the right path. There’s a staircase to the left, but it leads to a dead end,” Rokuko chimed in.

“High Priestess, let’s take the right path.”

“Keima, stop for a second. The next room is filled with monsters. Draw them out into the hallway.”

“High Priestess, wait just a second. I’ll send some Gargoyles to check out that room.”

“Keima, that puzzle room is a decoy. We passed through the hall on the side just fine.”

“High Priestess, looks like there’s a shortcut over here.”

“Keima, could you slow down a little? You’re about to catch up to some of the rats.”

“High Priestess, want some water? Let’s take a break for a bit.”

Rokuko was providing plenty of support with info that made conquering the dungeon a cakewalk. In other words, Alca and I were blasting our way through the dungeon effortlessly. *Though I still don’t have much to do since I’m just repeating what Rokuko says... All I do is summon Gargoyles at most.*

Alca and I were resting in a side room to give Rokuko and the others time to explore and get us crucial info. With my Gargoyles keeping watch, we were perfectly safe. I didn’t want to reveal that I could summon a ton of them at once, though, so I pretended that the guard Gargoyles outside were taking most of my mana.

Much to my chagrin, we were alone together in the room.

“Keima. I am beyond impressed,” Alca said, letting out a blissful sigh as she drank the apple tea I’d prepared for her.

“Hm? What’re you talking about?”

“I have explored dungeons with many others before, and it is safe to say I have never had an easier time of it than I am having now. Not to mention, you have given me so much splendid charitable Advice... and the Selfless Offering from a moment ago was just, ahahaha, my goodness. Are you being extra forward since Rokuko isn’t here, I wonder?” Alca asked, blushing. *The hell is all this about Charitable Advice and Selfless Offerings...? I feel like I vaguely remember her talking about this the last time I visited her room. Charitable Advice is like another form of love confession or something...? I don’t think so. And don’t even ask me what Selfless Offering I supposedly gave her.*

“I’m afraid you’ve lost me.”

“As coy as ever, I see. But I am more than well aware of how you feel for me...

and how I feel for you. A-Ahem, with that said. Shall we perform the kiss of vows that Rokuko so rudely interrupted before?” Alca asked, removing her boot. She had explained this to me before: In the Church of Light, a kiss to the boot marked one as a slave, a kiss through the sock marked one as a lover, and a kiss directly on the feet marked one as husband and wife. I remembered that since it had to do with feet.

...With her boot removed, the High Priestess’s musky sock was revealed, having gotten plenty damp from walking so far throughout the dungeon. When she peeled that off, her bare foot was revealed, steaming hot with the sweetest scent I had ev—

“Keima,” came Rokuko’s displeased voice. *Er, right. Sorry, I kinda got enraptured by her holy foot. Gotta be more careful.*

“Sorry, High Priestess, but I have Rokuko.”

“Fear not. I shall accept all of your wives and mistresses,” Alca replied, holding out her very nice-smelling bare foot. For a foot-fetishist like me it was practically a feast. But sadly, this feast was laced with poison.

“We are deep within a dungeon now. Nobody will stop us, and nobody is watching.”

Uh, actually, they’re definitely watching. And they’ve been watching the whole time! I yelled on the inside, but managed not to say aloud. The fact that Rokuko and the others were watching was a secret I had to keep from Alca no matter what. Thus, from her perspective, we really were alone with nobody at all watching.

“Now, you may kiss it when ready,” she said, wiggling her toes seductively. *I mean, this High Priestess definitely has nice feet, but her personality and religion are a bit much. I just can’t be with a girl that wants to fuck up dungeons. Her feet are good, sure... I mean, okay, they’re pretty great... So great I would leap on them if they weren’t metaphorically poisoned... Uh...*

Suddenly, my thoughts were interrupted by footsteps rushing our way at maximum speed.

“GRAAAAAAAAH!” With enormous speed, a small, cloaked figure smashed

through all the Gargoyles we had on watch. It flipped back its hood, exposing fiery red hair. “W-Wooow, what a coincidence! Hi, Uncle!”

“W-Whoa, if it isn’t Igni! Yeah, what a coincidence seeing you here!”

It was Igni.

“She made it! How’s that, Keima?”

Nice one, Rokuko. It seemed she had sent Igni this way after seeing how much I was struggling.

Alca put her sock and boot back on while glaring hatefully at the intruder. “I never would have thought we would be interrupted here as well... You are the dungeon researcher Keima was protecting the other day, no? What are you doing here?”

“Er, um, ummm...! Right, I came here to investigate a dungeon going through a paradigm shift, when a pitfall appeared from nowhere and I fell down! Right. Um? Sorry for coming in here without permission, but um, can I tag along with you two?” Igni said, speaking mostly in a monotone. Rokuko was probably feeding her lines through the dungeon call.

“Keima. Let her join you guys. Also, scold her a bit, and maybe say something about punishing her later.” Rokuko also sent word my way through a dungeon call.

“Sure, Igni. I don’t want to leave my friend’s daughter alone in a place like this. But you really shouldn’t go into dungeons without permission. I’ll have to punish you later.”

“A-Awww. That’s so mean, Unclee.”

Igni was speaking in such a monotone I got the feeling Alca was shooting her an icy look, but, well, the explanation was rock-solid. And since I went ahead and gave her permission, Alca had no reasonable basis on which to refuse her. She let out a heavy sigh.

“Don’t worry, High Priestess. She looks pretty young, but you just saw how strong she is.”

“Yep! I’m super strong!” Igni said, puffing out her washboard chest with pride.

“I suppose so, given you can safely explore a paradigm shifting dungeon without a scratch... Very well, you may join us. I would much rather refuse, but Keima has a kinder heart than I.”

And so Igni joined our party for real. With her around, Alca wouldn't be able to do anything weird. If worse came to worst, Igni could kill Alca herself. Though that was a last resort, and we'd have to be stealthy since Alca could revive.

“Keima, we found the Boss Room. This is probably the bottom of the dungeon,” Rokuko said, having found our destination. It was the last place left after she sent the rats throughout the whole dungeon. The room was digging a bit into the [Flame Caverns], and if it wasn't the bottom then time and space would have to be warping down there. And if there was no Artificial Core to break inside, then we missed a road along the way, and that would suck bigtime.

Please be the bottom. Please. If it wasn't we'd have to knock on walls with Golems, check the bottoms of pitfalls for passageways... The dungeon couldn't summon new monsters due to {Treaty} just like we couldn't, but we would still need to explore every inch of the dungeon with human wave tactics. That would mean exploring the dungeon with Alca while avoiding all the rats, which sounded pretty nightmarish.

With those thoughts in mind we headed to the Boss Room, and it wasn't hard to realize why Rokuko called it the bottom of the dungeon.

“Seems like this is the Boss Room,” I said. It was a pretty sparse Boss Room. The only thing special about it was that the stairs connected directly to the Boss Room, and you entered it through the ceiling.

We crouched by the entrance to peer inside the room, and saw the corpses of several Iron Golems scattered across the stone floor—scouts sent by Rokuko, no doubt. Despite the room being made of stone, they were covered in mud for some reason.

“Are those corpses...? Has there been friendly fire on their side? Perhaps they are playing dead. Either way, this is suspicious. Keima, may I ask you to send forth a Gargoyle?”

“Sure. Gate, open. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve

me—{Summon Gargoyle}.”

Following Alca’s request, I sent a Gargoyle into the room, and... a massive arm stretched out from the Gargoyle’s blind spot, grabbed it, and crushed it to pieces.

On closer examination the arm was made of whitish mud. A second later, the source of the arm dropped from its hiding place—the ceiling, in other words—and plopped to the ground. The top half of it was a Golem, but the bottom half spread across the ground like a crushed tomato.

“Whoa. What’s that thing?”

“A slime-type... no, a Mud Golem, I believe. And a giant breed at that? This is troublesome.”

Mud Golems. As their name implied, they were Golems made out of mud. That seemed kind of basic, but it was my first time seeing one.

“Priestess, Priestess! Is it strong?” Igni asked.

“Hm? Oh, yes, fairly strong. First of all, they are largely immune to physical attacks, much like Slimes are. Due to their opaque form it is impossible to tell where their core is. And due to this one’s large body, finding it will only be more difficult. How shall we defeat it...” Alca mumbled, less replying to Igni’s question and more analyzing the enemy for her own sake. A giant Golem would be problematic in its own way, but we were dealing with a mud Golem resistant to physical attacks.

“How would you defeat a normal Mud Golem?”

“First I would dry it with Fire magic. Once it’s dry, I would shave off the mud bit by bit while searching for the Core.”

Apparently, defeating even a normal Mud Golem was time-consuming and tedious. Not to mention that due to their corpse being just mud, they earned the same amount as a basic Clay Golem. There were different kinds of mud, but most of it wasn’t worth anything. So much sand and gravel was mixed in that even searching for metal was a pain, making it worthless—though if you were incredibly lucky you might find some with a rare metal like orichalcum in it.

“Furthermore, it seems to have a composition similar to that of the other Golems in this dungeon.”

“So it’s filled with poison, huh...? It’s not a fast-acting poison, but that’s still not good.”

“Uncle, Uncle, can’t I just burn it?”

No, no, that would reveal your identity. Stay, girl. Plus the poison stinks real bad when you burn it.

In any case, the Mud Golem drew back its muddy body to reform its shape. The top half of it looked pretty close to a normal Clay Golem, but the bottom half was like a big droopy Slime. When the top half got muddy it looked like a zombie melting in place, with the drops of mud dripping onto its Slime lower half and being absorbed back into its body. There was a fountain-esque stream inside of it pushing mud upwards, where it hardened in the place of mud that had just fallen.

“Welp. It definitely doesn’t look like physical attacks will do much to it.”

“What shall we do, then? Do you have any good ideas, Keima?” Alca asked, but this was my first time seeing a Mud Golem. No way would I have an idea for how to take it down... outside of having Igny blast it to bits in a single go, that is.

...Hm?

A cube rose up in the center of the Golem’s chest. When the mud dripped off and revealed what was beneath, we saw a door with a plate on top.

“...‘Control Room’? No way.”

“I suppose this means the Mud Golem has absorbed the entirety of the control room,” Alca observed. In a way, that made a lot of sense given that the Boss Room itself appeared to be a dead end. Normally, there would be a door leading farther down after a Boss Room, but there was nothing like that here.

“Don’t tell me... Count Lodol and the Artificial Core are in that room?”

“Hm. I believe this dungeon is similar to one with the Core and the Boss being one and the same, Keima. My experience tells me that the room and the Artificial Core are within the Mud Golem’s core.”

“That’s not good.”

“Can I just, like, burn them all up?” Igni asked. I kinda wanted to just say yes. A Flame Dragon could probably turn a Mud Golem to sand in a split second, giving it no time to moisten itself. Or maybe she would burn it so much it would turn into a ceramic statue.

“The room maintaining its structure leads me to believe that Count Lodol may very well be alive inside. I shall investigate this.”

“How?”

“Observe,” Alca said, holding up swords in both of her hands before dropping into the Boss Room. The Mud Golem recognized her as an enemy and attacked. Its large arms chased her while dripping mud, but she dodged while advancing forward.

She jumped across the room nimbly while stabbing her swords into the Golem’s mud body. Or, well, it was more like sliding them into its body. She also drew out multiple swords from {Storage} and threw them, forming a blade staircase up its body which she raced up toward the control room. Once there she attempted to open the door, but it appeared to be locked. Not even kicking it helped—the door was supposedly just wood, but it showed no signs of opening.

“Gaaah! The heck is going oooon?!” came a shriek.

“Count Lodol, are you safe?”

“Is that you, High Priestess?! Aaah, I’m saved! I am right here, your holiness!” Count Lodol replied from within the control room. Apparently he was, in fact, alive.

But that was when the Mud Golem swung an arm toward its chest, swiping Alca off. She spun in the air, landed gracefully on her feet, then returned to the entrance.

“Keima, I request your assistance in rescuing the count.”

“...Alright, I’ll summon some Gargoyles to use as bait. Do what you can with them.”

Thus began our cooperative boss battle, though in reality all I had to do was send in Gargoyles from outside the Boss Room.

“GRAAAAH!”

“O lance of fire, pierce mine enemies—{Fire Javelin}!” Alca stabbed the Mud Golem with a lance made of fire. Steam rose off it as water audibly boiled. The Mud Golem swung its arms to get rid of Alca and the Gargoyles, but she dodged them while casting more magic. “O lance of fire, pierce mine enemies—{Fire Javelin}!”

Two, three, then more lances of fire pierced the Mud Golem’s body. The fire javelins lasted for a long time, and they seemed perfect for drying out the water inside the mud. My Gargoyles were throwing in some fireballs of their own, but they, uh, just dissipated on the spot after hitting the Golem.

I shut my eyes at the noxious sulfuric stench wafting through the air as we wore the boss down. Over time, the flow of its mud slowed, and parts of its surface hardened entirely. However...

“GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

A huge pool of water dropped onto the Mud Golem’s head from above. Had it cast a spell? No, it must have bought water with DP. If I remembered correctly, the {Treaty} seal blocked most dungeon functions, but not buying items with DP.

“Ngh, all my efforts gone in a moment!” Alca exclaimed. The Golem had gotten back more water than it had lost. Mud was once again flowing through its body without issue.

“Wow, this looks fun!” Igni observed casually. Alca had excluded her from fighting, so she was just watching from beside me. *Little does she know that Igni could beat this Golem in a second. Though, uh, Count Lodol would be more Count Lodead at that point.*

“Ngh, there will be no end to this,” Alca said, returning to us once again. I sent out more Gargoyles to keep distracting the boss.

“Seems like the Mud Golem’s making it hard to rescue the count, huh?”

“Indeed. This is a problem indeed...” Alca said, putting a finger on her chin with a thoughtful look.

“Well, feel free to think up a plan while I buy some time.”

“Oh my... How splendid, Keima. I shall entrust buying time to you... and goodness. I see that you can control five entire Gargoyles at once without any issue whatsoever, hm?”

What, should I have stuck to using just three in front of Alca? Maybe so, but that would've put me in more danger, so...

“You would be so much more appreciated in the Holy Kingdom, Keima. If you have the right aptitude for it, I would love for you to replace Shento as my attendant.”

“Uh, don't worry, the empire definitely appreciates me more than enough.”

In any case, I sent out one new Gargoyle each time one was destroyed. Yeah, five Gargoyles sending out {Fireballs} is the perfect number for keeping it distracted. That said... If not for Alca being here, I could just let Igmi handle this, or mass produce as many Gargoyles as I need. Is she actually holding us back at this point? Mmm...

“High Priestess, remember that we can retreat if we need to. Especially now that we know where to find the boss.”

“I'm a bit too worried about Count Lodol for that. A full day has already passed, and who knows how long his tired body will last within a moving body such as that...” she replied. It was true that each time the Mud Golem swung its arm, the control room in its chest bounced around. I had been inside that giant unko undine... or rather, Dinne, but those bubbles didn't bounce around at all.

“What can I say, you reap what you sow. Why is Count Lodol even in that room anyway?”

“Hrm, now that you mention it, I do find it strange that the count is inside the control room... Perhaps he was modifying the control panel on his own. Against my instructions not to do so, that is,” she said. The control panel was probably that monitor-looking thing.

“I think you’re a little too trusting, High Priestess. Telling someone not to touch something just makes them want to touch it more. I’m guessing he got greedy and tried upping the difficulty, which ended up causing this mess.”

“...I don’t believe any of the settings available to him could have caused the dungeon to go berserk like this,” Alca said, thinking it over.

“Well, dungeons are living beings, after all. I guess this means your experiment was a failure? Hard to call it a proper dungeon when it goes berserk like this.”

“Hm...? No, this dungeon still remains a proper dungeon. I can confirm through my mana vision that it is properly returning mana to the air.”

Wait.

“Hold on a second, High Priestess. You’re making it sound like the dungeon’s still fine.”

“It is temporarily going berserk, but it should calm down before long. Though once this is all over, I will need to use my authority to bring the control room back to the surface.”

Wait, wait.

“It sounds to me like you don’t plan on destroying the Artificial Core at all. Am I missing something?”

“What a strange thing to ask, Keima. Is it not a grave crime under imperial law to destroy Dungeon Cores? Just planning to do so results in banishment and being barred from the country, but it sounds to me that you are suggesting we destroy the Artificial Core.”

Wait, wait, wait.

“Ah! Could it be that you have finally decided to come to the Holy Kingdom with me?!”

“Er, no.” For some reason, Alca and I just weren’t understanding each other.

...Igni came over and poked me. “Uncle, Uncle. Did you tell her about the eruption?”

“Oh!” Now that she mentioned it, I hadn’t told Alca that Tsia Mountain was going to erupt. Given the timing of when we met, it was likely she didn’t know about that.

“High Priestess. I just learned this earlier, but apparently this dungeon is going to cause Tsia Mountain to erupt. It’s draining the power to contain the eruption away from the [Flame Caverns].”

“Oh, I see. What about it?” Alca asked with a tilt of her head. “That is exactly as our research suggested. Placing an artificial dungeon next to a natural dungeon will lead to the proper dungeon stealing the power of the improper one. There is nothing wrong with that whatsoever.”

“No, no, no, no, like, the mountain’s going to erupt before that finishes happening. We’ve gotta destroy this Artificial Core.”

“I disagree. It would be best to let the mountain erupt,” she said with a shining smile. *What the hell?*

“All you have told me is that the mountain is meant to explode, and an improper dungeon is preventing nature from taking its course. What harm is there in letting the mountain do what it is meant to do?”

Uh... Am I talking to another human being, or...?

“There’s a lot of harm! For example, all the people who will die?!”

“Fear not, Keima. It will become proof that the proper dungeon has conquered the improper dungeon. In other words, even an eruption will lead to world peace!” she declared, so boldly and confidently that I honestly began to question whether the eruption was actually bad at all. *Wait, is this a mind control skill?!* I cradled my head.

“Are you quite alright, Keima? Have you been pushing yourself to summon so many Gargoyles after all...?”

“Nah, nah...” *Crap, what do I do? Alca’s just living in another world from us.*

I considered how to eliminate Alca while sending in reinforcement Gargoyles. The fastest method would be to kill her, especially since she would just revive. That said, we didn’t want to kill her ourselves. Since she would just revive.

“Alca, I think the Gargoyles won’t be able to distract the boss for much longer. Could you get back in the fight?”

“Oh, excuse me. I was so absorbed in conversation that I forgot our situation. Hm... I will need to do something about that core. The room is obviously the Mud Golem’s core, of course. Please continue to send reinforcements,” Alca said before returning to fight the Mud Golem. That was when Rokuko contacted me.

“Keima, I heard everything.”

“Oh, Rokuko. Got any ideas?”

“I think we should just have Igni turn into a Dragon and burn them all down, High Priestess included.”

“Fair, but I don’t know about making Ittetsu’s daughter murder someone. Sure, Alca will revive, but Count Lodol will be burned to a crisp.”

“Well, I guess I know how you feel. Should we have the Mud Golem take care of her, then?”

That would be the best for us, though we’d have to fight the Mud Golem on our own afterwards. And... Alca must have had some plan, judging from how she was sticking a bunch of {Fire Javelins} into the ground.

“{Fire Javelin}! O lance of fire, pierce mine enemies—{Fire Javelin}!”

It looked entirely as if she were trying to seal the Mud Golem within a prison of fire stakes. And once she finished doing just that with over ten {Fire Javelins}, she put her weapons into {Storage} and assumed a sword-wielding posture.

“O weapon of fire, take form—{Fire Weapon}.” She finished her chant, and a blazing sword of fire appeared in her hands.

“O weapon, be engulfed with fire—{Enchant: Fire}. O weapon, be engulfed with fire—{Enchant: Fire}. O weapon, be engulfed with fire—{Enchant: Fire}...!” She layered more and more fire onto the sword, increasing its size until it was gigantic. I was taken aback by that technique, and ultimately it ended up far larger than Alca herself. It was more than big enough to cleave the Mud Golem in half on its own. The sword was so huge it would be fair to call that technique

an ultimate attack.

She rested it on one of the {Fire Javelins} stuck into the ground around the Mud Golem.

“Explode!” She yelled, and the {Fire Javelin} beneath the massive sword exploded, sending it flying straight into the Mud Golem’s torso. It went so fast it ripped through its body while steam exploded in all directions. Then, after slicing the Mud Golem clean in half, it struck the {Fire Javelin} on the exact opposite side of it.

“EXPLODE!” she yelled again, and the {Fire Javelin} did just that. The giant sword absorbed the flames of the explosion to increase its own power before reversing direction, heading straight to the Mud Golem that was in the middle of reconnecting its body. Flames hissed and roared as the sword sliced through it again and landed on another {Fire Javelin}.

“Explode! Explode! Explode!” Boom! Boom! Boom! The massive flame sword accelerated with each explosion. The Mud Golem’s body was ripped to pieces over and over again as it burned. Water evaporated, mud dried, and everything just came crumbling down.

I called it an ultimate attack before, but that wasn’t quite right. It was an ultimate FINISHER. *Ripping a giant to shreds over and over with a giant flaming sword is just too cool...!*

“Uncle, that attack’s cool! I think that girl sucks, but her attack’s awesome!” Igni said, also appreciating the power of the ultimate finisher. However.

“Ngh!”

With a thunk, the giant sword was stopped in its tracks. The cause was the control room in the Mud Golem’s chest. I could hear Count Lodol shrieking from within.

“Tch, it’s too hard! Destroying the walls seems impossible...!” Alca cried, but the flame sword itself was evaporating the Mud Golem’s water fast. A steaming wind of heat and poison was blowing all the way out of the Boss Room. I survived it by wrapping a cloth around my mouth and casting {Purification} repeatedly to make it into a kind of gas mask.

The Mud Golem was being worn down.

“GRAAAAAH!”

But water fell on the Golem’s head from above once again. Indeed, it used that technique to save itself. All the lost water was regained in an instant. The dried, cracked surface of its body returned to its former wet and gleaming glory.

“Goodness gracious, this is a pain. A Mud Golem with a core hidden behind walls this resilient will demand more extreme methods, it seems,” Alca said with a wry smile despite breathing heavily. She wasn’t wrong. The stone walls of the room not even being scratched by an attack that strong was nothing short of absurd. It seemed safe to say that the dungeon’s protection function—that which made the walls and doors of a Boss Room abnormally strong—was at work here. No doubt the room beyond the Boss Room was actually the control room itself.

That meant that the Artificial Core we had been looking for was probably in the room as well. That was a pretty interesting design. The idea of a moving Dungeon Core reminded me of Aidy hiding her Core within her armor. That limited movement in some ways, but here it let them use the Core Room as a shield, which was pretty clever.

Oh wait, all my Gargoyles died from Alca’s ultimate finisher there. I need to refill their numbers... or maybe I should just not do that? Hm.,

“High Priestess, it’ll be a minute before I can send in more Gargoyles. I need to recover a bit.”

“Ngh, understood...!” Alca replied, dodging the Mud Golem’s revived arms to stab more {Fire Javelins} into them. All she was doing was buying time without a plan. Or maybe she too was recovering somehow while running around and casting magic. It seemed she had poison resistance too... *Maybe I should just watch until she weakens?*

In any case, Alca had settled on the control room being the Mud Golem’s core, but I had noticed something. No way was that the case. This was a Boss Room, and we had to beat the Mud Golem to get into the control room.

First, we knew for a fact that the control room was locked and couldn’t be

entered. The High Priestess being unable to enter even with her authority more or less proved that it was the room “past” the Boss Room we were in. But if the Mud Golem’s core was within that room, then the walls wouldn’t be strengthened by the dungeon. You had to beat the boss to enter the room past the Boss Room. If the Mud Golem’s core was inside that room, it would be impossible to beat the boss, and the dungeon would be broken. That would stop the dungeon’s protection function from working. The boss’s true self not being in the room would count as the boss not being present at all, and that would unlock the door leading out.

In conclusion, the fact that the control room’s door was locked and its walls were strengthened proved on its own that the Mud Golem’s core was outside of the control room.

Indeed. The Mud Golem’s actual core might be bean-sized and hidden somewhere in the Boss Room like the Orichalcum Golem Rokuko suggested a while ago. It could even be hidden within the Mud Golem’s body as one might expect, and the fact that it had to be connected to the Mud Golem somehow would prove to be a key hint.

I observed the room with that in mind and found a likely candidate in no time. The Mud Golem’s slime-shaped lower half had trails of mud leaking out of it. Five trails in total, actually, spreading out like a starfish. I couldn’t tell if only one of them was the core or if all five were part of a larger core, but it was extremely likely that it was hidden there.

Which brought me to whether I should tell Alca that. If I did, how should I tell her? If I didn’t, how should I eliminate her? *Hmmm. Let me try laying it out a bit.*

1) I want to save Ittetsu and stop the eruption → I have to destroy the Artificial Core.

2) I have to destroy the Artificial Core → Alca is getting in the way of that.

3) We want to rescue Count Lodol → The Mud Golem is getting in the way of that.

4) We want to defeat the Mud Golem → It’s hard.

5) Eliminating Alca → The Mud Golem should be convenient for that?

And that was that.

“...This is getting kind of tedious.”

“This is definitely a pain,” Rokuko agreed. We were both on the same page.

“Uncle, what’re we gonna do? Want me to just blow her up with fire? You want me to take out that girl, right?”

“Naaah, that would cause even more problems... Dragons are a big deal, y’know.” *I feel like that would cause a whole ‘nother Dragon ruckus... Bleh.*

“I kind of want to just wash this all away,” Rokuko said with a sigh. But something about her phrasing stuck with me. *Wash it all away... Wash it away, huh...? Yeah, that sounds like a good idea.*

“Alright, let’s just wash our hands of this.”

“Bwuh?” Rokuko replied, confused.

“There’s so many factors involved here, it’s a pain to think about what to do. And we don’t have that much time if we want to save Ittetsu, too.”

“So, time for my fire breath?!” Igni said. She was looking at me with her lizard tail wagging, hyped to finally do something, but I shot her down.

“Nah. I’m gonna ask Rokuko to take care of this.”

“Hm? How so?”

I had her grab something that we probably still had sitting in the back of the Master Room.

Alca’s Perspective

Alca the High Priestess was at a loss. She was unable to finish off the giant Mud Golem with any of her attacks. Normally, it would be simple to just dry it up, then break it. But this Mud Golem had a means by which it could regenerate its water. Magic was probably to blame. Normally, Golems were incapable of using magic, but Alca had lost to a magic-wielding Golem in the past and it remained fresh in her memory. That experience had taught her that some

Golems did use magic.

“This is far from good... If that massive attack didn’t do the trick, what can?” she asked aloud while stabbing {Fire Javelins} into the Mud Golem. With this Mud Golem, all that would do was buy some time. Perhaps it would be better to preserve mana, but she had no other options available to her.

“GRAAAAH!” the Mud Golem roared as another giant ball of water dropped onto it again, refreshing its water reserves. Its dry surface became moist and the cycle of mud resumed. Truly, what was to be done?

And that was when she stepped into a puddle.

“...Oh?”

The puddle was in fact covering the entire floor of the Boss Room. Perhaps the Mud Golem summoned more water for itself than before. It was gleaming wet and looking confident.

“Look out, High Priestess! It looks like the dungeon dug into an underground water reserve!” came Keima’s voice.

“Come again?” She turned while fighting and saw that water was flowing into the Boss Room from the entrance in the ceiling.

“This is... Ngh!” She tried to evaporate the water, but more just kept flowing in. The phrase “like throwing fireballs into a lake” had never been more apt, albeit in this case it was javelins instead of balls.

“At this rate the whole room will flood! Let’s retreat for now!” Keima called.

“Ngh, but Count Lodol is still in there!” Alca exclaimed. She could still hear him crying out from within the control room whenever the Mud Golem moved and shifted it. Abandoning him was not an option. But while Alca could use her {Resurrection} skill to revive from death, she couldn’t let Keima and Igni die.

“I-I suppose we have no choice... Keima, you evacuate first! I will stay here and attempt to finish this for as long as I can!”

“A-Alright! I can’t summon many, but I’ll leave some Gargoyles for you. Good luck!” Keima replied, and Alca sighed in relief. At least he wouldn’t be dying now. He even gave her three Gargoyles for support. She steeled her resolve and

shifted her focus to the Mud Golem.

The mud was looking healthy thanks to all the water. It was sloshing about wetly. Alca, on the other hand, was slowed by the water reaching up to her ankles. It got into her boots and made disgusting squishing sounds as she moved. The mud was less sticky than before, and as if to mock her it fell into the water, absorbed some, then returned to the main body.

It wasn't long before a Gargoyle died protecting Alca, its corpse sinking into the water. She used it as a foothold to dodge more attacks from the Mud Golem, but it was sinking fast. Or to be precise, the water level was rising and submerging most of the corpse.

A muddy fist came flying at Alca. "NGAH!" she cried, taking the blow head-on and flying through the air before smashing into a wall and falling into the water. The other two Gargoyles had to lend their shoulders to help her up, which reminded her that Gargoyles could fly. She wouldn't have to worry about the water at her feet if she were in the air.

"...With no other options left, I suppose I will have to use my last resort. Will you aid me in fleeing for a bit?" she asked, and the two Gargoyles nodded. They grabbed her from both sides and flew into the air.

The Mud Golem was even acting confident thanks to all the walls. It lazily swung its arms around, which the Gargoyles dodged with Alca in their arms.

But still, in the end they were just Gargoyles. One of them got hit by a giant muddy arm and broke to pieces. The other grabbed Alca with both arms and flew low, weighed down by her.

But they couldn't last forever, and soon they were cornered against a wall. The Mud Golem lifted up both arms. Alca and the Gargoyle had nowhere to run. The arms would fall, and they would have no choice but to take them head on.

But nonetheless, Alca grinned. "That was more than long enough. Go forth... {Judgment Ray}!" A beam of light blasted onto the Mud Golem's chest.

{Judgment Ray}. Such was the name of a King-Rank Light spell that used up almost all of Alca's mana. It was her ultimate move that drained all her energy. And it hit the control room's door head-on!

“GRAAAAAAAH?!”

“Ngh...! Did that do it...?!” Alca said, faltering as her consciousness faded from her lack of mana. But what she saw right before falling was an unscratched door. The spell had failed. She hoped it would at least open a hole, but it was to no avail.

“No!” Alca exclaimed, grimacing. The Mud Golem extended a hand as the strength left her and she fell into the water. But just as it reached her... All it did was hit her with muddy water.

“Ah?!” The muddy water woke Alca up a bit. Indeed. Muddy water. The Mud Golem’s body had absorbed so much water it was no longer gloppy, but rather soggy.

“This is it...!” Alca exclaimed again, her eyes wide with surprise. She had to reverse her mindset entirely. Previously she had been attempting to defeat it by removing the water, but here it was on the verge of self-destructing from too much water. Still, it didn’t quite make sense. She had never heard of a dungeon filling with this much water before, outside of ones specifically built around flooding. It was possible, though, that an artificial dungeon undergoing a paradigm shift had just coincidentally never broken into an underground water reserve before.

“Now then... It seems I will last a bit longer here yet.” She could barely move. The best she could do was avoid drowning by holding onto the Gargoyle and floating. But now it was the Mud Golem who was incapable of finishing its opponent off. Alca’s body heat was dropping from the water, but it wouldn’t be killing her anytime soon.

“Will this become an endurance battle for us both...?” Alca wondered, observing the Mud Golem. Despite melting from all the water, it wasn’t leaving, despite the fact that it had stuck itself to the ceiling earlier and presumably could do so again to escape the water. Furthermore, it had stopped attacking. Alca leaned on the Gargoyle more to preserve her strength as she watched the Mud Golem even more closely.

“What in the...”

The amount of water was breaking the Mud Golem’s body apart, to the point

where the control room she had considered its core fell off. It splashed loudly into the water accumulating in the Boss Room. If not for the water, no doubt she would have heard Count Lodol screaming in terror. And pain, too. The impact might have killed him, even.

“...So the control room wasn’t its core. I see,” Alca said, finally realizing the truth. The water was murky and hard to see through, but if she looked carefully she could see the Mud Golem desperately gathering mud to harden itself within the water. And there it was. The Mud Golem’s true core. Everything clicked together. In short, the Mud Golem had missed its opportunity to flee.

The water came in from outside the Boss Room. From the moment the fight started, the Mud Golem thought that it would never lose if it just had water. And as it continued the fight, the water drew up ever higher. It absorbed as much water as it could possibly contain. No longer would fire pose a threat—at which point, the Mud Golem finally realized the problem. It couldn’t get the water off it. Even attempting to move to flee to the ceiling would absorb more water.

Never had it thought there would be more water than its body could contain. And once it started to dissolve, it was no longer able to move properly.

“...Sir Gargoyle. I will destroy the core. If possible, please rescue the count.” Alca made a noble request of the Gargoyle with no way of knowing if it understood, then built up the scraps of mana still within her. She chanted the incantation for a spell that would cut right through water.

“■■■■■■■■■■ —{Stone Bolt}.” A pointed rock raced through the water to the clump of mud. The water slowed it down, but it maintained enough speed to pierce through the mud.

“...This time for sure, it is done...” Alca murmured before passing out.

Keima’s Perspective

So yeah, the plan was to flood the Boss Room. Just wash away the mud, Alca, and everything! I could easily justify leaving due to not wanting to drown, and Alca could take care of destroying the Mud Golem and rescuing Count Lodol if

she could manage it. Either way didn't matter to me. Because if you thought about it, the dungeon couldn't modify itself or use castling due to {Treaty}. That meant once the room was flooded, Alca wouldn't be able to interfere anymore.

To get it done I just cobbled together a hose and a water source spring. I had used both way back in my Dungeon Battle with Ittetsu. Likewise, I added in some plankton to stop the enemy dungeon from absorbing it, and that was that. I didn't even need to build up a bunch before releasing it, so I just poured the water in directly from the spring.

"Alright, it should be pretty flooded by now."

"It sure is, Keima," Rokuko replied before informing me that Alca and the Mud Golem had defeated each other simultaneously, though technically that was Alca's win since she was still alive.

Perfect, now I just need to get into the control room slash Core Room and destroy the Artificial Core. I'll go ahead and get rid of the hose; we don't need it anymore.

"Also, the reinforcements you asked for should be arriving soon."

"Nice."

I had gone ahead and requested some reinforcements that could move within water. That should settle the last of our problems.

I played Je*ga to pass the time with Igni until eventually the reinforcements slithered their way over to us.

"Eep?! The heck is that thing!?"

"Hm? Oh, that's our monster, Mr. Tent the Tentacle Slime." He had a clear, pink body covered in slimy wetness. Imagine a sea anemone and you would have something close to it. He was basically the boss of our sub-dungeon the [Ivory Beach,] and he was immune to physical attacks.

Mr. Tent slithered over and waved a tentacle in greetings. *What a nice guy.*

"Uncle, you sure like to use weird monsters."

"We have another dungeon by the ocean. He's our boss monster over there," I explained, and Mr. Tent bent his body in a weird bow gesture. "See? He said

hello.”

“Uncle, you can understand what it’s saying...?”

“I mean, you can’t? Look at all the tentacles. He has such a large range of expression!”

“...I mean, I guess compared to a normal slime? Maybe? I think you can just tell because it’s a monster from your dungeon.”

“Don’t worry, Igni. I can’t understand it either,” Rokuko chimed in.

“Wait, you can’t understand what I’m saying?” Mr. Tent said through a series of tentacle wiggles. *Hey man, I hear you loud and clear. Maybe the auto translator is doing some work here.*

That was when Mr. Tent took out something wrapped in leaves from within his slimy body.

“Oh? A gift? Ah, it’s fish. Thanks, I’ll eat it later. You want any, Igni?”

“I dunno, that’s kinda gross...” Igni said, making a weird face that made Mr. Tent jump in surprise. His innocent heart had never expected that the gift would go unappreciated. And so, Mr. Tent took out a pink crystal from within himself.

“This is a gift too? Take a lick...? Oooh! It’s so salty! This is salt! Wow, so you made salt from ocean water like how I taught you before? Nice. Here, Igni. Mr. Tent brought some salt for us.”

“...How can Slimes even make salt? It’s kinda weird and pink,” Igni said as Mr. Tent trembled with pride. “Uncle, what’d he just say?”

“Let’s see. ‘Impressive huh? I can provide as many military rations as necessary,’ I believe.”

“All he did was shake his body but he somehow said ‘military rations’?!?”

Sadly, it seemed Igni wasn’t too fond of the pink salt. Mr. Tent slumped over sadly... *Awww, there, there.* I rubbed his squishy back (?) to console him

...Oh, but on second thought, the fact that this salt’s pink means it probably has some of Mr. Tent’s bodily fluids inside. I think they’re good for blood flow,

beauty, and some other stuff. I'll have the Succubi take a look sometime later.

"Wait, it's sad right now?"

"Can't you tell from looking?! His tentacles are so droopy and sad!"

"I can't! And anyway, Uncle. What's the Slime even here for?"

Oh, right. I forgot why I actually called him over here.

"So yeah, Mr. Tent. I want you to go destroy that Artificial Core. Rokuko can tell you where it is. I'll keep an eye on things with my monitor."

Mr. Tent saluted with his tentacle. He seemed excited to finally be doing some proper monster work again.

"...Good luck, soldier!" I said with a salute of my own as Mr. Tent plopped into the flooded Boss Room.

"...Uncle. I think I just remembered that you're something special."

"Hm? Where's that coming from?"

Either way, despite having called Mr. Tent all the way over, the enemy boss had already been defeated. There was nothing but simple work left. The control room's door blocked Mr. Tent's path, but it was no problem at all. He blasted it down with water magic and let the air inside the control room bubble its way out.

Oh wait, Count Lodol's still in there. Let's see... I'll send in a Gargoyle first, just in case I need to make some excuses.

Inside the now-submerged room was Count Lodol, floating at the top where there was still a pocket of air. Mr. Tent felt around for a heartbeat and found one. Apparently, he was just unconscious. If nothing else, Count Lodol had the devil's own luck.

As for the Artificial Core itself... There it was. It already had a big crack running through it. The stone slate displaying the monitor was broken as well, and the cable was disconnected from it.

"Rokuko, get Mr. Tent to use the Gargoyle as a blunt weapon to destroy the Core."

“Okaaay.”

Mr. Tent, hearing my instructions through Rokuko, grabbed the Gargoyle’s legs and despite being beneath water swung it hard. It headed straight for the black, cracked Artificial Core. And when it hit, the force of the blow sent cracks spreading throughout the rest of the Artificial Core. Chunks fell off it like scale after scale, until ultimately the entire Core crumbled to bits.

Seconds later, an ominous rumbling sound could be heard.

“Keima! This is bad, the dungeon is collap—” Bzrt. The call with Rokuko disconnected.

“Uh, hello? Rokuko? Rokuko?!”

“Uncle! This is bad! The whole dungeon’s shaking... LOOK OUT!” Igni swung her tail, smashing a rock that had been falling towards my head.

Uhhh... Crap, is the dungeon collapsing? Honestly, I really should have predicted this. Of course destroying the Artificial Core’s going to make this happen. That’s how Cores work.

“Dang... I really didn’t think this through.”

“Wh-Wh-What’re we gonna do, Uncle?! At this rate we’re gonna be buried alive!”

I mean, uh. Worst case scenario, I could just {Ultra Transform} into something that could survive being buried so Rokuko could dig me out later. Or maybe I could go for a mole and dig myself out? Only problem is that Igni and Mr. Tent are here. I’m not sure the two of them would survive being buried alive... I thought, and then an idea came to me.

“Speaking of which—Igni, isn’t this Boss Room really close to the [Flame Caverns]?”

“Um, oh, right. It kinda shares a wall with the eighteenth floor.”

“Could you smash that wall?”

“Ah!” Igni exclaimed, having perfectly understood my intention. “This way, Uncle! It’s underwater! I’ll go break that wall, just follow!”

Apparently the bottom of the Boss Room was closest to the [Flame Caverns]. That was perfect, since we could meet up with Mr. Tent along the way. I held my nose and dove into the water after Igni.

“Guh! This water is disgusting!”

Epilogue

Igni broke through the floor of the Boss Room, and we found ourselves fairly high up in a [Flame Caverns] hallway. I thought for a second I would do more than sprain my ankles on landing, but Mr. Tent wrapped his tentacles around me and took the fall for me. He cushioned our landing successfully, then let go of me. Thanks to him my only injury was getting covered in slime.

“Thanks, Mr. Tent.”

Don't sweat it, Master! he replied with some trembling tentacles.

In any case, I used {Purification} to get the goo off me, then checked up on Igni. “Heeey, you alright?”

“Uh-huh, I'm okay! I'm surprised you are too!” she exclaimed, and a second later we heard the hole closing above us. That was probably Ittetsu or Redra's doing. Though the water had plankton inside and would thus flow farther down the dungeon. Oh well. It would evaporate before long. The [Flame Caverns] was pretty hot. Like, not “sunny day” hot, but “on the sun” hot.

“Yooo, Keima! Igni!” roared Ittetsu the Salamander as he raced down the passageway to us. *Oh yeah, the passages are this big so Dragons and Salamanders can fit through...* I nodded to myself just as he came to a full stop, scraping along the ground due to inertia.

“Dad! You're alive again?!”

“I never died! Thanks to you two, hah!”

Igni jumped on Ittetsu and gave him a big happy hug.

“You sure you should be moving so soon?” I asked.

“You bet! Thanks to you getting rid of that thing, my sickness just fuckin' died on the spot. I'm as good as ever. No need to worry about that eruption now!”

“Nice, that's what I like to hear,” I replied. His good news was all that I could have asked for.

“Hrm? Keima, who the fuck’re those two?”

“Huh? Mr. Tent, what’ve you got there? Oh...” I took a closer look and saw that Mr. Tent had Alca and Count Lodol in his tentacles. “Oh, they were just lying on the ground?” They had probably, or rather, definitely flowed in with us through the hole Igni opened. Talk about some good luck.

“...Er, nah, don’t toss ’em. Well. I mean, I guess our quest was to save him, so...” *We’ve already destroyed the Artificial Core, so there’s not really any point in finishing off Alca now. I’ll just carry them back. Mmm... They’re both unconscious, but they’re breathing and have pulses.*

“But they might wake up on the way back, and that could be dangerous. Oh well. Ittetsu, could you guide Mr. Tent out on the straight path? Igni and I will just leave through the [Flame Caverns].”

“You got it! I’ll go ahead and tell Rokuko you’re alright, too!”

Oh, nice. She’s probably worried since our call ended out of nowhere like that.

“{Summon Gargoyle}, bam. Alright, Igni. You know where to go.”

“Uh-huh! Just follow me, Uncle!”

And so I followed Igni out of the [Flame Caverns] comfortably with Gargoyles carrying me and our two unconscious fellows. No enemies came after us. Those that did pop up were eaten on the spot by Igni. *Gotta say, it feels kinda strange to see a loli dragging a Red Minotaur behind her with one hand while eating its raw meat with the other.*

In the end, Alca and Count Lodol didn’t wake up before we sent them to Dragg, so it probably would have been better if we had just rushed home through the straight path as well.

Count Lodol’s Perspective

“N-Ngggh... Ah?! This ceiling, I recognize it! This is my room! So it was all a dream,” Count Lodol said aloud.

“...My lord? My lord! I am so glad you’ve awoken!”

“Hrm? Oh, my steward. I... I feel as though this has happened before? But no matter. Ngh, my head is spinning. Careful now...” Count Lodol got out of bed and wavered on his feet. The steward quickly moved to support him. “Good grief, I had the most unfortunate nightmare. The Artificial Dungeon went berserk and I was locked inside the Control Room. I was dropped into a pitfall and then knocked unconscious, but I woke up in time to hear the High Priestess come to save me. It... It was a dream, yes.”

“Unfortunately, my lord, that was no dream. It truly happened...”

“Say... what...?” Count Lodol slumped over, all the strength leaving him. Naturally, he had guessed that himself. His hunger was hard to ignore, and it had felt too real to be a dream, particularly with how dry his throat had gotten over the half-day he spent locked up. Now his throat was wet for some reason, but his head hurt like he had hit something with it.

“So you are awake, Count Lodol,” said Alca the High Priestess. She was in the room as well, apparently. He had legitimately not noticed her due to the pain and foggiess of his head.

“Wh-Why hello there, High Priestess. How do you do?”

“Just fine. And fear not, I will charge for the healing magic alongside the rescue fee.”

Count Lodol swallowed hard. It would be a bit unreasonable to try to avoid paying for the rescue and healing... But, well, as long as the dungeon was safe, earning the money wouldn't be too hard.

“My lord. I have an unfortunate report. The artificial dungeon, the [Golem Graveyard], has been destroyed...”

“What?! This can't be!” Count Lodol exclaimed. They had finally started turning a profit from it, and now it was gone before he could reap all the riches.

“I'm afraid it's true, Count Lodol. I would have liked to save the artificial dungeon if possible, but... I will inform my superiors that we nevertheless acquired much valuable data,” Alca said.

“High Priestess. The problem here was your artificial dungeon bugging out. In other words, it's your responsibility as its supervisor, no?”

“Hm. You are not wrong.”

“I-In that case! I ask that you give me one more artificial dungeon seed, for free!” Count Lodol began, rushing up to the High Priestess, but that was when it happened.

“Apologies, but I will not be permitting that.” Cid Pavella, the next archduke of Pavella, entered the room.

“B-But why, Lord Cid?! Artificial dungeons are the next generation of dungeons! They are safe, and the proper form of dungeons!”

“Strong words coming from a man almost killed by one,” Cid replied. Count Lodol faltered.

“B-But, I...”

“Furthermore, I am told that the artificial dungeon was inducing an eruption within Tsia Mountain. As the future archduke of Pavella, I cannot allow something so dangerous on my land.”

“Ngh, ngggh!”

“My, my, Lord Cid. This all happened due to extenuating circumstances. Under normal circumstances, artificial dungeons are just as safe as Count Lodol says they are.”

“Why it happened doesn’t matter, does it? The artificial dungeon did go berserk, and it could happen again,” Cid said, and there was no argument against that.

“Besides that, what is all this about Tsia Mountain erupting?! This is my first time hearing about that!”

“Of course it is. The dungeon going berserk was going to cause it, and that happened right as you went missing. I was informed of this by a very trustworthy adventurer,” Cid said with a sigh. He himself had only been informed of it by the Adventurer’s Guild about half a day ago. Despite having spent days locked up in his room out of shock, the second he heard that, he rushed out and began directing the evacuation of Dragg. His behavior was fit for a future archduke known across the duchy as a prodigy.

“Though now that everything is settled, I’ve canceled the evacuation.”

“Are you certain it’s not nonsense?! I doubt a mere adventurer would be able to determine something like that! To think you would let yourself be manipulated by such obviously fake information.”

“...This warning was given by Keima Goren.”

“Gah! THAT FRAUDSTEEER!” Count Lodol roared in anger, beating a fist against his bed. It sank into his layers of blankets.

“Calm down. If not for Sir Keima’s assistance, you would be buried deep underground right now.”

“Quite right. Keima heroically saved me as well,” Alca chimed in.

“Ngh!” Count Lodol choked. Keima had saved his life. That would mean he owed him a big debt... if it was true.

“Oh, it’s true. As is all that about the eruption,” Alca said flatly.

“Wh-What was that? Wh-Where... Where is your proof?!”

“I will inform you all of a secret that must be kept. Salamander, the great spirit of fire, serves Keima.”

The air in the room froze. Great spirits were lords of nature wielding so much power and influence that not even the Church of Light could ignore them.

“I was only half-conscious, but I saw Salamander with my own two eyes. And I heard him when he spoke thus: ‘Thanks to you, I contained the eruption.’ Not only that, but I heard Keima order him to leave before us, alongside one of Keima’s other summons.”

“Say... what...?”

“We survived by escaping the [Golem Graveyard] directly into the [Flame Caverns]. In other words, Keima undoubtedly wields the power to break dungeon walls. If we assume that power comes from the great spirit of fire, everything clicks into place,” Alca explained with an almost dreamy, loving tone in her voice. It was certainly true that it was impossible to destroy dungeon walls through normal means, but Keima knew it was possible to be buried within a wall. He had destroyed dungeon walls multiple times before.



“I swear upon the Light God that all I have said here is true. However, the trump cards of adventurers must be kept secret. I ask that you speak of this to no one.”

The High Priestess had sworn to the Light God that she was speaking the truth. There was no doubting her, then.

And as for the great spirit of fire... well. If Salamander said Tsia Mountain was on the verge of eruption, it surely had been.

“I see... Actually, that makes more sense to me. It explains everything. Keima was capable of sending the Dragon fleeing precisely because the great spirit of fire serves him.”

“I-I can’t believe this! Nggh...!”

Everything made too much sense. There was no questioning it. One could only guess what good fortune had made it so, but the great spirit of fire undoubtedly served that fraudster. It was thanks to him that Keima was able to control a fire-wielding Dragon and make it his pawn. In conclusion: All of Keima’s accomplishments were, in fact, legitimate.

“Count Lodol. I believe you will want to *rest* at your home estate for now. House Pavella will look after Dragg for you.”

“What?! M-My lord, that’s just...!” Count Lodol stammered. Cid was quite clearly confiscating Dragg from him.

“...Listen well. Keima may have saved your life, but just think about all that you have done to him. It’s not hard to imagine that he is furious with you, Count Lodol. Do you want to make an enemy of a great spirit?”

“Ngh, b-but... But...!” Count Lodol stammered, still floundering. It was clear that he still couldn’t believe it, or at least didn’t want to believe it. Cid sighed and looked at Alca.

“Did you hear that, honorable High Priestess? Count Lodol doesn’t believe your word. It seems he wishes to make an enemy of you as well.”

“Oh, my. I suppose I shall offer him no further support, then.”

Count Lodol paled at both Cid and Alca ganging up against him. “Th-That is

not the case at all, High Priestess! I believe you! I believe everything you say!”

Cid grinned. “Now then. If you understand the situation, and still refuse to *rest* at home, then you will have to take responsibility another way. We must quell the great spirit’s anger. Perhaps dropping your decapitated head into the volcano is the best way to handle that. What do you think, Count Lodol?” Cid asked, and only then did Count Lodol understand. If the great spirit was serving Keima, then making an enemy of Keima was making an enemy of the great spirit and the Dragon, and House Pavella would certainly execute Count Lodol in that case. Of course they would. The customs of Pavella’s former royal family would give them no option but to cut his head off or let themselves be burned to pieces by the great spirit and Dragon. Cid providing him an opportunity to *rest* instead was undoubtedly an act of unparalleled kindness.

“Lord Cid! Your humble servant Ringen Lodol feels tired from these events and requests some time to rest, sir!”

And so, Count Lodol decided to *rest* at home.

Keima’s Perspective

The day after conquering the artificial dungeon, I ended up going to Dragg’s town chief residence to talk with Cid. Niku and Masked Maid #1 (Ichika) came with me just in case. Entering the parlor with the two of them following behind reminded me of the first time I visited Dragg.

“Count Lodol was so exhausted by recent events that he has elected to rest at his home estate back at the city.”

“Hm? Oh, alright. Tell him to get well soon.” *Feels like someone would rather go on vacation for resting like that, but, well... I guess this world isn’t industrialized or anything, so even a city has clean air and stuff. Guess it makes sense he’d rest in a convenient place like that.*

“Henceforth, House Pavella will take administrative control of Dragg. That would make me the town chief. Here’s to a long and fruitful relationship, Sir Keima.”

“Er, right. Same to you, Cid. Let’s be good neighbors.”

“I’m glad you feel the same.”

Cid and I exchanged a handshake. *Huh. This ten-year-old sure is acting tough, huh? Guess this is what they call having a firm spirit... Apparently, he was locking himself in his room over a lost love until yesterday, but who can blame him? He’s still ten, after all.*

“Yesterday’s incident was entirely the fault of Pavella. I will formally apologize to you.”

“Alright. I mean, actually, don’t sweat it. I’m not worried about it. Also, mind if I ask where Lady Alca is?”

“Ah, yes. She’s still in this estate. I believe she is planning to return to her kingdom soon, now that the artificial dungeon is gone.”

Soon. Yeah, she’s probably gonna spend the night in our inn. Hey, she’s welcome to stay a night or two, as long as she pays and doesn’t try to destroy our dungeon.

“Still, this certainly was one huge mess,” Cid said with a sigh.

“Y’know, they say sighing keeps happiness away.”

“Oh? Is that a Beddhist saying?”

“Nah, just a commoner’s advice. So, what happened?” I asked, and Cid began talking as if he had been waiting for me to ask this entire time.

“Right. As you know, the dungeon is gone now, and that means we have nowhere for all the criminal slaves to work. Not even expanding the farms for them is an option, since we don’t quite have enough water.”

Oh, those guys. Hopefully he just sends them far, far away from here.

“I mean, they’re slaves, right? Why not just sell them?”

“They are much more dedicated and hard-working than most criminal slaves. I have to admit to considering them an asset I don’t want to lose. Especially since half of them are quite insistent about wanting to keep working here.”

They’d high-tail it outta here if I turned into Succuma and asked them to, but I don’t really want to put myself through that again. I’d lose almost as much as I

would gain...

“There’s nowhere else for them to work?”

“Hmm. The inn the count built is full of empty rooms, but we can’t exactly have criminal slaves in such a high-class inn.”

Actually, didn’t it turn out that Ichika is a criminal slave? Eh, whatever. Our inn just does whatever it wants. And apparently, Ichika was just trapped into being enslaved somehow, rather than doing anything wrong, so yeah.

“To that end, I’m thinking of closing the luxury inn and restructuring it as another kind of store.”

Oh, that’s no good. That’ll make all the customers visiting your inn go back to visiting ours.

“Why not just have the employees working at the cheap inn go work at the fancy inn instead, then use the slaves for the cheap inn? I’ll even help improve the fancy inn if you need it.”

“...What? Er. Really?” Cid replied, looking shocked. “W-Would that not be stealing your customers and profit?”

“Let’s just say that as the pope of Beddhism, I’d like to see all inns improved. Besides, according to what my trustworthy partner said, it’d be pretty easy to fix up the place.”

After all, I hear the main problem is the bedding. All I have to do is toss some futons their way and they get more business while my inn gets none! It’s a win-win!

“I’ll provide some Beddhist bedding for you. Don’t worry, the price will be reasonable. Oh, right. Doesn’t Pavella love public baths? How about I build one of those and let customers of your high-class inn stay there as much as they like?” *Oh, but I don’t think they like cold water. Whiiich gives me an idea.*

“I have an onsen-making magic tool from the dungeon. I’ll let you use it for this.”

“What?! Those exist?!” Cid said, turning to face me with a serious look on his face. He had taken the bait. “But I must ask... How does it function? Does it dig

into the earth, or does it produce hot water?”

“It produces hot water. The only thing is, it’s got a lot of weird restrictions, and I need to test it a bit to make sure it works here. I can’t use it at my place since we have a natural onsen.”

It should be fine to just stick a customized [Water Source] into a pillar and call it a magic tool. I could get it all for about 2,000 DP easy, and we earned more than that from Dragg in a day already.

“That said, I’m pretty sure it’ll work just fine in Dragg. Though I’ll need to do a bit of a ritual.”

Something with a trap inside of it would stop working once I removed it from the Dungeon floor, so I would need to make part of Dragg a floor and set the trap on it. But I could hide in a tent and say I needed to do some ritual to make it work. All I had to do was include hiding the ritual as a condition for lending the tool.

Also, I would ultimately be *renting* it to them. That was an important detail. Reason being, by charging rent I could get free money, just like the income from the tunnel! And since I owned the tool, I could ask for it back as blackmail if any problems arose between our towns.

Heheheh. This way, they won’t go out of their way to cause problems again. Which means I can sleep more!

“How terrifying. To think a Dragon-conquering legend would be a master of negotiations as well...”

“To be fair, I’m not actually much of a fighter.”

Cid was giving a bemused smile. He probably noticed that this gift would prove to be a weakness for me to exploit. *Man, him and Maiodore, huh? Noble children sure are smart.*

In the unlikely event that they refused to return it when I asked, I could just fiddle with its settings from the dungeon and stop it from working. ‘Only we of Goren know how to fix it’ (read: have access to the on/off setting). It was perfect.

“How much for it?”

“We can negotiate. Though I actually don’t know the market price for magic tool rentals, so I’m gonna ask you to negotiate with Dyne, the merchant in our town. You can pay him for it too.” *Lemme just push all the work onto Dyne! At times like this, it’s best to leave everything to people who actually know how things work. Dyne won’t complain as long as he gets a handling fee. And hey, no fee is too high if it means making my life easier.*

“Oh, by the way. About the artificial dungeon’s ruins,” I continued.

“...What about them?”

“If you dig it up, you’ll probably find a ton of Iron Golem corpses.”

Indeed. We had failed to recover most of the Iron Golems we sent to the Dungeon Battle, and the majority of our army had been buried in the collapsing dungeon. That meant there was a ton of iron waiting to be dug up, not to mention all the weak Iron Golems that the artificial dungeon itself had been making.

“There were lots of Golems in that dungeon. Why not have those slaves dig them up for a bit?” *At the very least there’s over two hundred Golems’ worth, so it should take a while to dig it all up.*

“...Now that is some valuable information. Oh, and yes. I would gladly rent that magic tool from you. It seems as if you have just solved all my problems for me, Sir Keima. Haha,” Cid laughed with a conflicted smile. “What can I do for you in return?”

“Hey, don’t worry about it. Let’s just stay on good terms.”

And so, the meeting with Dragg ended calmly. Cid seemed intent on repaying me, which I guess had to do with Pavella being the duchy of merchants.

Wozma’s Perspective

“Town chief, I am in disbelief,” Wozma said after after seeing Keima the next day, and who could blame him? Ichika had briefed him on the situation yesterday after Keima went to bed immediately upon returning.

“R-Right. Sorry, Wozma. Did I go too far?”

“Yes, you went too far.” And anybody could tell he had. Cid had distanced Count Lodol from Dragg for his antagonism toward Goren, and Keima had rewarded that so excessively it was absurd. Had he just been that worried about Count Lodol? No, Keima had barely thought of him at all. It was Wozma and the villagers who were concerned, and maybe that was why Keima had been so considerate. After all, it was Keima himself who had saved Count Lodol’s life.

“Hahahaha, well... I’ll settle down for a bit and go back to being a nice ol’ figurehead.”

“What were you thinking? Good grief.” *What a kind town chief. So kind it’s actually cruel,* Wozma thought with a sigh.

The discussion yesterday was meant to be an opportunity for Cid to bow his head and do what Keima demanded as an apology. But after Cid sent Count Lodol to *rest*, which was the metaphorical head bowing, Keima made no demands. Not only that, he had quickly provided information and solutions to the three problems plaguing Dragg—dealing with the criminal slaves, a water shortage, and the inn that was losing money.

It was obviously excessive. Anyone could see that Dragg now owed an enormous debt to Keima. But Cid, being on the side apologizing for misdeeds, could hardly refuse Keima’s suggestions.

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Dragg was now under the de facto control of Goren... or rather, under the control of Keima. Dragg would have no choice but to obey any command Keima gave, no matter how extreme. The town had been weakened significantly, and in negotiations, Keima had shown no mercy. The magic tool that made an onsen was so convenient that one could only think he had specifically hidden its existence to use as an ultimate trump card.

“In any case, what will the price for the rental of the magic tool be? As you are the only one to have found such a tool, it is your decision.”

“Uhhh, just go with whatever a fair price for something like that would be.”

“A fair price? Understood. I will convey such to Dyne.”

“Thanks. Don’t rip him off, okay? There are plenty of these out there.”

Dragg already owed Goren a pile of debts. It seemed Keima intended to add onto that pile by renting the tool at a fair price. Cid would no doubt attempt to overpay for the tool, his last opportunity to pay apology money to Goren and reduce his debt. Dyne, on the other hand, was more than familiar with Keima’s methods by now.

In short, the negotiation table would end up quite strange as the buyer suggested an extremely high price, while the seller suggested a significantly lower price. Since Goren’s town chief was saying not to overcharge, the ultimate price would be on the lower end. A shame for Dragg’s town chief, surely. They could have paid back all their debt in a simple, understandable way if only they had the opportunity to pay an exploitative rental fee.

Keima dominating Dragg with a mountain of gratitude-based debt was so superb, one could put it in a textbook.

Keima’s Perspective

Alca the High Priestess visited our Dancing Doll Inn. Naturally, I was a bit trepidatious about having Neruneh handle her at the receptionist desk, since our friendly ol’ apprentice witch had a sharp tongue and verbally abused even Heroes, so I took her place ahead of time.

“Keima. As promised, I have come to stay the night.”

“Thanks for coming, High Priestess. Do you, uh, have the money to stay?”

“Of course. Shento, pay the good man.”

“Yes, milady!” The servant standing next to her took a bag out of the altar on his back and placed it on the counter. *That sure is a lot of coins... Uhh, what, there’s a hundred and eighty one? That sure is a weird number of coins to pay.*

“This seems to be too much. Our grand suite is twenty five gold coins per night, and the A-Rank dinner is five gold coins each.”

“I would like to stay for a week’s worth—six days. A-Rank meals will suffice.”

Oh. Ohhhh.

The drawback to her {Treaty}, that she couldn't enter the dungeon after seventy two hours of the spell being in effect, didn't matter in the least since the artificial dungeon had been destroyed, which meant she could spend plenty of time here relaxing. The other gold coin paid for her servant staying in a normal room for six days. Tip included!

...Well, she technically paid for eating a kid's lunch every day, but I'll go ahead and swap the menu up daily for her. Might as well throw in the shortcake I promised her, too.

"Okay. Now we just need to get you to your rooms."

"Indeed. Shall we go, Keima?"

...Well, I guess I have to guide her now, I thought just as Ichika conveniently passed by.

"Whoa, hey there, Alca. There's gonna be a rat race soon, wanna come?" she said.

"Yes," Alca replied instantly. "I stayed at the grand suite last time and, on second thought, can find it again on my own," she continued before taking the key and heading off to the recreation building with Ichika.

Different name, same person. Oh, right. Here you go, Shento. The room's thataway.

* * *

In the end, the rental fee Dyne negotiated for the onsen magic tool was eighty percent of the net income. Cid began negotiations offering to pay based on the water used, the entry fees, and so on, but Dyne stuck to eighty percent no matter what. I was impressed he pulled it off—eighty percent is like taking half of the profits, then another half of that, and then a little bit extra just out of spite. He was as skilled of a negotiator as I could ask for. Good thing I left it to him.

Though, uh, that is a fair price, right? We're not taking too much? I don't want him pissed at us. Oh? It should be fair enough for him to be feeling gratitude?

Alright then. Anyway, it's eighty percent of the net income post expenses, so we should still both be earning money here. They won't pay the money when they're in the red, but that's just standard practice.

And thus, with the fee settled, I brought the onsen-producing magic tool to Dragg. Once I was told they were ready, I borrowed a wagon from Dyne and stuck it on.

...Incidentally, the magic tool was just a one meter tall cube with a [Water Source] stuck onto it. While on the wagon, it was just a plain chunk of stone. Oh, and since [Water Sources] have options for fiddling with the kind of water, all I had to do was set it to "onsen water". Worst case scenario, I could just set the heat to high, but this option would make it more like proper onsen water. But hopefully not a sulfur onsen. Those stink pretty bad.

Accompanying me were Niku and Ichika (Masked Maid #1). At this point the three of us had become the Dragg Squad, including Ichika always being in her masked maid outfit.

"By the by, Master. I got a real deal question for ya."

"Sup?"

"Why aren'tcha just putting that in {Storage}, man? That'd be hella easier."

Oh. Uh... Good point.

"Masked Maid Number One. In terms of convenience, just buying the block there would be even easier. I am sure that Master is doing this for a reason," Niku said confidently, which just made it hurt worse. *Uhhhh.*

"The plan is to show everyone that the magic tool is a huge stone block. Any would-be thieves will see this and give up on it, yeah? By showing it off ahead of time, we can discourage thievery."

"Uh-huh. Nice one, Master. Not bad for some bullcrap you just made up."

"Hey!" *Don't call it bullcrap. Even though it is.*

"Cause I mean, man. They could steal it no prob if they have {Storage}."

"...Okay, that's true." *Theft prevention might just be pretty dang hard in this world.*

We found Cid waiting for us at the other end of the tunnel to Dragg. He had some guards with him.

“There you are, Keima! I’ve been waiting.”

“Oh, my bad. Am I late?”

“No. I just came early. Is that the magic tool?” Cid asked, already expressing his full interest in the stone pillar in the wagon.

“Yup. So, where do you need it?”

“I was thinking we’ll try out the center of town first. Follow me,” Cid said, and we followed him to a potential spot for it.

Hm... Yep, this is well within dungeon territory. Should be fine. Not to mention that there’s already channels for water and stuff, so just letting the water run should be fine. The place is set up so well, I really have to wonder what he planned to do if this place didn’t work out.

“...I see there’s already water channels here, huh. What was the plan if I couldn’t make an onsen here?”

“Oh, that would be fine. We would just need to extend these water channels a bit. It’s just that this spot would be the fastest and most convenient. Not to mention, I believe in you, Keima,” Cid said with a straight face. *Well, uh... Your faith will be rewarded?*

Getting straight to the ritual, I had Cid’s guards help set up a tent to hide us from any onlookers. I then brought the one-meter-tall stone cube out and placed it on the stand that had been prepared. Niku did that, picking it up and carrying it easily with one hand. One of Cid’s guards thought it was lighter than it looked and tried to lift it too, but it was so heavy he couldn’t manage it even with two arms. *Behold the fearsome might of an orichalcum-supported puppy. Within her is true power.*

After that, I just had to place the {Water Source} in it.

“Alright, time for the ritual. Everyone but me and Kuro, please leave. Ichika, you keep watch outside the tent.”

“You got it.”

“By the way,” Cid interjected, “Is there anything else we can do?”

“Hm? Uh, let’s see... Actually, yes. Cid, can I ask you for a little favo—”

“Yes, you may! Ask anything!” Cid replied enthusiastically. *A-Alright? He sure seems cooperative. Is he that excited about the onsen magic tool? I mean, I guess I understand how he feels. Baths feel great. {Purification} just can’t capture the same feeling.*

“So, what do you need?”

“The ritual’s top secret. Can I ask you to make sure nobody’s hanging around the area?”

“Oh, that? Consider it done. I swear nobody will approach until you call for us.”

Alright, that gives me room to do lots of things. Aaand makes sure I don’t have to see any of the Last Commune guys again.

With Cid taking care of the crowd, Niku and I could finally get to work on the magic tool ritual. That said, as I mentioned, there wasn’t much to actually do. I just had to place a customized [Water Source] onto it from the menu. Bing bang boom, done. *Dungeons sure are convenient. Wait, does that count as a compliment for Rokuko...? Am I praising her? Huh.*

“I’ll set it to pour out enough for a natural onsen. The heat’ll have to be hotter than our onsen for it to not cool down. Water content... normal onsen ratios,” I said aloud, fiddling with the menu while Niku stayed on guard just in case. Though it was set to be invisible, so all anyone would see was just me tapping my fingers in the air beside the stone block.

Alright, that should do it. Now I just need to hit the confirm button.

But if I ended it that fast, they would question whether I had really performed the ritual, and I really wouldn’t know what to say to that. Thus, I decided to kill time instead. *I wonder how the artificial dungeon excavation project is going?* I thought, opening the monitor.

“Dig for mama’s saaaake!”

“Dig for the holy mother’s saaaake!”

...And I closed it. *Good to see the criminal slaves still working hard... Nice weather out there, huh? Oh, Niku. If you're gonna nap, can I use your lap as a pillow?*

* * *

I woke up from my nap, reality having been successfully escaped for a bit.

"Master, are we done?"

"Yeah, it should be fine to say the ritual's done now. All we gotta do now is tell them the water will keep flowing as long as they regularly swap out the magic stone."

Most magic tools absolutely require magic stones to function, but a [Water Source] was a dungeon object and thus didn't need one. The plan was to avoid suspicion by having them offer up a new magic stone each week. All I had to do was retrieve the magic stone stealthily, and consider it part of the rental fee.

It was kind of like building an inn to get both DP and the inn fees. Always getting two sources of payment for these kinds of things was why being both a Dungeon Master and a town chief was so profitable. *Though, well, a single magic stone's not much compared to a whole town's worth of DP.* I'll just turn it into a Golem Blade (Magic Blade) or something.

Anyway, I pressed the "place" button on the [Water Source]. Water began flowing out of the block, which was a part of our dungeon. It wasn't shooting out like water from a hose, though. Rather, it overflowed out from the [Water Source] within. It was like the cube was enveloped in a veil, and the water raced down to the stand while radiating steam.

It probably would spray out if the holes were smaller, I thought while adjusting the heat and water amount.

...Oh. I need to make a slot for the magic stones with {Create Golem}. I can make a small door on the side and... Nah, that really gets in the way of the water. Let me adjust the walls so the water flows around it... Move the [Water Source] itself a bit... Actually, maybe I can just dig into it... Carefully, so I don't break it... This kind of looks like a Merlion now. Maybe I should fiddle with the decoration a bit to make it look like a lion more? No, wait. Water coming from a

lion's mouth would be like drool. Nobody wants that. Change of plans. I'll just push the [Water Source] further inside and have it come out of smaller tunnels.

"Okay, done."

"Good work, Master."

In the end, the onsen maker ended up as a basic cube with water gushing out of small holes without much force. I made a small door on one side of the onsen where no water was coming out, and they could just fit the magic stone inside. I would retrieve it at some random point to make it seem like the magic stone had been used up.

...Oh. How about I stick the cube to the stand with {Create Golem}? That way there'll be no way to steal it. Nice. That sounds good to me. Let me just lock it in place, aaand, done.

Thus ended the activation ritual for the onsen magic tool. All that was left was telling Cid, recovering the tent, and going home. Maybe due to all the steamy hot water, when I left the tent, the cold air felt really refreshing.

I told Ichika the ritual was done, and Cid came over not long after.

"Sir Keima. It seemed like you spent a lot of time in there even after the water started flowing. Were there any problems?"

"Nope, it went just fine. Really, the most important part of the ritual is after the hot water starts flowing. Want to take a look?"

"Oh, I can? Allow me, then."

I beckoned Cid into the tent to show him my masterpiece. *Behold. This is the onsen magic tool!*

"Aha, I see. Holes open into the cube and water comes out of them. Very interesting design."

"By the way, there's a small door at the back for you to put magic stones into."

"I see... But there's a lot more water than I expected. Does it function for only a small portion of the day?"

“Nah, pretty sure it never stops.”

“In other words... it goes all day?”

“Yep. Is there a problem with that?” I asked since he looked a bit bemused, but Cid shook his head.

“No, it’s just that producing this much water must demand quite the quantity of magic stones.”

“Uhhh... I think it’ll work fine for a week on a single Iron Golem’s magic stone,” I said. *Might as well make it cheap to run so they don’t end up unable to afford the operating fees. I’d have to stop it through the menu each time, which would be a pain.*

“D-Dungeon magic tools certainly are something. Human-made ones can’t even compare.”

“Yup. This sure is a dungeon magic tool.”

“...With this much water being produced a day, the entire town need not worry about water again.”

“Will the water channels be fine?”

“Yes, perfectly fine. We were right to listen to Sir Dyne’s warnings.”

I didn’t know what Dyne had told him, but I was glad to hear there weren’t any problems. *It’s nice to have competent subordinates.*

“So yeah, that’s all the work on our end. The rest is up to you.”

“Indeed. I will strive to begin earning revenue to send your way as soon as possible.”

Cid and I exchanged a firm handshake. *Alright, that’s that for the magic tool. Now I just need to get home and sleep!*

“Incidentally, there’s something else I would like to discuss with you, Keima... Do you have the time?”

“...What is it? I’ll warn you now, I’m not gonna agree to any tedious favors,” I replied casually, but for diplomatic reasons I couldn’t refuse Cid’s invitation and was thus stuck going to Dragg’s chief residence. *Oh wow, there’s a lot more*

vases inside here now.

Once I took my seat, one of Cid's maids set cups of tea on the table in front of us.

"Thanks to that magic tool, we'll be able to use water without restraint here."

"Huh? If you're gonna use it for living water, maybe I should boost how much it produces?"

"No, that amount is enough. We've been using rain water and water-producing magic tools ourselves. It rains reasonably often here... though of course, this is all common knowledge to you, as town chief of Goren."

Yeah, of course rain falls here. Though the weather is completely different on opposite sides of the mountains for some reason.

"So, what do you want to talk about? I'm not interested in any fishy get-rich-quick schemes."

"It's not a bad deal. I think it'll benefit us both."

"So you say, but pretty much everyone who offers bad deals claims they're good deals. Who would admit to offering a bad deal?"

"Fair... Er, it's a good deal, and it isn't fishy? Does that sound better?"

"Just tell me what it is already. I'll at least hear what you have to say," I said, urging him on. Cid nodded and slowly began to speak.

"In short, I want to strengthen the bond between House Pavella and you, Keima."

"Alright. So you want to form a stronger bond between Goren and Dragg."

"...More or less. And the best way to do that is a marriage. What do you think?"

"Uh-huh... So you want someone from Goren to marry someone from House Pavella?"

"No... Or, well, I suppose. Yes, I suppose that's what I mean."

Well. This sure is a classic. House Tsia did the same thing with political marriages. Yeah, I'm kind of an expert here. Nobles always try to use blood to

form bonds.

“Sorry, but I’m gonna have to decline. I’ve got Rokuko.”

“Er, no. I’m not talking about you, Sir Keima. I mean Lady Kuroinu.”

“Wait, what?”

Cid looked Niku’s way. “May I ask for your hand in marriage?” he asked in a serious tone.

“...Master,” Niku said, looking my way with worry and not knowing how to reply.

“Hold it, Cid. You’re just putting Kuro in a bad spot here. What kind of joke is this?”

“I’m serious!” Cid said, doubling down despite Niku’s reaction. I closed my eyes and thought.

Aaah, I wish I could just fall asleep here. This can’t work, right? It could never work. I seem to recall Vice Chief Wozma telling me not to do any work for a bit. Weeelp.

...Anyway, enough avoiding reality.

“Put simply, Kuro’s already betrothed to Maiodore. You missed your chance.”

“You seem to be misunderstanding something, Sir Keima. I’m not suggesting that Lady Kuroinu end her betrothal with Maiodore.”

“...Wait, what?”

“Nobles practice polygamy,” Cid said with a confident grin.

Polygamy. In other words, a special guy overflowing with talent and status getting multiple wives. Most of the time, anyway. But if his first and second wives don’t like each other, the husband gets squashed between them as their relationship turns into a bloody battleground of tedious drama. There are lines of succession, wills, inheritance, and just nothing but tedious, tedious, tedious junk! Polygamy is a lifetime of work and hell.

“No, no, no, no, no way. Polygamy is out of the question.”

“But wouldn’t it be perfect? Lady Kuroinu, Maiodore, and I could all be

together just like that.”

“Won’t there be fights over who’s the main wife...? Wait, uh, I guess not.”

“Yeah, anyone could tell just by looking. Maiodore would be the main wife, of course,” Cid said. It was obvious because Niku was a slave and Maiodore was an archduke’s daughter.

“But still, what’s the point of going that far? What do we really gain?”

“The rumors say that Lady Kuroinu is your daughter, Sir Keima. Lady Kuroinu and I marrying would make you my father-in-law. I promise that my father, the archduke of Pavella, would provide you with gracious support. I will even provide a contract,” Cid said while taking out a contract that already had “Sravayu Pavella — Archduke of Pavella” signed at the bottom.

“Wait, is that real?”

“It’s real. I swear on the name Cid Pavella—Cidolfus Pavella.”

“Convincing, but there’s nobody here who can confirm that for me.”

Cid took out three more pre-signed contracts. They were all written the same way.

“One for you, one for House Pavella, one for House Tsia, and one for the Adventurer’s Guild. It was quite a tall order for my father since the actual contents had to be so vague. Still, he signed them immediately when I said they would be important for deepening our bond with you, Keima.”

...Okay, if he’s sending one out to the Adventurer’s Guild too, it’s probably not a fake.

“I’m honored, but no.”

I read the contract just to be sure, but all it said was “If this marriage occurs, the towns of Goren and Dragg will support each other” in simple language lacking any long-winded noble euphemisms. Everything except the marriage was left undescribed, and it basically implied Dragg would do anything for the sake of Goren. *Should you really have signed something like this, Archduke of Pavella?*

...Well, not that I intend to make Niku engage in polygamy. Unless she wants

it, that is.

“But why? Forgive what will sound like bragging, but I believe I am on the handsome side, and I’m told I’m a quick thinker. It’s not so apparent when you’re around, Keima, but I am even known across the duchy as a once-in-a-lifetime prodigy. If I were you, I would accept this contract without a second thought.”

“Then why were you turned down by House Tsia, Cid? They must have had some problem with marrying into House Pavella,” I said, and Cid smirked as if I had walked right into his trap.

“You seem to be misunderstanding something, Sir Keima,” Cid said before taking out a red potion—Tee S, the sex-changing drug.

“...What?”

“I’m the second wife, Dad.”

...Are you insane, Cid? Or, well, I guess if, diplomatically speaking, Niku is Maiodore’s husband and thus a guy, it makes sense that Cid would offer himself as a wife... Maybe? Still, he should know by now that Niku is actually a girl... Eugh. Don’t make this mess of sex and gender any more complicated than it already is, please.

“I’ll have to talk about Bonodore about this first.”

“I suppose so. Just know that I’m serious. Oh, want to keep your copy of the contract, Dad?”

“Nah, I’m good. And stop calling me Dad.”

“Ah, I got ahead of myself there. My apologies, Sir Keima,” Cid said while putting away the contracts. It felt as if I could hear Leona, the God of Chaos, laughing from within the red potion somehow.

* * *

In any case, after quite a tumultuous week, it was time for Alca the High Priestess to return home. She hadn’t done anything major in particular while at the inn, but just being around her at all was exhausting. I was very much looking forward to her leaving soon.

Since she technically was a VIP from another country staying in our grand suite, I guided her all the way to Tsia Mountain's tunnel to see her off.

"Keima. Are you certain you do not wish to return to the Holy Kingdom with me?"

"Sorry, but it's not happening."

"I see... What a shame. Still, I imagine there will be endless opportunities for us to meet in the future, Keima. A man strong and wise enough to save even the immortal High Priestess is no doubt tied up in the strings of fate," Alca said with a small, blissful smile.

"Keima," she continued after a pause. "Would you care to turn around for a moment?"

"Huh? Uh, sure?" I said before turning around, only for Alca to embrace me from behind. *Wait, wh-what?!*

"I ask that you face away... If you were to look at me, I would be too embarrassed to speak."

"Er, okay...?" I replied, and Alca wrapped her arms around my waist while pushing her body against mine. The soft body only an adult woman could have squished pleasantly against mine. Her sweet flowery scent tickled my nose.

"Thank you ever so much for saving my life last week," she said, probably referring to when I carried her out of the collapsing artificial dungeon while she was unconscious. That was the only thing I could think of.

"That was the first time I have ever come back alive from such a dangerous situation. As you know, as the High Priestess I have a {Revival} skill, and in most situations I exit dungeons by dying."

"Well, I'm glad you didn't have to die this time. Staying alive is a good thing."

"...Indeed. It certainly is. And... erm, I... ahem." Alca seemed like she wanted to say something, but just couldn't get it out.

"If you have something to say, feel free to just say it. I'm all ears."

"Ah... Yes, yes indeed," she replied, then took a deep breath before continuing. "Forgive me. I was wrong to say the eruption would be a good

thing.”

Oh, that...?

“It seems that years of working as the High Priestess has dulled my appreciation for the sanctity of life and the fearsomeness of death. Only upon you saving my life did I remember how valuable life truly is...” she said, trailing off. I didn’t know what internal debate had raged within her, but I could tell that saying those words had taken a lot of courage for her. Someone taking on the role of a High Priestess no doubt felt that they had to never make mistakes, never say the wrong thing, and certainly never go back on their past words. Even Rei had been tense about always “being in the right” and living up to her role, and she was just the High Priestess of a chill religion like Beddhism. I couldn’t even imagine how much pressure the High Priestess of the Church of Light must feel to always be the epitome of correct virtue.

“There’s nothing to forgive. You said what you thought, and now you’ve changed your mind. That’s fine and normal. Don’t sweat it, High Priestess.”

“Aaah... Keima. If you would permit it, I would love nothing more than to steal you away to the side of light at once,” Alca said, squeezing me tighter. And then...

“I’M NOT GONNA LET THAT HAPPEEEN!” Rokuko yelled, rushing up to us.

“...Again? Must you interrupt every romantic moment my lover and I attempt to have?”

“Wh-What the heck are you even saying?! Keima’s *my* partner, not yours! Get off him, get OFF!” Rokuko tried pulling Alca and I apart with all her might. But despite her best efforts, Alca remained snugly pressed against me. She was simply too strong for Rokuko to move even an inch.

“Keima, fight back a little!”

“I’m going to be real here, I literally cannot move.” I had actually been trying to get her off me for some time now, but she was squeezing me so firmly I couldn’t even flail in place. That was in part due to giving Niku the orichalcum support without fixing my own, but Alca was also hugging my arms against my waist in a way that kept them pinned down.

“Ahaha. It seems Keima accepts my love, at the very least.”

“No, he doesn’t! He would never! Why are you even here?!”

“Keima was very enthusiastic about me staying at his inn before I left.”

You have very loose standards for what defines “enthusiastic.”

“Keima! Is! Mine! Okay?!”

“My, my, my,” Alca replied, finally letting me go. It was less Rokuko successfully ripping her off and more Alca just deciding to let go.

“Monopolization is not a good thing, Rokuko. The Church of Light teaches that we must share good things with each other.”

“I don’t care! I’m a Beddhist! And Keima’s the pope of Beddhism, even!” Rokuko said, this time hugging me as if to keep me from being stolen away. Various soft places pressed against the front of my body. *Uh. Please?*

“Ahaha. I have heard much about your ‘sub religion’ without a god... It’s very cute. Though taken another way, it means that if Keima alone joins the Church of Light, then all of you will be members as well. Isn’t that right, Keima?”

“No, everyone’s free to choose their own main religion.”

“Oh, my, what a shame,” Alca said before embracing me from behind again.

“Eep?! H-Hey! What are you doing?!” Rokuko exclaimed.

“Rokuko. Just so that we are all the same page... You know that I am perfectly fine with granting you my love as well, yes?” she said, this time reaching far enough to wrap her arms around Rokuko as well with me in the middle. In other words, I was being sandwiched between Rokuko and Alca in a three-person hug. And yes, that meant Rokuko and I were facing each other head-on, with her face right up close to mine.

“Oh my. Keima, your heart is pounding harder than before. I see that Rokuko joining us truly is important for you. Ahahaha.”

“Hey, wait! Stop! Don’t touch me in weird places... Eep!” Rokuko cried, making cute noises. *Where the hell are you touching her, Alca? Hello? Excuse me?*

Rokuko pushed forward to get away from Alca's hands. Which meant her soft body pressed against mine even closer. Her face flushed crimson. Alca's hands went even further... leading Rokuko to let out more cute, sweet cries while hugging me as tight as she could. Alca wasn't letting either of us escape.

"K, Keimaaaa... Nnn... Nmmm..."

Hold it. Too much. I can't take it anymore.

"Alca, let us go. This joke has gone too far."

"So you don't want me to take you both away to the Holy Kingdom?" Alca whispered into my ear, her hot breath tickling me.

"No. We're fine here."

"My, my, how cruel. You would spurn my most heartfelt request, dear? Ahaha."

Uh, why isn't anyone helping?! Come on, servant guy! Don't just look away! Stop her!

"A'ight, a'ight, I think that's enough, High Priestess. My master's got a pure heart and those honkers of yours aren't doing him any favors," Ichika said while walking over, probably having been summoned by Rokuko.

"Oh, my. If it isn't Ichika... Ahaha, I must confess, his heart is so pure I'm almost hesitant to taint it. But the allure is oh so intoxicating. Would you like to join us?"

"I'm gonna have to pass. Like, believe me, I'd friggin' love to join, but I'm kinda a slave here, y'know?" Ichika replied, and at that point Alca let Rokuko and I go.

Th-Thank the lord. I'll have to give Ichika some curry rolls later. Some real expensive ones, from dedicated food stands.

"...Incidentally, Keima. How much would you charge for me to take Ichika? She understands me quite well, so I would like to make her a maid of mine."

"She's not for sale."

"Ten thousand gold coins."

“She’s not for sale,” I repeated, making it clear that I wasn’t going to negotiate.

“Sigh... Your will is as strong as ever, Keima. Very well, then. I pray that you live a happy life serving Keima, Ichika.”

“Hahaha, you got it. I’ll look after you real nice whenever you come back.”

Ichika and Alca exchanged a firm handshake. *Ichika, the hell did you do to make her like you that much? Ten thousand gold coins is kind of a lot.*

“Now then, Keima, I must depart. If you ever find yourself visiting the Holy Kingdom, don’t hesitate to visit my estate.”

“Sure, I’ll drop by and say hello if the time comes.”

“Indeed. It would be oh so delightful if Rokuko and Ichika were to accompany you. I shall be waiting for you all.”

I’m gonna be honest and say I don’t want to go to the Holy Kingdom at all. You’ll probably just lock me inside your room or something.

In any case, Alca the High Priestess finally left Goren. Rokuko and I slumped to the ground in exhaustion, finally freed from her reign of terror. *I have no idea how Ichika just skipped back to work without a care in the world.*

“...Well, I know what to take from this,” Rokuko began.

“Huh?”

“You’re mine, Keima, and I can’t let anyone take you. I’ll need to be more aggressive from now on. What do you think?”

“...You’re asking me?” *I mean, if you get too aggressive, I’ll probably buckle from all the pressure, so don’t go too far.*

Side Chapter — The Bizarre Rental Fee Negotiations

It was time for the rental fee of the onsen-making magic tool to be negotiated. Dyne, the merchant shouldering most of Goren's financial administrative responsibilities, visited Dragg's town chief residence. Inside a simple, largely undecorated parlor was Cid Pavella, the town chief of Dragg.

"Thank you for coming. I'm Cid Pavella, the town chief."

"Yes, my lord. I'm Dyne, a merchant from Goren. Pleased to make your acquaintance," Dyne replied.

"Sir Dyne. First, allow me to thank you for coming."

"No need to thank me, Lord Cid. After all, I'm a commoner and you're a noble. Only makes sense I'd come visit you, man," Dyne said, speaking in his Pavellan accent and debasing himself a bit. But that was actually a hard jab thrown Cid's way. By establishing Cid as his superior and emphasizing that he was beneath him, Dyne was expressing that he intended to guide the negotiations in Cid's favor.

In truth, the meeting should have involved Cid going to Goren and negotiating in their chief's residence. Cid had wanted to thereby express that status didn't matter for the negotiations, but before he could do anything, Keima had sent a letter saying the vice chief ordered him not to do any work, and that he would therefore send a merchant to Dragg.

Cid simply was not able to visit a merchant's store to conduct a negotiation such as this. It was a firm practice for commoner merchants to visit nobles instead of vice versa, and Cid forcing his schedule on a merchant's store would be so disruptive to business that it was out of the question.

With a single letter, Keima had forced Cid to take a suboptimal opening stance. The key to the negotiations here would be recovering from that as much as possible, and paying as much for the tool as he could to repay the debt that had been loaded onto him. Cid ordered his trained noble face muscles to force

a smile.

“Indeed. But today we are negotiating a price. I would like to have an equal, balanced discussion on the market price of the tool.”

“Yeah, of course. This is all business to me too.”

“Then first, allow me to pay you for travel expenses,” Cid said before taking out a clinking bag. But Dyne took only a single glance at the bag before shaking his head with a smile.

“Hah, Lord Cid. That ain’t a good move, lemme tell you.”

“...Figures.” Cid clicked his tongue. The bag was obviously too full for mere travel expenses. It was a bribe. Cid, knowing that Dyne would be significantly involved in business between Goren and Dragg moving forward, had attempted to bribe him in order to measure his worth as a man.

First, if he just accepted it then and there, he was a small fry. Cid would be able to squash him down with his negotiating power. That would be ideal for him.

Next, if he turned it away saying he couldn’t accept a bribe, then he was a merchant with integrity. Cid would be able to expect fair, honest negotiations. That would be fine too.

Next, if he accepted the bribe with an ulterior motive, he was an experienced negotiator. He would ignore the intent of the bribe and, at best, take the negotiations a bit more seriously since he had bothered to take it. But even then, Cid would only lose the bribe and not much else. It would still come down to negotiating strength.

But the last was the worst and most difficult of all common reactions—refusing the bribe with full understanding of what that meant, as Dyne had just done. It showed their restraint, their dedication, and most of all, it showed they had no intention to negotiate at all. They knew they were in an overwhelmingly dominant position, and with that in mind they refused a bribe that might endanger their dominance. It was another way of saying they could easily earn more than enough money from the negotiations without needing to take a trifling bribe. In this case, Dyne was also showing that he had strong

connections to Keima, the town chief.

“My apologies for testing you. Pretend you didn’t see anything.”

“Hey, don’t sweat it. I know what’s up. I didn’t get trained by the town chief... ’scuse me, trained by Keima for nothing.”

Furthermore, he casually dismissed the reality that Cid had offered him a bribe without exploiting it as a weakness, further establishing his dominant position. All Cid got from his bribing attempt was the knowledge that Dyne was a bigger threat than expected. He should have expected nothing less from a merchant with Keima’s trust. Cid would have to go all-out as if he were negotiating with Keima himself to not lose his footing... or rather, to not be crushed to pieces. Cid swallowed hard.

“Judging from that accent, you must be from Pavella.”

“Yup. But you can just think of me as a Goren merchant now, my man.”

“Hahaha. Could I ask you to be gentle, as a fellow Pavellan?”

“Sure. I’ll sell you the tool for real cheap, brother. Don’t tell Keima.”

“Hahaha,” Cid laughed dryly, unable to hide his worry. Dyne knew he didn’t want the tool for cheap.

And thus began the negotiations.

“First of all, I need to know how strong the tool itself is. We shouldn’t even think about a set monthly payment if we don’t know how much the tool itself can actually do,” Cid began.

“Fair. I heard from Keima that it makes enough hot water to fill up a public bath, but it’d be risky to set a hard price when we don’t know the exact details. ’Specially what kind of magic stone it’ll take.”

“In that case, I think we should settle this based on the income the magic tool earns.”

“Fine with me. I was thinking the same thing, dude.”

The two of them grinned in agreement. Next step was establishing a baseline.

“I intend to pay all money earned from water purchases, bath visits, and so

on.”

“...Eighty percent. That’s what I’m aiming for and I won’t take any higher.”

“Hm... Eighty percent of all our sales, hm? Very well,” Cid agreed instantly, holding out a hand. If Dyne shook that hand then negotiations would be over, but of course Dyne did not.

“Still joking this late in the game? Quit playing with me, man. We couldn’t take that much from you. I’m talking about eighty percent of the net income, obviously.”

(Translation: “The hell are you trying to pull here? You think you’re in a position to pay us that much?”)

“Oh, really? But you won’t earn that much from the net income.”

(Translation: Ngh, I knew that trick wouldn’t work. But net income is just too little, anyone can see that!)

The difference between the “sales” Cid spoke of and the “net income” Dyne spoke of couldn’t be more significant. Allow me to give a brief explanation.

Let’s say you have a bag of chips you’re selling for 500 yen. If you sell one you get 500 yen in sales straight-up, but then you have taxes, base price, and so on to take out of that 500 before it becomes net income.

If the net income of the chips is 25% (earning 125 yen per bag sold), and you have to destroy the ones that didn’t sell (losing 375 yen per bag), then net income would only be 25% of sales even when you sold all of the product. Net income would be zero if you only sold 75 out of the 100 bags, and any less than that would lose you money.

Here, Dyne was asking for eighty percent of the net income, a figure which could possibly be in the negatives depending on expenses. Naturally, with that established Cid had to retract his hand. If he let that deal through, it would be yet another favor to pay back.

“Sir Dyne, I think a merchant such as yourself should be more interested in turning a profit.”

(Translation: Quit fucking around and let me pay more.)

“Consider this us celebrating your becoming the town chief of Dragg. Not to mention, Keima said that this magic tool was just sitting dead in a storage building. We don’t even know if it’s working so you’re taking on a bit of risk here, y’know. We appreciate that, man.”

(Translation: You’re new here, pal, don’t get in over your head. We don’t even need this shit. A single bronze coin is a profit to us. Got it?)

“I appreciate the thought, but without Keima the magic tool can’t even function. By all rights he should take all of our earnings. No need to hold back, I’m willing.”

(Translation: I’m sorry. Please, just let me pay back a little of my debt. I’m begging you.)

Under normal circumstances, every coin earned by the magic tool (even before expenses like upkeep and employee wages) would belong to Keima. Without him, the magic tool wouldn’t exist, after all. Anything less would be more debt, anything more would be paying back the debt, and to that end Cid was intent on at least not digging his hole deeper. He needed to give Keima all of the sales. However...

Dyne let out a sigh. “I’m here to make a deal that’s good for both of our towns. Personally speaking, I’d be totally fine not taking any money at all, but something that benefits us both long-term is ideal. Keima’s telling me to be nice here, so you know what, how about we compromise and I take fifty percent?”

(Translation: Sorry, but I’m no softie. How about I just give it to you for free? Sure would put you in a lot more debt, huh?)

“Fifty percent is simply too beneficial to us to be a sign of equal friendship. I say... the eighty percent you suggested before is fair.”

(Translation: Alright, alright! I’ll go with your first deal, just spare me!)

“Pleasure doin’ business with ya. Eighty percent share it is. Man, sure feels good we settled it that quickly. Easy work.”

(Translation: Oh, want us to cover eighty percent of your costs when you go in the red? I can arrange that.)

“Er, well. As you know, I’m the son of Pavella’s archduke, and I receive some support from him. It’s unlikely our town will ever be in the red, and even if we are losing money, I wouldn’t be so shameless as to push the expenses onto Keima. I would like to make a deal here with that in mind.”

(Translation: I’m sorry! I was too cocky! But come to think of it, I have House Pavella backing me, so we’ll never go in the red! Please, please just let this end! Save me!)

Dyne, recognizing Cid’s reply as admitting defeat in negotiations by referencing status, nodded.

“Alright then.”

(Translation: A’ight, I’ll cut you a break. That’s good enough for me. And now it’s settled for real.)

“...Er, will you want a deposit on the magic tool just in case? We might break it by accident ourselves.”

(Translation: With that settled, is there any way I can pay you a lump sum of money at all? Please?)

“I’ve been told not to take anything like that, man. Seems like Keima really likes you. Y’know, I think I remember him saying something about giving the futons for free.”

(Translation: Don’t be a sore loser, pal. Give up.)

“F-Forget the deposit, then. But at least let me pay for the futons. It’s the least I can do.”

(Translation: Wait! Okay, I get it! I’ll actually give up now, let me live!)

And so Cid and Dyne exchanged a firm handshake, their negotiations over the magic tool’s rental fee complete.

Extra Episode — Rokuko Wants to Flirt With Keima

A thought struck Rokuko. She wanted to flirt with Keima more. With a homewrecking bug like Alca the Church of Light's High Priestess aiming for Keima's affections, Rokuko needed to give off such a lovey-dovey air in public with Keima that nobody else had an opportunity to approach them.

In the past, Rokuko had mostly kept to herself, but during Goren's first wedding she made it known loud and clear that she was Keima the town chief's partner. Everyone in town knew and accepted her position. But it wasn't enough. It just wasn't enough.

Keima hugged Rokuko and patted her head, sure. That made her happy and filled her life with meaning, sure, but still. She wanted to flirt in all sorts of ways beyond that. And when thinking about how to accomplish that, the heavens granted Rokuko with divine inspiration.

"Couldn't we do some crazy special flirting if Keima used his {Ultra Transformation}...?"

Keima's Hero skill, {Ultra Transformation}, was a power that let him, put simply, transform into anything. Since the skill's fifth level let him transform into anything that existed in the past or present, anything Keima knew was fair game. Key word being "anything". Rokuko still remembered the time Keima transformed into a Gigaplant monster and tentacle-groped Haku like it was yesterday.

"So basically, I have a lot of ideas and I want to hear your thoughts on them."

"...But why me?"

"I don't know why you called me over eitheer."

Rokuko had called Elulu the elf Ghost and Neruneh the Apprentice Witch over to her room. Reason being, well, they were both free at the time. Rokuko knew when the dungeon wasn't busy and who had what shifts at the inn.

"Don't elves live a really long time? I feel like you probably know a lot about

this stuff.”

“I’m a half-elf, so I matured at about twenty years old... It’s fine, though.”

“I’m looking forward to your crazy ideas, Neruneh.”

“Okaaaay, I’ll do my beeest.”

And so began the meeting on how best to flirt with Keima using his {Ultra Transformation}.

“So, here’s one idea I came up with.”

Put simply: The onsen strategy. Keima would transform into an onsen, and Rokuko would get inside. Her entire body would be enveloped by Keima’s hot water in the ultimate hug. Since it was a hug and not you-know-what, Keima should be fine with it. No doubt it would be a bold leap into modern flirting techniques.

“Couldn’t you just drink him insteaad?”

“Drink him?! Keima?! Wait... That’s actually a good idea,” Rokuko mused.

“Nonono. Please wait, Rokuko. If you separate the water, what will happen when Master undoes the transformation?!”

“Keima will be fine. Even if he dies, he’ll just revive.”

“What will happen to you if he revives inside of your stomach?!”

Ah. Rokuko hadn’t thought of that. In the event of Keima re-forming inside of her body, he might have to escape by tearing through her stomach.

“Good on you for catching that. This is it. That kinda thought is why I wanted to talk things through. Here, I offer you a melon roll as thanks.”

“Th-Thank you very much... Ah, this offering tastes delicious!”

“I’ll tell Keima this is an important experiment and have him try it on a Goblin later,” Rokuko said.

“If you’re going to test it on a Gobliiin, why not do food, instead of an onseen?”

“That would be a bit faster... and food, hm? That’s not a bad idea either.”

Rokuko thought deeply. Food... Consider candy. Keima could turn into candy which Rokuko could eat. Is that not something more powerful and intimate than a kiss? No, wait. Was she about to let a Goblin do that with Keima? Something more powerful and intimate than a kiss?

“...Forget about the Goblin experiments.”

“Oh? But then we can’t be sure you’ll be safe, Rokukooo.”

“Ngh...! Forget about this whole train of thought! It’s over!” Rokuko declared. She didn’t intend to risk her or Keima’s life through flirting. There was no point if they just died.

...But she did want to try it out at some point if the opportunity arose. She made a little mental note of the idea to stash away in the corner of her mind.

“Okay, with safety in mind, this is my next idea.”

Next was clothes. Basically, Keima would transform into a sock, and Rokuko would wear it. Considering Keima’s foot fetish, the next step would be a shoe.

“Isn’t that genius? I’d be wearing Keima!”

“Oooh! There would be a lot of contaact, and it would be totally saaafe!”

“Right?! I feel like Keima will start transforming into socks at the sight of me after we do this!” Rokuko said, puffing out her chest with pride at Neruneh’s praise.

“It’s certainly an impressive idea, Rokuko, but, um... I think there might be a problem with this. From your perspective, won’t it just be you wearing a normal sock? Would that be okay with you?”

“...Ah?!”

She hadn’t even considered that. Elulu’s observation cut straight to the core of what lovey-dovey flirting truly was. After all, lovey-dovey was a two part word: just lovey or just dovey wouldn’t cut it. They BOTH had to be lovey and dovey for the flirting to truly be lovey-dovey!

“Ngh, I’ll have to rethink that idea... Good job, Elulu. Have a second melon roll.”

“Um, can I have another kind of roll please? I’d like a cream roll!”

Rokuko presented Elulu with a cream roll for her esteemed service. Neruneh looked on with envy, wishing Rokuko the Dungeon Core would praise her as well.

“I need to think of something toooo... Aaah! What if he transformed into a Ghost and overlapped with youuu?!”

“Overlapped...?! That’s fresh!”

It was an idea born from looking at Elulu. A Ghost could ignore physical limitations and position itself over someone else’s body, creating overlap. Doing so would allow Keima and Rokuko to flirt closer than anyone ever had before.

“Neruneh, that’s a top tier idea. Have a melon roll.”

“I’d like a sandwich pleaaaase. An egg sandwiiich.”

Neruneh ate the egg sandwich Rokuko gave her with a smile.

“Transforming into a monster opens up lots of options. Keima couldn’t do anything as an onsen, but as a Slime he could move around,” Rokuko said thoughtfully.

“Weeeell, the question is if you could really see the thing Master transforms into as Master, riiight?”

Rokuko’s eyes shot wide open. Indeed. Keima’s {Ultra Transformation} allowed him to transform into something else that existed. But following his transformation, one could say that his body was not his own. Could Rokuko call flirting with the transformation as flirting with Keima? So asked Neruneh.

“...Grr, that’s a tough question. To think there was such a fundamental flaw in this!”

“Wait, why is the body even relevant? What matters is the heart!” Elulu declared, completely unbiased.

“Well, that’s probably true in some ways, but... Ngh, there’s no good answer here!”

In the end, they didn’t have any more ideas past that point, and Rokuko let

Neruneh and Elulu go after rewarding them with a huge load of rolls.

Then came the next day.

“Eheheh... Keima’s transformed into meee... Ehehehe, cuuuute!”

“Do you, uh, really find this fun?” Keima asked, transformed into loli Rokuko and sitting on big Rokuko’s lap while she stroked his hair.

“Your body is mine but your heart is Keima... This is totally acceptable lovey-dovey flirting! It’s the very epitome of lovey-dovey flirting!”

“I have no idea what you’re even talking about, but, well... If you’re having fun, I’m fine with it.”

Yeah. And that was that.



Afterword

The year is 2020. Volume 12 of Lazy Dungeon Master has finally been released. That's a whole dungeon! But it was so long, I only have one page for the afterword. That's not good. I have so much to say since I wrote like 99% of this volume from scratch, but there's just no space. I'll have to cram in letters without using too many line breaks. Thank you for reading, everyone.

Okay, let's cut straight to some deep lore. The LN is conflicting with the WN more and more, but this time I introduced a new character: Count Lodol. I asked my disciple Takenoko (author of "Genocide Online") for an idea here. Special thanks to him. I would expect nothing less from my disciple. His nickname is Mr. Fanletter. His fanletter for Volume 11 was so heavy the post office wouldn't send it. Very impressive.

Anyway, Alca the High Priestess of the Church of Light appeared in this volume. She and other side heroines are getting increasingly significant roles to play, which is making a big mess for Keima. Man, there sure are a lot of heroines now, huh? If Keima was a bit more loose with using his Dungeon Master powers, this would be a straight-up smut novel by this point.

There was a popularity poll the other day, with talented people helping. The results were Niku in first with Rokuko in third. Just imagine what the Ivory Goddess's face would look like if she saw that. Though if you included Big Rokuko and Loli Rokuko's votes, she would be in first. That was what led to the Japanese store pre-order bonuses for this volume being what they are, at the editor's request. Big and Little Rokuko got their time to shine, plus Niku. Oh, that's all the space I have. See you next volume!

Onikage Supana

Notes From the Translator

Hello all. At the time of me writing this (8/18/2020) the entire LDM series has

undergone a small but significant translation update, bringing old volumes up to some style standards of the modern volumes, plus updating/fixing some terms. Short-term, this will be a bit jarring and I apologize, but long-term, the series will benefit significantly. The three main changes are below.

Divine Futon → Divine Comforter Church of Lux → Church of Light {Trinity} → {Treaty}

My apologies and thank you for your understanding.

Bonus Short Stories

Shut-in Cid

Cid Pavella was the successor of Archduke Pavella, which made him the next Archduke of Pavella. He was widely regarded as a once-in-a-generation prodigy, and for most of his life he had lived up to that reputation, but at the moment he was in the middle of spending multiple days locked in his guest room at the Pavella town chief's residence.

"Siiiigh," Cid sighed for the millionth time. He knew what he was doing was wrong, and yet his body just wouldn't move.

"....."

Cid curled up in his blankets on the bed and rolled around. Count Lodol was doing something with the Holy Kingdom's High Priestess, but he didn't even feel like stopping them.

"Siiiigh," Cid sighed again. He knew the source of his mood. Put simply, he was heartbroken. The pain of heartbreak was immense even for adults, and Cid was still a ten-year-old child.

That was when a child nun appeared. "Ciiid! Let's plaaaay!"

"...Michiru?" Cid replied. He recognized the nun. It was Michiru, from the Beddhist church.

"Eheheh, I came to play! Mai told me to give you some time for yourself, but it's been a long time since then, so it should be fine now!"

"...How did you get in here? This is my room."

"I came to play with a friend! That's all that matters!" she replied. Cid decided not to think about it too hard, concluding that although the door and windows were locked, he just didn't notice due to the blankets over his head. It might be necessary to look into the security of the residence.

“Well, this is a fairly dull room with nothing too fun inside of it,” Cid said.

“You’re here, Cid! Let’s talk!” Michiru exclaimed. The guest room Cid was in was so bare there wasn’t much to do at all, but that didn’t bother Michiru in the least. She sat on the other side of the bed with a full smile, and it was all Cid could do to nod back at her awkwardly. “What’re you doing in here, Cid?”

“...Nothing, really.”

“Ah, you were praying like a Beddhist! You’re a diligent believer in the faith, and that deserves praise!” Michiru said before patting Cid’s head.

“Now that you mention it, I suppose that’s true,” Cid replied. He had researched Beddthism in hopes of finding some common ground with Niku to talk about. The holy symbol hanging from his neck was proof of that. But either way, he still found it unbelievable that doing nothing actually counted as praying.

“Resting when hurt is important, okay? This is common sense in Beddthism! The results of praying like this are immediately obvious! And it boosts your faith!”

“But I’m not hurt in the least.”

“Your heart is, isn’t it? There, there. There, there,” Michiru said while gently patting his head. It didn’t feel bad at all. “Let me tell you something nice. When you’re in a bad situation, make a detailed list of all your individual problems, and think of a solution for each. Sometimes when you have a big problem, it’s actually just a bunch of simple little problems making things complicated, and if you solve them it’ll all be better. Leona told me about this!”

“Leona?” Cid asked. It was a new name to him, but Michiru just continued without answering.

“This is why big problems and worries are usually solved by talking it out with other people and thinking of solutions. So! What’s worrying you, Cid?”

“E-Err...”

“I may not look like it, but I’m still a Beddhist nun! I’ll help you out!” Michiru said, looking at Cid head-on. For a second it seemed like her red eyes gleamed

with a bewitching light.

“Er... I’m, er, heartbroken.”

“Heartbroken, okay. Was it with Mai or Niku?”

“Both... I guess? The girl I fell in love with was actually engaged to my first love,” Cid began, and before he knew it he was spilling his heart out to Michiru. He felt himself relax a lot as he spoke. It was like some kind of fuzzy feeling in him was being sucked out each time she patted his head. Thanks in part to Michiru being a surprisingly good listener, Cid felt like his broken heart had been mended.

“...Michiru, you really are a proper nun.”

“Eheh! Now you get it!” Michiru said, puffing out her flat chest with pride. Her smile healed his soul further, and for the first time in a long time Cid smiled for real.

“Haha, suddenly I’m feeling so much better. Thanks, Michiru.”

“No, no, thank you for the meal!” she replied. Cid couldn’t help but smile at what a strange, incomprehensible response that was.

At some point, the sun had fallen and the town had gone dark.

“Oh, whoopsie! I need to get going soon,” Michiru said.

“Ah. Want me to walk you?”

“Nope, nope! I may not look like it, but I’m an adventurer! I’ll be fine on my own too!” Michiru replied with a grin.

“Thanks for today. Mind if we talk like this again sometime?”

“I’d love to! We at Beddhism accept everyone. And you’re a friend, so you can come whenever!” Michiru said before leaving through the window. She had probably come in through the window as well, but either way she nimbly disappeared into the darkness as if she could fly.

“The girls in Goren sure are something else, huh...?” Cid mumbled. They were incredible in more ways than one, suffice to say.

Michiru's Job

It was decided that a Beddhist church would be built in Dragg, and in turn Count Lodol ordered that a young nun be sent to oversee construction. To that end, Keima went to his church to call over Suilla the chief nun and Michiru the apprentice nun, both of whom were lazily performing their daily duties at a relaxed pace.

“So that’s how it is. I’m thinking of sending Michiru over for a while.”

“I understand the circumstances,” Suilla replied. “But are you sure she is the best choice for this?”

“Well... It is a Beddhist church, so all it needs is to be a comfortable place to sleep. With an altar, of course. The builders actually putting the church together will know more or less what to do.”

“I see. So it will not be a difficult job, then.”

“If you want, you can just write up a list of general instructions to give to her.”

“Very well. Can you handle this, Michiru?”

“Eheh, leave it to me! This is a big job, and I’m just the girl for it!”

And so, it was decided that Michiru would be sent to Dragg as an advisor for the Beddhist church. With his business finished, Keima left the church.

At once the Succubus nuns who had been listening outside the door slid into the room. “Um, Suilla. The other town’s chief was surely thinking of us when he made his request, wasn’t he? Or is he just a lolicon?” asked one of them.

“We wouldn’t mind if he laid his hands on us. We’re Succubi, after all.”

“In fact, we’re at our best when dealing with fat nobles. We’re Succubi, after all.”

“And once the job is done we could turn the tables and devour him. We’re Succubi, after all.”

Suilla paused to think. “It is likely that the pope is getting revenge on Dragg’s town chief. No doubt that this Count Lodol has been exceptionally rude to him,” she suggested, and the other Succubus nuns all nodded in agreement.

“Ohhh, that makes sense.”

“Considering how he acted when he came to Goren the other day, that must be the case.”

“Though there is the possibility that Michiru is so cute she’ll awaken his inner lolicon.”

“That in itself would prove to be a good experience for her... She is a Succubus, after all,” Suilla replied before glancing at Michiru, who tilted her head in a cute way. “Ahem. In any case, please do your best in completing this mission.”

“Of course, sister!” Michiru puffed out her nonexistent chest, brimming with self-confidence. That actually worried Suilla more, so she and the other nuns all worked together to write up a detailed list of instructions for her to bring as Keima had suggested.

* * *

And so, Michiru’s job was done once she handed over the list of instructions. With nothing else to do, she started lazily killing time in Dragg.

“Mm, it kinda sucks that all I had to do was hand over the letter. I’m a better worker than that! I’m smart and competent!” she declared loudly to nobody. Thus, for lack of anything better to do, she went over to visit the construction site. Once there, she found a bunch of construction workers fighting for some reason.

“Huh?! You fuckin’ said this pillar should only be three fists wide!”

“And you think this is three fists wide?! Anyone could see it’s way too fuckin’ big!”

Michiru had no idea what they were saying, but it sounded fun so she decided to butt in.

“Hold it right there! I, Michiru the Beddhist nun, shall solve thi—”

“Who the fuck are y— Errr, I mean...”

“Shut the fuck up, you litt— Uh, I uh...”

The moment they saw Michiru, the pissed-off construction workers chilled out instantly. Reason being, Michiru had gotten teary-eyed from them yelling at her. There was a saying that went, “not even a king can defy a crying child.” It only made sense that construction workers would be utterly broken in the face of a crying loli.

“Sorry for yellin’. C’mon, calm down.”

“I-I’m not crying! I was just surprised...”

“R-Right, yeah. You’re a good, strong girl.”

“Sniff... What’s going on here, anyway? Why’re you fighting?” Michiru asked through sniffles, and the construction workers hurriedly explained the situation.

“This guy made a pillar bigger than I told him too.”

“Nah, I definitely made it three fists wide.”

The pillar was certainly as wide as three of the builder’s fists. However, it was four of the other guy’s fists. That made Michiru tilt her head.

“...Where are the blueprints? Let me see them,” she asked.

“Blueprints? We don’t need none of those, we just remember what we build in our heads.”

“That can work if you build it on your own, but it won’t work if you’re building it together. Even a kid can figure that out,” an actual child said, which left the construction workers no room to argue. “Don’t tell me you don’t know how to write, or even do math. Even I can write, you know.”

“O-O-Of course we know how to write! We know numbers! Am I right?!”

“Y-Yeah! Alright, let’s get some blueprints made...”

And so, since the builders actually didn’t know how to read, write, or do math, Michiru started giving them lessons.

“Beddhism’s crazy. Normally only merchants know how to write and do math, but she’s just a little girl and she knows...”

“I think I should get my kids to study in Beddhism...”

Thus, the good word of Beddhism was spread before the church was ever

built, a fact Keima would never know.

Niku and Gym Clothes

“Gym clothes?” Niku asked.

“Yeah. They’re clothes built for moving around in. It’s like this jersey I’m wearing.”

Niku trained often, but she usually wore her maid outfit when doing so. The frills bouncing all over the place were cute to be sure, but at the cost of seriously getting in the way. Thus, I made some gym clothes for Niku to wear while training.

...At this point we’re rich enough to just dump DP on this kinda stuff, but why do gym clothes cost more than a futon? And why are they bloomers?

“So these are the... gym clothes?” Niku said after putting them on.

“Yeah. They don’t have any Golem assistance, but they feel pretty comfortable, huh?” I said, and Niku swung a fist experimentally. It was a smooth punch even without the Golem assistance.

“They are easy to move in. My legs especially,” Niku said. Her thighs were surprisingly healthy for her age; she lifted them up to do rapid high kicks in the air. *Y’know, Niku’s whole body is as soft as those clothes.*

“...May I ask for a hole to be made for my tail?”

“Oh, right. Will here work?” I asked, opening a hole in the bloomers by her lower back. Niku spread it open a bit and slipped her tail through.

“Master, I would like to try a duel. We should make my opponent wear gym clothes too, so we’re equal.”

“...Guess I’ll ask Ichika.”

“Okay,” Niku replied quickly, full of enthusiasm. I got the feeling that Ichika wearing gym clothes would have a lot of destructive power in its own way. Even so, I called her over and handed over a pair. She put them on without hesitating—and just to be clear, I didn’t watch her change. Nor did I watch Niku change.

“Woof, these are some soft clothes, man. Not bad. I can bounce around like hotcakes in these. Though it’s kinda embarrassing how my legs are like, totally exposed.”

Ichika stretched to loosen up her body, with her large chest bouncing softly within her tight gym shirt.

“...Ichika, do you have a bra on beneath that?”

“Stare at my boobs a bit longer and I think you’ll figure the answer out real quick, dude.”

“I’ve heard that the base of your boobs will hurt if you don’t keep them firmly locked into place.”

“You’ve got a point... But wait, why the heck are you just casually talking about boobs like that, Master?”

Maybe I should get some sports bras or something for them too.

“Okay. Let’s duel, Ichika,” Niku interjected.

“You got it. But these clothes provide like zero defensive power, so be soft on me, ‘kay?”

“I will hold back as much as I can.”

And so, the duel of bloomers and wooden swords began... Yeah, Niku’s crazy impressive here. She’s moving as fast now as she does with the Golem assistance. I’m impressed Ichika can keep up with what she’s doing at all.

“Ngh, whoa, hold it, Niku, stoooooop?!”

“I can react a lot faster thanks to the gym clothes.”

The sound of wood hitting wood filled the air. Hm, it does seem like the sounds are quieter than when they use Golem assistance, which means their blows aren’t as heavy. But they’re moving faster despite that.

“...Nghh?!”

“Ah.”

Eventually, Ichika failed a parry and took a wooden sword blow to the gut.

“Guh, guh, guuuh... Master, heal meeee...”

“Yeah, one sec.” I crouched and cast {Healing} on Ichika, and after calming down she let out a sigh.

“Not gonna lie, I think that crushed an organ...”

“Sorry. I couldn’t slow it down fast enough.”

It seemed she would need more muscle power to stop the sword right before it landed. I thought for a second that they maybe didn’t need Golem assistance, but it was clearly still helpful enough to matter. But on the other hand, if you weren’t worried about stopping blows, then Niku was still a deadly fighter loli even without Golem assistance.

“Niku, you’re still strong even without Golem assistance, huh?”

“Yuppers. Niku’s just flat-out strong.”

Are all beastkin like this? Or is it just Niku..? It’s gotta be just Niku. She’s just that special.

“Anyway, in conclusion, the lack of frills and stuff did help you move faster.”

“You believe so?” Niku replied before gripping the side of her bloomers thoughtfully. “Doesn’t that mean I would be even faster without any clothes at all...?”

There was a marathon runner who ran without clothes a very long time ago, but Niku was a girl, so I had to shoot that idea down.

Ichika and the High Priestess

“Whew. You sure won this time, High Priestess,” Ichika said.

“It was a fine race. I felt quite heated by the end.”

Alca the High Priestess elected to stay in the grand suite, but before then she viewed a rat race. In a twist of fate it was Land of Dreams, the third most popular entrant, who managed to secure first place and line her pockets with winnings. She ultimately spent all those winnings buying beer and food for everyone in celebration, but emotionally speaking it was still a win. And then,

having enjoyed her fill of the rat races, Alca finally allowed Ichika to guide her to the grand suite.

“All the celebration has made me somewhat sweaty. I believe I would like to take a warm bath ahead of time.”

“Sure, sure. Just go ahead and put in some of the mandarins to make some mandarin water.”

“Mandarin water?”

“I think just showing you’ll be faster. C’mere,” Ichika said, and the moment she opened the door to the grand suite a light magic tool lit up the room. Apparently it had been set to shine when the door was unlocked. In any case, Ichika guided her to the bathing room, where a tub of hot water had already been prepared.

“Oh? I see hot water was prepared during the rat races. Judging by the fact the water is still warm, it must have been prepared at the perfect moment. I would expect nothing less from Keima.”

“Heh heh heh, you’ve got it all wrong, High Priestess. I actually got this water ready before we even went for the rat races. The trick is, it’s using a warming magic tool! Check it.”

“I see, so you used a magic tool to keep it warm,” Alca replied. On closer examination she did see something like that within the tub. Ichika removed the tub’s wood cover and revealed the oven magic tool.

“...Is this not a magic tool for cooking? I believe I saw one in a store before.”

“If you put the heat inside water, it’ll keep the hot water warm, so yeah. Just gotta be a little careful with the settings, cause you’ll boil otherwise.”

“I see,” Alca replied, sincerely impressed. She had never thought to use the tool like that. It wasn’t unthinkable to drop a {Fireball} into water to heat it up, but the thought hadn’t extended to using magic tools in a similar fashion.

“So yeah, and here’s the mandarins,” Ichika said while pointing at a bunch of fruit in a basket. They were yellow.

“Mandarins indeed.”

“You take ’em like this and just toss ’em in,” Ichika said while tossing the mandarins into the hot water. “Then you do this with one,” she continued as she sliced one mandarin in half before sticking one half underwater and crushing it in her palm. A sharp citrus scent flooded through the bath water at once.

“I see, so fruit can be used in this way as well... Quite lavish,” Alca said. It reminded her of bathing in rose water, sliding into a large tub beneath a layer of bright red flower petals.

“This stuff’s good for your health and makes your skin silky smooth, for real.”

“That is quite delightful.”

“Riiight?” Ichika replied while nomming down on the other half of the mandarin. Alca didn’t say anything, as a sign of mutual respect and understanding.

“Ichika, since you’re here, would you care to assist me with my bathing?”

“Say no more, girlfriend. Let’s get you stripped!”

Ichika usually only ever had to do so with adventurers and merchants at best, but she was a skilled worker capable of treating nobles when the time came for it. One might think that she was being fairly rude and casual with the High Priestess, but in fact she was doing so because she knew Alca wanted her to do so. She could be polite when the time came for it.

* * *

“Let’s get your hair done too. I dunno how things are done where you come from, but here we’ve got shampoo and conditioner. It’ll get your hair super silky.”

Alca was soaking in a pleasant-smelling tub with her body now scrubbed clean. Her skin was smooth as butter, and Ichika was taking out dungeon-made shampoo and conditioner to take care of her hair as well. Thus began the hair scrubbing. Alca quietly entrusted her body to Ichika’s dexterous hands.

“...Ichika, were you a noble’s attendant before you fell into slavery?”

“I was an adventurer, but I took on jobs like this sometimes. Didn’t have much

time to be all picksy-choosy once I got the debt on me, and nobles pay out the ass for jobs, so yeah. They sure loved me since I knew how to do all sorts of junk like this. You know what I'm talking about," Ichika said with a grin, and Alca nodded. Her life certainly would be easier with someone like Ichika around.

"I wonder if Keima would be willing to sell you to me."

"Noooot a chance, girl. And I don't wanna leave him either, so yeah."

Imagine, for a moment, how much Ichika would cost. She could read, write, do math, and be a decent bodyguard. She could host nobles (if she wanted to), and all flattery aside, she had an exceptionally pretty face on top of a curvy body. That alone would put her at a solid one hundred gold coins bare minimum if a merchant wanted her as a mistress. Add on the fact she knew {Storage} and that would boost the minimum to five hundred gold coins. That price would double if you considered her knowledge and experience in running events such as the rat races.

"...Is ten thousand golds not enough?"

"Nope. You can try if you really wanna, though."

Indeed. No amount of money would be enough to make Keima nod his head. Alca could easily imagine him refusing even ten thousand golds for her.









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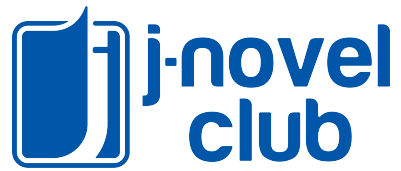
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Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 12

by Supana Onikage

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Ebook edition 1.0.1: October 2020

Premium E-Book for