
HOW NOT TO SUMMON A DEMON LORD
VOLUME 7
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Blinded by the sudden light, Diablo squinted as he tried fixing his gaze on the person speaking to them, only to swallow his spit in surprise the very next moment.
—*Yup, I can see why you were shocked now, Shera!*
Rafflesia had *giga* boobs.


"...TH-THERE ARE ONLY... DARK ELF WOMEN IN THIS VILLAGE, RIGHT!?"
"AH!? WE'RE GOING OUT LIKE THIS!?"
"LET US MAKE WAY TO THE ALTAR."


Down at the lower half of her body, the tentacles began creeping into her underwear—
Unable to speak, Shera screamed silently.
—Not theeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeere!

c o n t e n t s

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The story so far—

In the MMORPG Cross Reverie, Takuma Sakamoto was overwhelmingly powerful, and was able to role play so well that his performances were more boss-like than the actual bosses of the game. For this reason, he came to be known as the “Demon Lord.”

By defeating the《Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros》faster than anyone else, he obtained the super rare item, the《Demon Lord’s Ring》. It was one of the ultimate pieces of equipment in the game, able to reflect all types of magic.

Then, one day, Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like Cross Reverie! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his Summoner:

“...I am the one who summoned him. Your magic was a failure.”

“You’re wrong! He’s mine!”

But thanks to the Demon Lord’s Ring he wore, the magic was reflected, so the《Enslavement Collar》meant for him had clamped onto the two girls instead!

Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people if his life depended on it. After struggling over what to say, the words that came out of his mouth were from the Demon Lord role play he had used in the game:

“Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo.”

The three of them have since made the town of Faltra their home base. As it turned out, Rem held a great secret: Within her body was sealed the soul of the《Demon Lord Krebskulm》. Trembling with fear deep down, Diablo’s Demon Lord role playing drove him to promise he would find a solution to her plight.

Diablo soon after found himself foiling an invasion of one hundred Fallen, lead by a Fallen named Edelgard. Diablo then later found himself the recipient of a

quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the Elven Kingdom of Greenwood had demanded Shera be returned to him, threatening open war with Faltra against the country of Elves should compliance fail. The details of Galford's quest were simply to find a way to avoid the war. The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight Alicia was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions.

Using the《Marionette's Flute》, Keera manipulated Shera and unleashed a forbidden summon called the《Force Hydra》—yet Diablo still managed to rescue her.

Prince Keera was eventually killed by Galford, and his remains were returned to the Elven Kingdom by Celsior, an elite Elven warrior, and his cohorts.

After her rescue, the group set off to resurrect the Demon Lord Krebskulm trapped inside Rem. But in the process, Krebskulm had lost a portion of her memories as a Demon Lord, being reduced to a biscuit-loving young girl, who was then nicknamed "Klem."

Peaceful days passed by...

Suddenly, Alicia betrayed the group! Now awakened as a true Demon Lord, Klem went into a destructive frenzy. But thanks to one of Diablo's ultimate spells and the sound of Rem and Shera's voices, Klem was subdued and reverted to her biscuit-loving form. To ensure Klem would never go berserk again, Diablo bound her with the same enslavement magic afflicted upon Shera and Rem.

Through a string of coincidences, or perhaps God's own guidance, Diablo found himself rescuing Lumachina, a holy woman, from the Paladin Gewalt. Being a《High Priest》, Lumachina was the highest ranking member of the Church. However, due to her attempts at ridding the Church of corruption and avarice, she was nearly assassinated. Still seeking to reform the corrupt Church, Lumachina sought the help of the Paladin Captain Batutta, setting out to meet him in Zircon Tower.

Located in the perilous expanse of the former Demon Lord's Domain, Diablo's

group of Adventurers accompanied her as bodyguards. After a long journey, they arrived at their destination, and were greeted by Batutta.

However—

Batutta had been culminating the spread of a cursed illness known as Death Knell disease, and extorted donations in exchange for treatment.

Diablo fought hard, defeating Batutta and toppling his underground altar. But all of a sudden, Lumachina collapsed, the mark of the Death Knell disease having appeared on her body.

Avoiding pursuit from Laminitus, Zircon Tower's governor, Diablo's group made way to a dungeon Diablo made in *Cross Reverie* to get an item that could cure the Death Knell disease. Eluding many traps (?), they finally reached the dungeon's lowest level, where they also met the《Magimatic Maid》, Rose. Diablo then obtained the item he sought, along with many pieces of new equipment for himself and his team.

The Fallen Varakness marched the Demon Lord's Army against Zircon Tower, crushing the races' army under their superior strength. Diablo quickly rushed on the scene and, exhibiting《The Demon Lord's True Power》for some reason, saved Zircon Tower from the invasion.

Diablo then made way to the Royal Capital. Lumachina returned to the Church and the capital for the first time in a long while, resolving to face those who'd plotted her assassination head on.

Thanks to Alicia's efforts, who had reformed and joined Diablo's side, Diablo and his group managed to gain evidence of the《Cardinal Authority's》—the Church's top brass—wrongdoings.

They stormed the Church, but Lumachina was overwhelmed by Vishos's, the head of the Cardinal Authority, demagoguery and was captured as a heretic for crimes against the Church. Horn was the only one to escape, and, with the help of the level-up goddess Babalon, was able to rescue the group.

Diablo, who'd played along with the Church's act till then, snapped out of his

lulled senses at the sight of Horn’s efforts. He defeated the Paladins and destroyed half of the Grand Cathedral... Yet Lumachina still revered him as her God, which somehow resolved the situation and led to the villainous Cardinal Authority’s defeat.

With the escaping members of the Cardinal Authority all killed by Gewalt, he is quickly recruited by the《Order of Palace Knights》...

Prologue

The Imperial Capital Seven Wall's sixth district, 《The Firebird Inn》—

The rain that had begun pouring down at noon lasted until nightfall. Raindrops battered against the window panes as a candlestick standing on one of the side tables flickered, casting a shadow on the room's residents.

An Elven girl lay asleep on the bed, the (currently runaway) princess of the Kingdom of Greenwood, Shera L. Greenwood. Her face was pallid, her expression pained, and her breathing ragged.

"Nng... Nnn..."

The High Priest Lumachina Weselia sat beside her, praying all the while. She was capable of performing healing miracles, bringing even the most wounded from death's door and onto full recovery.

But Shera still remained as pale as before.

"How is she?"

Diablo had entered the room. Lumachina turned to face him, shaking her head.

"Her fever has not broken yet. That said, her condition is not worsening either..."

"...In that case, she should get better with some rest," Rem, the Pantherian girl who had entered the room with Diablo, proposed. "I'll watch over for now, so you go get some rest, Lumachina. You have your duties at the Church to consider, don't you?"

"Yes..."

Leaving Rem to look after Shera, Diablo and Lumachina moved to the common room.

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The inn the Imperial Knight, Alicia Cristela, had prepared for them not only had individual rooms for each of them, but also a large common room for communal gatherings. Rose, the《Magimatic Maid》, stood back-to-back with the wall, and on the sofa they found the Grasswalker, Horn, with her gaze fixed at the window. She was apparently deep in thought.

Lumachina had put on her coat, preparing to return to the Grand Cathedral.

“Lord Diablo, Miss Shera’s fever seems to be due to emotional stress. I have dispelled any diseases that may have been present, and her body should be perfectly healed, but... It seems the stress from your many journeys has gradually accumulated...”

True enough, ever since they’d left Faltra roughly two months ago, they may have had time to rest, but it had been one suspenseful situation after another. They went from one life-threatening crisis to the next, time after time. And now, Shera had received word of her father’s passing...

Diablo shrugged dejectedly. “One can’t blame her for becoming bedridden.”

“Please forgive me... If only I had found a better occasion to break the news...”

“Don’t let it bother you.”

It was the death of a parent; there were very few situations where keeping such news hidden would be a good idea.

“Miss Shera may very well wish to return to the Kingdom of Greenwood. But in the state she is in, I fear that may be too dangerous...”

Lumachina had accompanied them all for some time now, which meant they didn’t need to fear any grievous injuries or fatal diseases. The High Priest was the most powerful healer in all of Lyferia after all. But having regained her control over the Church, Lumachina would have to serve as its absolute authority now. She wouldn’t be able to escort them again.

Diablo nodded. “We’ll remain in the capital for a while then.”

“Please do. If her condition changes, please head to a church. Also, please take this.”

Lumachina handed Diablo a silver holy mark. It was roughly the size of a brooch, but it had a definite weight to it. It was apparently made from real silver.

“What’s this?”

“A Paladin Captain’s mark. The title of Paladin Captain is surely beneath you, my Lord, but this is the most I could prepare for you. With this mark, any church you visit should extend their aid to you.”

“Are you asking me to become a Paladin Captain?”

“I would be thrilled to have you, Lord Diablo... But the rest of the world needs your help. Such a title would require your presence at rites and festivals, which may be too troublesome for you... Either way, you may see it as an honorary title.”

“Hmph... I see.”

Diablo was no good when it came to social events, and hearing speeches from higher-ups just made him sleepy. Besides, a Demon Lord dealing with the Church’s affairs would be straight up weird.

At any rate, having the cooperation of every church in the kingdom was convenient. You could find churches even in remote villages, and, in the Kingdom of Lyferia, a church was more than just a place for prayer as they also served as postal services, banks, and schools.

Diablo accepted the holy mark. “Greenwood is a ways off after all. We’ll of course have to make sure Shera’s fine, but we also have preparations to make for the journey.”

In the game, it would take an hour to get to Greenwood without teleporting. Judging from past experiences, a distance of three minutes in *Cross Reverie* was five hours in this world. Getting from Faltra to the former Demon Lord’s Domain took even longer, with an hour’s worth of traveling being two weeks long. They’d be taking the main road for half the way this time, but would still need to prepare food and water for the journey.

—I could use magic to make those if we needed them, but I’d rather not waste MP if I didn’t have to.

“Have you gone to the Kingdom of Greenwood before, Lord Diablo?” Lumachina asked.

Diablo was summoned from another world, and had visited every corner of this world in *Cross Reverie*. He couldn’t just say, “I’ve been there in the game” of course; he still felt as if knowing that much was to be expected.

“I am a Demon Lord after all. I command all manner of knowledge and wisdom.”

“True enough, my Lord... The Elves’ sovereign territories are hidden in the depths of the《Wayward Forest》, an unexplored region where only those allowed to enter the kingdom may pass.”

Diablo recalled a similar setting from *Cross Reverie*. However, an early-game event would lead players to the Kingdom of Greenwood, and from there on teleporting to and from the place was simple. Diablo didn’t quite feel “unexplored territory” was an apt description of the place, seeing that it was as hidden as some “secret hot spring” you might hear about on TV. They also had Shera on their side, so getting lost shouldn’t be an issue.

“There’s no need to worry about us.”

“Indeed. It was presumptuous of me to be concerned for you, my Lord.”

Lumachina bowed her head deeply, then turned to leave the room after a word of goodbye when Horn sat up and suddenly called for her.

“Ah, hmm! D-D’ya have a minute?”

Horn’s expression was uncharacteristically serious. It seemed something was on her mind.

“Yes, what is it?”

“I... Well, there’s something I need to ask you, Lumachina. You should hear this too, Boss.”

“Understood.”

“So be it.” Diablo nodded as well.

Judging by Horn’s conduct, it seemed she had something important to say.

Rose was also in the room, but didn't bother to leave.

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Horn sat back on the sofa. Lumachina, who had taken off her coat, sat opposite of Horn. Diablo took a seat next to Lumachina.

"Speak, I'll allow it."

"R-Right..."

Horn looked rather deep in thought, her bunny ears twitching nervously as sweat dripped from her forehead.

Horn was a Grasswalker, a race with bunny ears and tails whom retained their youthful appearance even upon reaching adulthood. Horn, however, was still a child at the tender age of 12.

A black-leathered《Subjugation Collar》was around her neck since she and Diablo were bound in a《Subjugation Contract》with the latter being the Master and the former serving as Thrall. The contract made it so the Thrall's level increased in accordance with the Master's, making Horn a level 80 Thief. Frankly speaking, she was quite strong right now. Thieves weren't a class that focused on combat, but Horn was now stronger than the common warrior. But the cost for that strength was that should the Master die, so would the Thrall. Such was the deadly nature of the contract.

Lumachina patiently waited for Horn to speak. She was used to confessions and consultations, and remained calm as such.

Diablo was nervous beneath the surface though. He was bad at speaking to people in the first place, but when they looked so grave and serious, the fear that he "mustn't say anything careless" ran through his spine like an icicle.

The two could hear Horn nervously grit her teeth. Then, she took three deep breaths. All of a sudden, she fell from the sofa, lying on the floor on her hands and knees with her head lowered.

"Please, I'm begging you! I want to go study magic!"

“What!?” Diablo couldn’t help but raise his voice at this sudden “request.”

Horn’s body twitched nervously.

“I-I know I’ve caused you so much trouble up till now, and I’m sorry... B-But I... Even so! I want to become a Sorcerer like you, Boss!”

That was an unusual wish to have. Horn had paid such a hefty price to increase her level as a Thief, only to pick another path now?

However, Lumachina nodded without a hint of surprise in her eyes.

“Once before...when we had just arrived at the capital, you expressed great interest when I mentioned there was a magic school here. Are you serious about wanting to learn magic?”

“Definitely! You noticed that, Lumachina?”

“Your admiration for Lord Diablo is quite apparent, Horn.”

“I mean... I know I won’t be as strong as Boss, but...still...”

“Am I to take it you wish to become an《Elemental Sorcerer》?”

“You might mock me for it...but yes.”

Most Sorcerers in this world were《Summoners》because Summoning Magic was considered the superior school. It may be lacking in firepower, but it was a safe method. Elemental Magic, on the other hand, was a fairly under-researched field and was perceived as weak and useless.

Lumachina shook her head. “How would we mock you when we know Lord Diablo and his power?”

“Awesome! Oh, but... Uhm, I...”

Horn turned her gaze in Diablo’s direction. Lumachina also directed a concerned look his way, and Rose, who stood against the wall, diverted her eyes to Diablo as well.

Diablo finally realized they were expecting to hear his opinion. His lack of communication skills made it so he always assumed other people “don’t know he’s there and don’t care for what he has to say.” That wasn’t really ever the case since he’d come to this world...but years-old habits really did die hard.

Diablo cleared his throat. “Hmph... Do as you wish.”

Horn’s expression lit up at those words. “Really, Boss!?”

“If you wish to become a Sorcerer, go ahead and learn magic. You needn’t anyone’s approval to live as you choose.”

“Thanks a million, Boss!”

Horn lowered her head again, bumping it with a thump against the floor.

Lumachina, on the other hand, looked at him in shock.

“What is it?”

“I am just a bit surprised, my Lord. I thought you would be opposed to this...”

“What made you think that?”

“Grasswalkers may be skilled with magic as a race, but...I believe Horn’s talents are better geared for the Thief class. I thought you would object since her skills are already quite honed, and going into an entirely different field would be inefficient...”

“True, it is inefficient...”

—But I hate it when veterans try to enforce a playing order on newbies. Why not let them take the long way around? Why deny them any challenges? I, myself, love the process of trial and error, so I can’t stand seeing people rob beginners of that enjoyment... Not to mention how patronizing it is to think you can teach them... That’s just the worst.

Not wanting to become that type of player, Diablo never did train newcomers. In his eyes, someone who spent all his time researching for the perfect path may as well never start the game. But that wasn’t an idea he could eloquently put into words. Lumachina and the others didn’t know this world was based on *Cross Reverie*, so any explanation about “high level players” wouldn’t make any sense to them. To begin with, it was unlikely they’d even understand what he meant by the word “game.”

“Either way...I’m not opposed to the idea.” Diablo averted his gaze. “I also do not particularly support it.”

“In all likelihood, this path will be far more challenging for Horn than any other path would be.”

“But that’s what she wants, no?”

“Yes, so it seems. Horn, do you understand what we mean? Are you prepared for this?”

Horn nodded in response. “Of course!”

“Very well then,” Lumachina said. “I’ll handle your recommendation to the Mage’s Association. I’ll have you enrolled as a beginner.”

“Th-Thank you!”

“Don’t use your thieving skills in the academy though...”

“Of course, I won’t!”

“How long will it take for her to learn the basics of magic?” Diablo asked.

“It slightly differs by the individual, but young Sorcerers usually graduate at the age of 15. Horn will be enrolling a bit later than usual, which may mean it will take a bit longer.”

“Three years!?”

“Indeed.”

“I see...”

It was a school, come to think of it, so that stood to reason. Considering the game’s sense of scale though, Diablo somehow assumed it’d be shorter. Either way, Horn would have to stay in the Capital for the foreseeable future.

“The capital’s magic academy is a boarding school,” Lumachina added. “It is possible for family and friends to come for visits, but you should consider that you will not be able to leave the campus for a while.”

Horn looked like she was about to cry.

“F-For real!? I-I mean... The Boss has to go to the Elven Kingdom, so I knew this was coming, but...”

It may not have been for very long, but Horn was a companion who had

traveled by their side. The thought of her leaving was a lonely one, but hesitating to say goodbye didn't feel like a Demon Lordly thing to do. Diablo chose to change the subject, with a detached expression.

"You said she shouldn't use her Thief skills in the academy, correct? Just to make sure, her training to become a Sorcerer won't reset her level as a Thief, right?"

Lumachina tilted her head quizzically. "Why, no, it will not. Not using them for a very long time may cause them to decline somewhat, but..."

"Hmm..."

Cross Reverie had employed professions called classes. Players could use bonus points they gained when they leveled up to tweak their stats to some extent, but stat growth was pretty much fixed by class. Warrior-type classes increased their skills with weapons, while Sorcerers developed their magic skills. That was just how the system worked. But when you changed classes, your level would reset. Once you changed back to your original class, you would get those levels back.

—Did the developers do that for balancing purposes?

In a game where leveling up was easier (compared to this world anyway), if players were able to extend all classes to their max level, everyone would aspire to make characters that were maxed out in everything. As a result, perfectly maxed out characters would end up being identical to one another, completely destroying player character individuality. So, to avoid that, the developers placed restrictions on maxing out classes.

That wasn't the case in this world though. The skills you trained your body to learn didn't just go away, and once you took things like game balance out of the equation and thought about it realistically, it did make sense.

In the end, Horn would be able to level up as a Sorcerer while retaining her current level as a Thief. That said, gaining the experience needed for those levels wouldn't come easily...

The Adventurers who lived in towns under the races' domain were level 20, on average. Level 40s were seasoned Adventurers who had carved out a name

for themselves. Meanwhile, in the game, it would only take you a week to reach level 40. This world may be similar to *Cross Reverie*, but it was no game. Dying meant real, unforgiving death, and gaining experience meant putting your life on the line. People who willingly threw themselves into danger to level up were highly uncommon.

—Well, I guess while she's in the academy, there isn't too much risk of her running into danger. That may be exactly why it takes them three years to learn the fundamentals.

Diablo turned his gaze to Horn. "If you're going to do it, give it your all, girl. That way, even if you expire halfway through or fall before the end, you won't have any regrets."

"Boooss..." Horn's eyes filled with tears. "I... I... Thank you so much, Boss!!!"

Horn's face had contorted with tears, and snot was dripping from her nose making it...quite the sight. Lumachina smiled kindly, wiping the girl's face clean with a handkerchief.

Chapter 1: Sylvie, Once More

The next day, at dusk—

Rem stepped out of Shera's room.

"...She's doing better than yesterday. I managed to give her some food."

"She can't get up yet?"

She shook her head at Diablo's question. "...The most I could do was get her to sit up on the bed. She'll still need some time, I think. But I believe she's calmed down a bit."

"That's good."

It was time for them to eat too. Diablo had requested the staff to bring dinner to the common room this time.

Rem looked around. "...Is Horn still in her room?"

"Yes. She's reading a book Lumachina sent her this morning."

"...Seeing that book brings back memories... I also read it while studying the fundamentals."

"Hmm."

Diablo crossed his arms, a pensive expression on his face. He'd become somewhat capable of reading this country's language by now, to the extent of being able to read labels on commodities. But reading books was still out of reach.

—I've thought of this before, but maybe I really should learn how to read and write in this world's language? But a Demon Lord studying like a kid is all sorts of lame...

He had a room to himself now, but Rem and Shera usually ate and slept in the same room as him. With all that, he couldn't really find time in the day to study on his own.

A knock came from the door, probably one of the Firebird Inn's employees with their food. Rose, the Magimatic Maid, approached the door and opened it with a twist of the knob, only for her gaze to be met with a pair of bunny ears. It was a Grasswalker with reddish-pink hair and a friendly smile.

"Yahoo, Diablo! It's been forever!"

She raised a hand to the air, waving it enthusiastically. Her outfit, if it could be called that, consisted of just a bit of cloth that covered her intimate parts, making her half-naked.



“Sylvie!?” Diablo’s eyes widened.

“Did you only figure out who I am because of my outfit?”

Diablo felt his insides chill with stress as she directed a jeering glare at him.

“H-Hmph... Spare me your nonsense.”

Diablo was terrible at remembering people’s faces, despite being especially good when it came to memorizing game stories and trivia.

“Master, this individual isn’t an enemy, correct?” Rose asked to confirm.

“Yes, she’s no enemy. Though she’s not someone to lower your guard around either.”

“Ahahaha... That’s mean, Diablo. We’re allies, aren’t we? You’re one of Faltra’s Adventurers, and I’m the Adventurer Guild’s Guildmaster, aren’t I?”

Sylvie was a reliable fighter to have on their side, but she did oppose Diablo once before, during the incident with Klem. Sylvie was a warrior fighting for the sake of the mortal races, but she was under no obligation to obey Diablo. This meant that, depending on the circumstances, she may end up opposing him.

—It doesn’t look like she’s got any ill-will toward us for now at least, so what did she come all the way here for?

Diablo didn’t know the reason for her visit, which made panic spring up within him. But he couldn’t let his Demon Lord act crumble even for a second.

“Hmph... Since you’ve come all the way here from Faltra, I assume you must have some important news? Let’s hear it.”

Sylvie walked into the room with an “Excuse me~” and hopped onto the sofa in a childish fashion.

Grasswalkers naturally had childlike appearances, but Sylvie was apparently a veteran who had experienced the《Fallen War》, the war between the races and the Fallen, 30 years ago, so Diablo had no idea how old she really was.

It was then that there was another knock on the door, and this time it really was their dinner being delivered. Dishes of various sizes were set on the common room’s dining table, appetizing aromas wafting up from them.

“Whoa...” Sylvie’s eyes sparkled. “Is today some kinda celebration or something!?”

Rem shrugged. “...The meals at this inn are always like this.”

“That’s amazing!”

“...You’re welcome to join in if you want. Shera and Rose aren’t eating, so we have more than we need.”

Rose was a Magimatic Maid, so she didn’t eat in the traditional sense of the word, and Horn’s portion was already carried to her room.

“Now that you mention it, where *is* Shera?” Sylvie tilted her head curiously.

“...She’s feeling unwell.”

“Aww... Is it because she heard about her father?”

“...So you knew.”

“Collecting information’s part of being an Adventurer, after all~” Sylvie moved to the dining table’s chair as she spoke, picking up a fork and knife.

Having traveled with Lumachina, Rem and the others had gotten used to praying before meals. Diablo waited wordlessly for Rem to finish, and they continued their conversation as they dined.

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“Omnmnmn...”

“Stop eating and state your business already, Sylvie!”

“Hmng, aah... Phew! Don’t rush me, Diablo. I had to hurry all the way to the capital you know.”

Sylvie licked her lips after downing a chicken skewer in one gulp.

“...How did you find out we were in this inn?” Rem asked.

“When you came to Faltra last time, you had the High Priest with you and said you were headed for the capital. So I went to the Grand Cathedral and asked her.”

“...You make it sound so simple. I’m shocked. We hid Lumachina’s face so no

one would pick up on her identity. And besides, you can't just walk into the Church and ask to see the High Priest without making arrangements ahead of time."

"You shouldn't doubt my powers of observation. And while arranging a meeting with the High Priest is usually difficult, they let me in easily once I mentioned your names."

"...That's reckless! If we failed and the Church was still under the Cardinal Authority's control, who knows what would have happened to you!"

"Of course, and that's why I did my homework and made sure the coast was clear before I went over. I'm going to have to keep my sources of information confidential though. You know how they say having a few secrets makes a girl more alluring?"

Sylvie gave a childish smile. Diablo motioned for her to continue her story, and Sylvie downed a glass of grape juice.

"Glug, glug... Phew! This bittersweetness hits the spot! Well, anyway... One of my reasons for coming here was to let you know about Shera's dad, but you already know that."

"...Just to stay on the side of caution, I'll ask: Your information is that Shera's father—that is, King Greenwood—has passed away, correct?"

"Yep. Her mother, the queen, is still alive and well, but she married into the family and isn't of royal blood, meaning she has no claim to the throne. To be honest with you guys, if Shera doesn't go back home, the royal bloodline will be cut off."

Diablo scoffed. "That's no business of mine."

"Haha... I figured you'd say that. But doesn't Shera wanna go back home at least once? Her dad died, so she should probably at least visit his grave and pray for him. You're not against that, right, Diablo?"

He hadn't met with Sylvie that frequently when he was in Faltra, but somehow she'd seen through his personality already.

"...If Shera goes back to her kingdom, would she have to become the queen?"

Rem asked.

"Well, I don't know. I'm not that familiar with Greenwood's customs. I think this is the first time an Elven king died leaving only women and children behind. But if you're worried, you could just escort her there and keep an eye out yourselves."

"...That's what we intend to do."

"Hehe... You've changed, Rem."

"Huh?"

"You used to say you didn't need any companions, and never got deeply involved with any party I set you up with."

"...That's... Things have changed...since then."

"Did Diablo influence you?"

"...I suppose that's part of it, in some ways."

"And the other part is the Demon Lord that was sealed inside you, right?"

"Wha!?" Rem rose to her feet, knocking down the chair as she did.

—How did she find out about that!?

Diablo was shocked as well, but maintained his cool façade.

"Sylvie... Did Celes tell you?"

"Celes would never tell a secret like that. You couldn't get a Sorcerer to spill his beans no matter what. But fine, I'll let you in on my trick... It was Klem. I gave her some world-famous, Rallybell-made almond biscuits and she told me all sorts of stuff for 'em."

Sylvie knew Klem was a Demon Lord, so Klem probably thought it was okay to tell someone who knew what she was about other things too.

"Ngh..." Rem's expression sharpened with hostility. "I knew you couldn't be trusted!"

"That's cold, Rem. You'd have been better off telling me, that way I'd have been able to help you out better. So why did you keep quiet? I see all of my

Guild members as family, you know.”

“...Because I can’t trust anything you say...”

“Well I’ll be damned, Rem. You should really reconsider. The biggest reason I came all the way from Faltra actually has to do with you.”

“...With...me...?”

“I understand you’re wary of me because of what happened with Klem, but this time, you should believe me ♪”

Sylvie winked at Rem.

“...I-It’s true...” Rem still seemed hesitant. “The Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed inside my body. But that’s already a thing of the past.”

“Is it really now...”

“...How much do you know!?”

Rem looked poised to burst out of the room at any moment. Her triangular cat ears flattened against her head, and her tail swayed left and right nervously.

“Hey, hey, no need to stress out.” Sylvie raised her hands apologetically. “I’ll tell you everything I know, don’t you worry. But I can’t do anything if you won’t trust me.”

“...I’m listening.”

Rem took a deep breath and sat back down. Sylvie began speaking, as if relaying some olden tale...

†

In ancient times, God had defeated and sealed the Demon Lord. One of the pieces of the Demon Lord, the Demon Lord Krebskulm, was sealed within Rem’s ancestor. That piece was then passed on from mother to daughter... Thus, the cursed inheritance continued across the generations.

God also left behind a method to remove said seal, for when the time came and a hero capable of definitively defeating the Demon Lord appeared... However, that ritual was lost to the annals of time, leaving only partial methods of resurrecting the Demon Lord. One such method was that the girl who was

the vessel of the Demon Lord's soul was to die. The other was to provide the Demon Lord with a large amount of magical energy. Both methods would result in the seal's destruction.

Just recently...

Diablo had resurrected said piece of the Demon Lord by pouring his magical energy into it. But the Demon Lord appeared in the form of a young girl, nicknamed Klem. The unsealing was incomplete, and Krebskulm's power still laid dormant within Rem's body...

"And that's about all I know." Sylvie's rabbit ears twitched, as if to say, "How about that, huh?"

"...It's...probably exactly as you say." Rem nodded. "I'd even say you know more than I do."

Diablo was once again taken aback.

—The Demon Lord Krebskulm is still inside Rem!?

"What is the meaning of this?"

"...I'm sorry, Diablo. I should have said something sooner... The Large Black Dragon we fought in your dungeon said so as well, but I didn't know for sure."

"Hmm."

"...I know you may find it hard to believe when you had to find out like this. But really, I didn't mean to keep it a secret."

"We've been together so long now, so I understand even without you having to explain it. You put Lumachina's and Shera's needs before your own, right?"

"...That might be so, yes."

After the dungeon, they had to stop the Fallen invasion at Zircon Tower and reform the Church after. As soon as that was dealt with, they had learned of the Elven king's death. Rem never had the leisure nor opportune moment to ask for help.

He could check the flow of her magical energy to see if the Demon Lord's soul

was still inside her later, but...it most likely was.

“Did Klem tell you that too, Sylvie?”

“Yep.”

“So, Klem’s aware part of her is still inside Rem then.”

“Apparently, she noticed it when she almost awakened. But she prefers things the way they are right now, so she doesn’t really mind.”

“Ngh...” Rem’s expression turned more severe. “What if I died not knowing that? What was that girl thinking...?”

“Her head’s as childish as she looks, you know?”

“...I’ve made a huge mistake. I should have spoken to Klem more before leaving Faltra... I can’t believe she neglected to tell me something so important...”

“Hmm~ I guess the races and a Demon Lord just have different definitions of what’s ‘important.’”

“...I suppose that’s right...”

Klem operated on a different sort of common sense compared to the rest of them. Even though she knew she was the Demon Lord, she had given up on fighting against the races, all in the name of biscuits. In her eyes, anything that didn’t involve biscuits probably didn’t strike her as meaningful in any shape or form.

“Frankly,” Sylvie added, “I make it a point to not get involved with Klem too often. I thought interfering at the wrong moment might awaken her again...but the situation’s become too dire for that now.” Sylvie then shifted her gaze toward the east.

“A new Demon Lord awakened after all...” Diablo whispered.

He could still remember what the Fallen Varakness had said, and judging from how mobilized his army was, it was likely true.

“Yeah... We’ll be going to war with the Demon Lord sooner rather than later, and we’ll need more information and power on our side if we wanna win. If we

don’t hurry...then this time, we’ll lose.”

Rem gasped at Sylvie’s words.

“Why are you so sure of that?” Diablo asked, stifling his own unrest.

“Well, we just got lucky last time. The Demon Lord wasn’t as aggressive, and the races had a few powerful heroes on their side too. That time was a golden era for the races. But now, we’re just not strong enough.”

Her carefree tone made her words ring all the more severely. If a veteran of the great war such as herself was saying as such, the warriors of this age were probably no match for those of that long ago time.

“You fought both the races and the Fallen, right, Diablo? And I heard you were at the battle for Zircon Tower too. What do you think?”

Diablo recalled his past battles. Faltra’s governor, Galford, and the Paladin Captain Batutta, who was presumably dead, were both strong. They were cunning and employed great strategy. The races’ true strength laid in that resourcefulness. But when he thought back to the defensive power at Zircon Tower, the Fallen’s army far exceeded the races in terms of individual strength. Varakness was especially menacing. If Diablo hadn’t rushed to the scene, the Fallen would have surely routed the races’ army.

“In all likelihood...the Demon Lord’s army is much stronger.”

“I figured as much.”

There were a few towns that had already been destroyed by the Fallen in *Cross Reverie*. But there was never an event that involved a town in the process of being destroyed. It was hard implementing a town that was ruined for players who cleared a specific section of the story but was still being kept up for newcomers to an MMORPG.

—But this isn’t a game. This is another world... This is reality.

Diablo was there to see Zircon Tower be abandoned by the races, and he was also present to see the Fallen, Gregore, run wild in the streets of Faltra, so he could understand the feeling of crisis Sylvie felt as the guildmaster of the Adventurer’s Guild.

“I want to bolster the races’ strength, but it’s just as important to prevent the enemy from getting stronger too. We have to prevent a situation where two Demon Lords awaken, at all costs. I want to prevent Krebskulm from fully awakening.”

Rem nodded. “...I understand your intentions now, Sylvie. I feel the same way. Do you have a specific plan regarding what we should do?”

“You betcha! If I didn’t, I wouldn’t have dragged myself all the way to the capital, now would I?”

Sylvie pulled a letter from her bosom.

—Wait, where did she pull that out of!?

Diablo rubbed his eyes. The envelope was larger than the surface Sylvie’s scant outfit covered. It bothered him for sure, but now wasn’t the time to point that out.

Rem took the envelope. “Is it from Celes?”

“Right on the money.”

Celestine Baudelaire was the head of Faltra’s Mage’s Association, serving not just as its top authority but also as the one who maintained Faltra’s defensive barrier. If she were to die or move too far away from the city, the barrier warding the Fallen and Magical Beasts off from Faltra would be undone. Celes saw Rem as a little sister, and knew the Demon Lord was sealed in Rem’s body.

“...This is...!?”

Reading the letter, Rem’s eyes widened.

“What’s wrong?”

“...A-Ah, pardon... Here you are...” Rem handed him the letter.

“Hmph... I would guess Celes’s letter is pointlessly long-winded.” Diablo shook his head haughtily. “Summarize it for me.”

—I, uhh, can’t read...

But that was ridiculously lame. He couldn’t say that out loud.

“Her greetings are a bit long winded, yes.” Rem nodded. “But, in short...it says

she’s found a way to remove the remnants of Krebskulm from my body.”

“Oh?”

“...And the ritual to do so is passed down in the Dark Elves’ territory.”

“Dark Elves!?”

Elves were few in number compared to Humans, but Dark Elves were a minority even among them. They were said to be an Elf species that had its blood mixed with the Fallen’s, but it was unknown if that was actually true.

In *Cross Reverie*, Elves had fair white skin, golden hair, blue eyes, and slender frames. Dark Elves, on the other hand, had dark skin and black hair and eyes. In the game, you could customize your appearance to change your eye and hair color, but...

—Is it the same in this world?

Diablo hadn’t met a Dark Elf so far.

Now, in *Cross Reverie*, Dark Elves had another physical feature that set them apart from Elves:

They had large, plump breasts.

Not like Shera though, who was a rare example. They all had huge...no, not huge, *mega* boobs.

In the game, at least. Diablo didn’t know if it was the same in this world.

—Damn, I really wanna find out!

“Are you planning on visiting the Dark Elves’ territory, Rem?”

“Yes, that’s my intent... I should confirm if they really know about the ritual. The only problem is that I don’t know where they are located.”

“Aren’t they near the Kingdom of Greenwood?”

In the game, Dark Elves had lived in the same forest as Elves.

Sylvie nodded. “You’re well-informed, Diablo. That should be right, though

I've never been there myself."

"Hmph... I am a Demon Lord. 'Tis only natural I would know."

—It's a really good thing I wasn't wrong...

Rem nodded. "...Yes, I think I'll go to the Dark Elves' territory. There's no telling what things are like there now, but this is the only clue I have."

"I think that's a great idea!" Sylvie agreed. "But we should be careful. Dark Elves don't welcome outsiders."

"...They're discriminated against like the Demons. It makes sense they would be cautious of other races."

"It seems they were treated like the Fallen in the past, and the Kingdom of Lyferia attacked them."

"I never knew something like that happened..."

"There's a reason there are so few Dark Elves~"

"Rem, if you're going to the Dark Elves' territory, I'll accompany you," Diablo said, resting an elbow on the table.

"...I appreciate it, Diablo... But Shera needs to get home as soon as possible. That being the case, I'll go to the Dark Elves' territory on my own."

"What?"

"...Sylvie's words made me remember: I was always an Adventurer who worked alone. It's always been the three of us since I summoned you...but if need be, I'm willing to work on my own once more."

"But the Dark Elves are..."

—I gotta find out if their breasts are really that big... I mean, no, it's dangerous to go alone!

He was incredibly worried about her. There were no impure motives at work here. Honest.

...Probably.

"I'll be fine. If it's just to ask about the ritual magic, the Dark Elves should at

least hear me out, even if they're opposed to strangers." Rem was oddly obstinate. "Please forget about me in the meantime. You should stay by Shera's side, Diablo. She's the one who needs you now."

"Hmph."

True enough, there was no telling what was going on in the Kingdom of Greenwood. Because of that, they couldn't just let Shera go back on her own. Adding on to that, leaving Rem's problem for later and going to the Elven Kingdom first would be...honestly, quite inefficient.

For Rem, the remnants of the Demon Lord inside her were a matter of life and death, and a source of constant anxiety. Naturally, it wasn't something she would be willing to put off for much longer. Working separately made sense.

"No, that's a super bad idea!"

A door flung open, and Shera burst into the room, shouting. She was still in her nightgown, and her disordered, messy hair bounced around as she ran. She wasn't as pallid as she was a few days ago, but her cheeks still seemed emaciated and thinner than they should be. It was only natural, seeing how she spent all that time sleeping and hardly ever ate.

"You can't go to Blackwood alone, you just can't, Rem!" Shera approached her nervously.

"...Calm down, Shera... Are you feeling better?"

"Oh, yeah. I think I'm fine... My tummy's rumbling though, and I smelled something nice..."

"...I see. Just sit for now, and try not to eat too much. Let's get you some soup for the time being."

"Okaaay!"

Shera sat down for dinner with them for the first time in days.

"Hey hey, Shera!" Sylvie raised a hand in a friendly gesture. "It's been forever."

“Hey, it’s Sylvie! It really has! What’s up?”

“I have some business with Rem.”

“Ah, that’s right, Rem! Blackwood’s a dangerous place!”

The conversation was all over the place. Rose and Horn weren’t the type to initiate conversations on their own, and with three women chattering like this, things finally felt boisterous again.

“Blackwood... Is that the Dark Elves’ territory?” Rem responded, contracting Shera’s excited spiel.

“Yep, but it’s a pretty small territory... It’s right next to Greenwood.”

“...Like Diablo said. But you’re saying going alone would be dangerous?”

“Yeah! They say Dark Elves eat the other races! Elven parents always tell their children, ‘If you’re bad, we’ll feed you to the Dark Elves.’”

“...Have they ever actually eaten an Elf?”

“I’ve never seen it happen...but when someone goes missing, everyone says a Dark Elf probably ate them.”

“...Spreading groundless rumors is mere gossip, and arbitrarily assuming things based on someone’s race is discrimination, Shera.”

“But some kids really did go missing!”

“...If someone disappears in the forest, wouldn’t you usually suspect monsters first?”

“Ohhh... Right, come to think of it, my oldest brother got eaten by a magical beast...”

“...Oh... I’m sorry...”

“Mmm? Oh, it’s okay. It all happened before I was born. I never met him, so it’s like, ‘Oh, so that’s a thing that happened.’”

“...I understand Elves have a negative view of Dark Elves. It’s only natural Dark Elves would shun Elves and other races after being treated like that.”

“It’s super dangerous!”

“...That’s what it sounds like. And I get the feeling the Elves are at fault here... But whatever the case, I need to learn about that ritual magic.”

“Then let’s go there together!”

“Huh...?” Rem was shocked at Shera’s proposal. “But, your father...”

“I do want to go home as soon as I can... But we can’t let you go to Blackwood alone! I’ll be fine with it if Diablo goes with you.”

“What are you saying!? Are you forgetting how Prince Keera had kidnapped you? We had to fight 200 Elves just to rescue you! We can’t send you back to that country alone! You’re the one who should go with Diablo!”

Until now, they kept bickering about which one of them had summoned Diablo, but now they were fighting over who should take him.

—*They never change...*

“Can’t you split yourself with magic, Diablo?” Sylvie asked.

“That’s impossible. I could make an illusion of myself, but it would have to stay within 10 meters of me.”

“I was only joking, but that’s pretty amazing on its own! We’ve still got a problem here though.”

“There’s a chance the Kingdom of Greenwood would try to keep Shera there by force. But Blackwood is dangerous too. We can’t let Rem go there alone.”

“Ahaha... You’re pretty overprotective, Diablo.”

Diablo felt himself blush at that teasing remark and grabbed a thick sausage, shoving it into Sylvie’s mouth.

“Cease your nonsense! Rem and Shera are both my belongings! I won’t let anyone lay a hand on them, be they Elves or Dark Elves! That’s all this is!”

Sylvie’s eyes darted around as she struggled to down the sausage.

“Buufufufha... Nng... Phew! Don’t stick thick stuff in my mouth like that, Diablo! It’s mean! My mouth is child-sized, so if you go too far you might break it!”

“I wouldn’t guess with how much you eat. Where does it all go?”

“Ahaha... My tummy might swell if I’m not careful.”

While he was speaking to Sylvie, Rem and Shera both closed in on him.

“...Are you listening, Diablo!?”

“Diablo, you gotta listen to me!”

Diablo bent back reflexively, his well-built chair creaking in protest.

“Mm? What is it?”

“...Shera is saying we should go to Blackwood first. Please talk her out of it.”

“But me hurrying won’t really change anything.”

“...You got a fever from the shock.”

“I can’t let you go to Blackwood alone!”

It seemed Shera and Rem’s conversation had progressed while Sylvie’s childish little mouth struggled to down the long, thick sausage it had been stuffed with.

“Hmph...” Diablo folded his arms. “If Shera’s willing to put off her matters, we should probably do that. The places aren’t too far from each other either way. We can go to Blackwood first then head to the Kingdom of Greenwood from there.”

“But...”

“You truly have a tendency to put other people’s matters ahead of your own, don’t you, Rem?”

Rem’s ears visibly twitched at Diablo’s words. “Th-That’s not... I merely think that’s the natural thing to do!”

“Do you not prioritize yourself because you dread being called selfish for it?”

“...No, that’s not... It’s just, Shera’s problem has to do with her family, and my problem is a personal one.”

He’d heard a bit about Shera’s family during the incident with Prince Keera, but Rem had never spoken about her past. Diablo had no communication skills, and his mind blanked whenever he tried to push a conversation along on his

own, but he'd become apt at observing others calmly.

—It's hard, pitting your own problems against other people's circumstances...

Rem was apparently an Adventurer who had focused on traveling alone before she summoned Diablo. As good as she was at negotiating, she still wasn't skilled at making friends. You could explain things all you wanted, but a person with communication problems wouldn't understand. It was all because the socially inept didn't operate on logic, but on emotion—on anxiety.

"Won't I disappoint others?" "Won't they mock me?" "Won't they get angry at me?" "I won't break this relationship if I do this, right?"

There were no correct answers, so, think as one might, the anxiety would never go away, driving them to put their needs last. The more priority they gave to the other person, the more they minimized their own anxiety. As a result, they looked obstinate to everyone else.

—Which is why putting that logic into words won't achieve anything.

Rem was afraid of disappointing Shera by putting her own needs first, so what Diablo had to do here couldn't be in effort of persuading her.

Diablo rose from his chair. "You fools seem to have the wrong idea. I've never allowed you to advise me on what to do. I am a Demon Lord, your ruler and owner, and *I* am the one who decides! And *I* say we are heading to Blackwood first. All those who oppose me will be destroyed!"

"N-No, but that's...!?"

Shera placed her hand over Rem's, who was about to spring to her feet. "See! Diablo's already decided, so we can't argue, right?"

"...Are you really fine with this?"

"Uh-huh! The thing with Father was just too sudden, and I was shocked... But I've been prepared for this ever since I ran away from home. So it's fine, really. For now, let's focus on your problem."

"...I'm sorry..."

"That's not right!" Shera's hand squeezed Rem's encouragingly. "You mean 'thanks,' right?"

“...Ah... Yes, you’re right. Thank you, Shera.”

“Teehee~”

“And you too, Diablo.”

“Hmph... I didn’t do this for you. I simply have an interest in the Dark Elves’ territory myself. Do not waste your gratitude on me.”

“Heheh...” Rem’s eyes were moist with tears. “You’re always like this...”

Diablo turned his back to them.

—It really is too early for thank-yous though... We don’t know yet if the Dark Elves really have the ritual magic to remove the Demon Lord’s remnants from Rem...

Sylvie raised a hand. “I’ll come with!”

“Did Celes ask you to escort me as well, along with delivering the letter?”

“As sharp as ever. That’s right!”

Celes probably paid a good amount if the guildmaster of the Adventurer’s Guild herself was asked to do it.

“As always... Celes is such a busybody...” Rem sighed.

“You can’t blame her. If we fail this, the Demon Lord might awaken, so we have to be cautious.”

Leaving the conversation behind, Diablo left the common room.

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Lyferian Calendar: Month 9, Day 30, Year 164—

Diablo walked down the Royal Capital’s streets with Rem at his side.

“...I think this is the first time I’ve gone out alone with you.”

“Hmm?”

Come to think of it, he’d gone outside with Shera a few times, but he couldn’t recall ever going out with just Rem. They had shared rooms a few times though.

“...Why did you only go out with me this time?”

“Horn’s studying, and Rose is both too conspicuous and a liability when it comes to negotiations.”

Rose had a tendency to resort to (excessive) force whenever someone made a comment that made light of Diablo. She was as reliable as could be when it came to beating monsters, but the worst possible fit when going about business in town.

Shera was also still recovering in bed.

“And Sylvie has matters to attend to.”

She had to visit the local Adventurer’s Guild. She didn’t have many chances to visit the capital and had people she needed to meet. She also said the other day she had to pay the king a visit to thank him for his monetary support.

“...That’s a shame.” Rem smiled sadly. “I wanted to believe you simply wanted to go on a date with me, just the two of us...”

“Wh-What?”

“Hehe... I’m only joking. Anyway, you mentioned negotiations?”

Her words made him terribly self-aware, and he felt his cheeks heat up. He remembered the countless warnings and horror stories he’d seen on the internet of the type of losers who took a female party member’s jokes seriously only to crash and burn.

Diablo laughed scornfully, trying to mask his discomposure.

“Hmph... You speak such foolishness at times. Listen well! I have brought you to help negotiate...for we are about to buy a carriage.”

He had Shera explain to them how to get to the Kingdom of Greenwood, but it was too far to get there on foot. Blackwood was even further than that.

“...Did you forget I’m bad with vehicles?” Rem frowned.

“I believe you fared better on larger carriages?”

“...I suppose. They do shake less...”

Rem had gone into a panic when they rode a small sandship or a wagon, but was calm when they took a larger sand ship and a stagecoach. She apparently

just didn’t like the shaking.

“It will be expensive, but we’re quite a few people strong.” Diablo shrugged. “We’ll buy a large carriage. Having you faint along the way would only make things harder.”

“M-Maybe we could all just run there!? No...forget I said that.”

Rem quickly realized how silly what she just said was. But, clearing her throat, she continued.

“...Normally we would take a stagecoach or join a caravan for such a long journey... But there’s no highway leading to the Kingdom of Greenwood so we don’t have much choice. It’s a bit ironic that going to the former Demon Lord’s Domain was easier than going to a region controlled by the races.”

“If it were just me, I’d make it there no problem.”

“...You would have no reason to go to the Elven Kingdom on your own, Diablo.”

“And it would be boring.”

“...If we’re buying a carriage, won’t it delay the journey by a few days?”

Regardless of this being another world, a carriage wasn’t a simple vehicle you could easily buy and take for a ride right away. The carriage’s frame and the horses required preparation.

“Shera still needs time to recover, so this suits us just fine.”

“...Yes.”

Incidentally, Horn was shut inside her room at the inn, toiling over the homework Lumachina had sent her. In a few days’ time she’d be enrolling at the Sorcerer’s Academy, but since the first years began studying at the start of the ninth month, Horn had a month’s worth of catching up to do.

“...If I had succeeded in summoning you alone back then, at《Starfall Tower》, would we always be walking together around town like this?” Rem wondered aloud, sneaking a fleeting gaze his way.

“Perhaps. Don’t tell me you and Shera are still arguing over which one of you

summoned me?”

“...Of course not... I understand now, that it only worked because it was the two of us. At the time, I thought Shera was just a novice...but she’s truly a genius.”

“So it seems.”

Shera could see the flow of magic in people and other things. She had mastered a skill that took those with considerable talent years to master, and did so when she was only a child. Rem was training to learn how to do it as well, but it would still take her some time it seemed.

“...If Shera were to study seriously, she could become a truly powerful Summoner. Well, if she were to polish her skills with a bow further, she’d probably be a legendary markswoman... It’s a shame.”

“It does feel like she’s made a mistake there.”

Shera was a skilled archer. She never had her level as an archer measured by the Adventurer’s Guild, but she was probably over level 80. And since Elves lived for quite some time, if she were to put her mind to mastering the bow she would no doubt reach the level of a hero.

“...Diablo, do you remember when the Fallen attacked Faltra?” Rem suddenly asked.

“Yes, I remember that happening.”

“...I almost died fighting Gregore. And if Celes were to die then as well, the barrier protecting the town from the Fallen would have been destroyed.”

It was thanks to Emile running to the scene and holding out against Gregore that Diablo had made it in time.

“What about it?”

“...Do you think Shera might be stronger than Gregore was?”

“Hmph. It depends on their fighting styles, but she might have won.”

Now that her bow had been strengthened by Klem, she could win with ease.

“...Then it’s as I thought...”

Rem hung her head. Even if they were companions, seeing the gap in their natural talents saddened Rem. No...it was exactly because they were companions that it had gotten to her.

“You’re a high level Summoner yourself.” Diablo placed a hand on Rem’s shoulder. “And you have the equipment I gave you. The way you are now, Gregore would be no match for you.”

Rem looked up at him. “...You can be shockingly kind sometimes.”

She was right. Cheering up a depressed girl wasn’t very Demon Lord-y.

“Ha!” Diablo averted his gaze. “I merely stated facts. Do not misunderstand, fool.”

“...Ah, pardon me.” Rem smiled happily, contrary to her words.

They hastened their pace, heading to the carriage house the inn’s employees had recommended.

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They found the place on a side street just off the main road, at the end of the sixth district. It was within the city walls, but there was almost no one around, and they could see a few warehouses here and there. The place had a fence roughly their height, and beyond it was a lawn where horses were grazing. Their fur was brown and olive-colored, and their legs were short and thick. They were probably carriage horses. They weren’t very quick, but were capable of carrying heavy loads and were durable enough to last long journeys.

At the edge of the premises they found a building made of bricks. This was probably the carriage house. It had a set of large doors, reminiscent of castle gates. They were likely used for the carriages to leave from.

Next to them was a small steel door. The two knocked, and, after a short pause, they could hear the sound of the door being unlocked from the inside.

Then the door opened. A long-bearded Dwarf stood on the other side, with a pair of drooping dog ears and a tufty tail.

“Bah, Adventurers! This here’s a carriage house,” he said after looking at Diablo. “The stagecoach and gharry are off the main street.”

“...P-Please, wait! We’re here to buy a carriage.”

“Ah, ya be customers! Please please, come in.”

His attitude suddenly became much more friendly.

The interior of the carriage house was reminiscent of a pub. It had a wooden counter and chairs as high as their waists. Wheels, whips and other carriage-related items were propped up in the background as ornaments.

The Dwarf clerk went behind the counter.

“By the by, who’s recommendation brought ya here?”

“...The Firebird Inn’s employees said we should come to you.”

“What!? Ya be stayin’ there?”

“...For the last ten days or so, yes.”

“Well, by jolly! Ya must be skilled Adventurers. Did ya find a mountain of treasure or somethin’? Oh, can I pour ya a drink? Ale? Wine? I’ve got some nice whiskey.”

“...No, alcohol is a bit... Just coffee would be nice.”

While Rem was handling the clerk, Diablo looked around the shop. He was no good when it came to small talk, and when it wasn’t strictly necessary, his communication skills plummeted. Whenever he entered a shop, he’d hoped dearly that whatever he looked for would immediately be on display. But, unfortunately for him, shopping in this world wasn’t an entirely business-like affair. It required interaction and conversation.

“Do you have any carriages in stock?” Rem asked. “Preferably ones that don’t shake.”

“By the dozens, lass! We’ve got an extensive selection, from military wagons to carriages intended for nobility. By the way, are ya sure ya don’t want a drink? I’ve got some brandy in the back.”

“...Coffee, please.”

“So how many people is the carriage ya want intended for, and how far do ya wanna take it?”

They finally went into negotiations. Rem turned her gaze to Diablo, who opened his mouth to speak.

“The Elven forest. We’ll also be stopping at Blackwood—the Dark Elves’ territory. We’ll need a carriage for five people that can also carry heavy luggage.”

“The Elven forest!?” The Dwarf’s brows furrowed. “And Blackwood too!? I wouldn’t if I were you, they be wicked folk!”

“Don’t make me repeat myself.”

The Dwarf shrunk in fear of Diablo’s glare. “Fine, so be it. Our horses can traverse forests too, and they’re smart enough to not run off if monsters attack. But let’s talk about the frame now. So, ya need seating for five. And ya said you’ll have heavy luggage?”

“...There’s one who’s a bit on the heavy side...” Rem said. “If you can’t make a seat to support that kind of weight, a tray would do.”

“What kinda weight we talkin’ here?”

“About as heavy as a knight in full plate armor.”

“Too heavy to get on a horse,” Diablo added.

He had to support Rose with one hand once, and even his level 150 muscles couldn’t support her weight. There was no mistaking how heavy she was.

“Gahaha, that’s heavy, all right!” The Dwarf laughed. “Heavier than a cow! That’s one heavy friend ya got!”

“...Yes, I suppose.”

Rem sighed in relief. It was a good thing they didn’t bring Rose along... She seemed to hate being called “heavy,” and would probably beat the poor Dwarf to a pulp with her dual-bladed sword if she heard him.

There was no horse that could support Rose’s weight, which was why they needed a large carriage.

After choking a bit on his laughter, the Dwarf brought the discussion back on track. “Well, if ya want a carriage that can carry someone that heavy, you’ll be

needin’ a coach-and-four. Any less than four, and the horses won’t be able to take it. And Blackwood’s pretty far from here, so they might hurt their legs.”

“...How much would it cost?”

“First, the interior. Nobles tend to pay more for the interior than the carriage itself. Ya want laces on your curtains?”

“...The bare minimum will do.”

“Eh? I thought ya had money to afford it.”

“...I don’t like squandering money away.”

“It ain’t squanderin’. A worthy interior does good for the heart.”

“...Our hearts aren’t so lacking that fancy interiors will do us good, thank you very much.”

“Gahaha! Well said! Understood, so we’ll do with the bare minimum for your journey. I do recommend a canopy to ward off the wind and the rain though. And I’ll put some lap blankets on the bench, yeah?”

“...That sounds good, yes.”

“And I’ll put the ale barrel below your seats.”

“...No, we won’t be needing that.”

“What!? Ya don’t wanna drink along the way!? What’re ya even going on a journey for!?”

“...To reach a destination?”

Rem cradled her head. Was this place really a good idea...?

The Dwarf employee pulled a blueprint out from under the counter. It was for a medium size, four-horse-pulled carriage with room for six passengers, and he began scribbling addendums on it with a feather pen.

“So, we’ll put the heavy stuff on things on the back wheel’s axis. They’ll shake a fair bit, but it’ll ease the burden on the horses. And for the steps when you get on and off, a floor, bearings, wheels... All of these’ll have to be reinforced since you’re carrying heavy weights.”

“...Reinforced?”

“Large carriages usually are. They gotta be, they carry lots of people. The army uses ’em to ferry troops, so they hafta be sturdy.”

“...I see. And how much will it all cost us?”

“Ah, let’s see... Well, including all the modifications, I’d say somewhere around 20 million friths? It might end up being a touch pricier once we get down to the details.”

Rem stiffened like a board.

“We’ll take it.” Diablo nodded.

“A great thank ya for your patronage!” The Dwarf clerk grinned.

“...W-W-Wait just a second!” Rem jumped to her feet. “You could buy a house at Faltra with that kind of money!”

“True.”

Diablo had assumed it would be expensive. You could buy a carriage in *Cross Reverie* too, and they were a bit cheaper, but there were the modifications to consider. Diablo had prioritized teleporting to save time back then, and didn’t have a party, so he never bought one.

“...Are you serious!? That’s almost all the reward money we received from Lumachina!”

“There’s no telling how long it would take to reach there by foot.”

“...I don’t mind walking...”

“We’re short on time. Their actions concern me, so the faster we’re done with this and I get back to Faltra, the better.”

Rem gasped as she realized the meaning behind Diablo’s words. The “they” he was concerned about meant the Demon Lord that had awakened in the east.

“...Y-You’re right... Yes, you’re right, Diablo... We need to hurry.”

The Demon Lord’s army attacked Zircon Tower, and might attack Faltra next. If Diablo were to be absent when that happened, it could have disastrous repercussions. Right now they were focusing on Rem and the ritual magic as

well as Shera's homecoming, but they were also preparing in between for the coming hostilities.

Rem requested the Dwarf to give her a detailed estimate.

"I'll go draw one up immediately. Remodelin' the carriage'll take me around ten days though. The horses need to be prepared for the long trip too."

"...Very well. That said, I will compare your estimate to other coaches around the city."

"Gahaha! Ya really are a first-rate Adventurer, ain't ya? No pullin' tricks on ya! I'll warn ya though, I'm the best in terms of quality!"

"...Heh... I will take that into account."

Rem really was priceless when it came to negotiations.

Having finished their business, Rem and Diablo prepared to leave the shop. As he opened the metal door for them to leave, the Dwarf asked one last time, as if to make sure: "By the by, ya sure ya don't want the ale barrel?"

Interlude

Horn was allowed to pursue the path of the Sorcerer.

Horn went out into the common room, bags all packed. Rem sat there alone, reading a book on a sofa. Raising her head, she smiled at Horn's appearance.

"...So that's the Sorcerer's Academy's uniform. It looks very good on you."

"Really!?"

"...I need to take care of Shera so I can't escort you, but...do take care."

"I will. Will Shera be okay?"

"...She's well enough to be picky about her food. I'm just about ready to kick her out of bed, but we still have to wait for the carriage."

"I see..."

Stagecoaches ran along Lyferia's highways, but the Kingdom of Greenwood was a secluded area, and the Dark Elves' territory was seen as dangerous, so they didn't dare go that far. But it wasn't a distance Diablo's group could cover by foot either. To resolve this issue, Diablo decided to use the reward he received from the Church to buy a carriage, but remodeling the frame and preparing the horses would take ten days. For how much of a hassle it was, their journey would be made easier by it.

Horn wanted to go along with them to the Elven Kingdom, but...

"You guys take care."

"...Of course. We'll come see you at the academy before we leave."

"Whoa, thanks! Oh, hmm, by the way...where's Boss?"

"...Who knows? He's been out since this morning. He knows you're leaving today... I'm sure he's got something in mind."

"Yeah, I think so too."

"...Maybe he's just afraid to meet you because he doesn't want to say

goodbye.”

“Huuuh!? But Boss is a Demon Lord!”

“...Hehe... I’m joking.”

“R-Right! Besides, there’s no way he’d be sad to say goodbye to...someone like me...”

Rem extended her right hand. “...No matter what anyone says, never forget you’re our adventuring companion. I’ll remember how bravely you struggled until the day I die.”

Horn grasped Rem’s hand with her own.

“Me too! And the next time we meet, I’ll be the type of Adventurer you can rely on!”

“...If you want to be a Sorcerer, I think being a Summoner would be more realistic.”

“Uuu...”

Horn remembered now that Rem was a Summoner as well.

“It is nearly time, Horn.” Lumachina had arrived.

“Ayup!”

She left the hotel, making her way to the twelfth district. There, the Royal Mage’s Guild—and the academy she would enroll in—awaited her.



Chapter 2: Going to the Dark Elves' Forest

Two weeks later—

Diablo's carriage rode across the plains. Horn had stayed behind in the Royal Capital, having enlisted in the Sorcerer's Academy, and subsequently left the party. Much had happened surrounding that, but that was a story for another time... For now, Diablo was traveling alongside Rem, Shera, Rose, and Sylvie.

As noon approached, they stopped for a break. They tied the carriage to a tree, and Rem and Sylvie unloaded their cooking tools from the tray, making swift preparations for lunch.

Today was skewered beef jerky and vegetable soup. The meat was hard, but as Diablo bit deep into it, a rustic flavor filled his mouth. The vegetable soup consisted of potatoes, onions, carrots, and the like, making Diablo long to add some curry powder into the thing. Cream stew would be nice too. Diablo didn't usually care much for food, but found himself longing for his old world's cooking every now and then.

—Once I handle the revived Demon Lord, I should look into picking up some cooking skills.

He'd mixed eggs with salt, vinegar, and olive oil to make mayonnaise in the inn one time; that was tasty. But, come to think of it, there was a lot of luck involved with that. The hen eggs sold in Japan were thoroughly checked to make sure they were hygienic and safe to eat. But an egg taken as is from a chicken was very likely to have salmonella bacteria on it. He didn't know if that applied to this other world, but... That was the reason he'd heard one shouldn't eat raw eggs from outside Japan.

If he were to cook like a modern Japanese person in a backward world like this one, where people weren't even accustomed to washing their hands before meals, the result could end up claiming lives. They were still at the point where they dumped their kitchen waste in the back alleys for pigs to dispose of after

all.

He recalled hearing about how a plague claimed half the population of Europe in the 14th century. This world was better off because the Church's priests could use miracles to《Purify》people, but... Come to think of it, if you used a Purifying miracle on moldy cheese, what would happen? It didn't exist in this world, but would that make it into natto beans?

"What's wrong, Diablo?" Shera peeked into Diablo's field of vision.

After lying in bed for a long time, she'd regained her vigor and greeted him with a cheery expression, though she clung to him somewhat closer than usual.

"Mmm? Ah... I've a great many things to ponder."

"Oooh, I see. Well, we're almost to the forest."

He was actually deep in thought regarding the intricacies of food, but he chose to keep that to himself.

"The Elves' forest, huh?"

"We're almost to Greenwood. Blackwood's still a bit further away."

"Yeah, we should be there in a day or two, I think?" Sylvie spread out a map. "The carriage should be able to take us all the way into the forest, right?"

"The Dark Elves use carriages too." Shera nodded. "They live differently from the Elves."

"Riiight. The Elves' forest provides you with all the fruit you need, and you have plenty of game to hunt. And Blackwood's full of poisonous plants and venomous snakes and bugs, I hear. I've never been there though."

"...I hope this armlet you gave me will prove its worth here," Rem said, running her fingers over the band clasped around her left wrist. A golden pattern in the shape of a snake was etched onto it. This《Madara's Armlet》prevented the《Poison》,《Stun》, and《Confuse》status ailments. It wasn't particularly powerful, but Rem could equip it even at her level.

"Must be nice..." Sylvie brought her fingers together. "Diablo gave you all this equipment I've never even heard of before."

“...There are many others like this in Diablo’s Treasure Vault.”

“Treasure Vault!?”

“...It’s in the Demon Lord’s Domain and guarded by many powerful monsters, so I wouldn’t recommend trying to break in.”

“Ahaha... No matter what kind of treasure’s in there, it’s not worth making an enemy out of Diablo. But I’d be happy if you could lend me some when the time comes.”

True enough, if he were to give the equipment in his Treasure Vault to high level Adventurers, they’d become considerably stronger. He’d kept them all as part of a collection and never planned on using them after all. Giving those up was much more preferable than letting the races be destroyed. If they were going to fight the Demon Lord’s army, maybe letting others use them wasn’t a bad idea...

Rose, the Magimatic Maid, descended from the carriage, which creaked in protest as she did. She didn’t need food or sleep, and spent the whole trip sitting on a reinforced seat, like a ship’s figurehead.

“Rose does not approve of this. Rose was entrusted with guarding those items. They belong to Master, and only Master may use them. Normally, no one else would be allowed to lay hands on them... The fact that a few of them were even lent to Master’s subordinates alone torments Rose so deeply that Rose’s power circuits run the risk of overloading...”

Rem shrugged. “...I am Diablo’s companion, not his subordinate.”

“Companion? In which case, you are in no position to simply receive from Master, you must also return the favor.”

“...Ngh... I made the skewer Diablo is eating right now...”

“Hmph, so you are a mere kitchen maid.”

“...Wha!? Say that again, you overweight maid!”

Rose turned to Diablo, her face turning expressionless. “Master, Rose has confirmed a hostile presence. Requesting permission to deploy《Asterismos》.”

“...Diablo, let’s leave this scrap maid behind. It should help the carriage move

faster.”

Whenever it came to quarrels, Rem’s tongue became truly vicious.

Diablo merely sighed. “Don’t you ever tire of this? I’ve lost count of how many times you’ve been at it. Rem helped us acquire this carriage, as well as helps us in battle. Rose is also quite dependable. So long as you do not wish to leave, I do not...intend to push you away.”

“Diablo...” Rem’s anger dispersed, turning into an embarrassed smile.

“M-Master...called Rose ‘dependable’...” Rose, on the other hand, was shaking. “Rose will preserve this moment’s footage for posterity and perpetually replay it in Rose’s mind...”

It didn’t really feel like he’d said something that major...

“Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!” Shera latched onto him from the side. “What about me!? I’m useful, right!? You depend on me, right!?”

“Yes, yes, I do.”

“Uuu... Why is your voice so plain when you say that!?”

His pulse still quickened when she pressed her considerable breasts against him. He turned his gaze away from Shera, only to find Sylvie smiling wryly at him.

“Heheh... You’ve become a real leader, Diablo.”

“Leader? Save me your foolishness... I am a Demon Lord.”

“Then give them orders. Rose obeys you, and Rem has the《Enslavement Collar》on.”

True, the steel collars shone dully around Rem and Shera’s necks. When they first met, he’d ordered them to stop fighting and make up. He didn’t know they’d be compelled to obey, but... He could do the same thing here.

“Cease your nonsense.” Diablo shook his head. “They aren’t apes; words are all I need to make myself clear. A Demon Lord only issues orders for more lofty causes than this.”

“Hmm, I see.” Her words implied she understood, but Sylvie’s eyes were still

laughing.

“Then Rem and Rose should shake hands with a smile!” Shera proposed.

“...I refuse.”

“How absurd. Rose will not subject Rose to this foolish action.”

Diablo nodded at Rem and Rose, who voiced their disapproval. “Isn’t this a chance to show you’ve realized my words?”

“That was a nice idea, Shera!” Sylvie clapped enthusiastically.

Rem and Rose exchanged glares.

“...Ugh... Very well... I’ll prove my fortitude is far greater than yours.”

Rem extended her right hand first.

“Rose interprets this as an order from Master,” Rose said, her face expressionless. “As such, Rose judges this as a fitting enough cause to lift Rose’s hand at a sixty degree angle.”

Regardless of their wills, Rem and Rose brought their hands together. Shera called out, “Smile! Smile!” and Sylvie, with her characteristically carefree smile, gave them a harsh assessment of, “Thirty points ♪” Rem and Rose somehow managed to twist their expressions into smiles, their muscles making an almost audible creaking sound as they contorted against their wills.

Diablo lifted his hand, holding a skewer to shoulder height. “My meat’s going cold.”

Rem and Rose lowered their hands, looking more exhausted than the rest of this trip altogether had made them. Shera laughed aloud, seemingly amused.

“Shera, don’t you argue with Rose sometimes too?” Sylvie asked. “You don’t mind being called Diablo’s subordinate? You said you were companions earlier too.”

“Mmm? I don’t mind being his subordinate or his belonging. I mean, we’re companions so long as we travel like this. We’re all together, and we all have fun!”

“Ah, that’s a farsighted way of looking at it... Let me get you another serving

of soup.”

“Yay!”

Putting a close to their somewhat long-ish lunch, they set out again. The forest was now in sight.

†

The next day—

Diablo lay down on a bench behind the carriage’s canopy, resting his head on Rose’s soft lap. She was durable enough to withstand a blow from a Magical Beast, but she was still as soft as he’d expect from a girl. Since she was Magimatic, he didn’t feel any body heat from her, but there was another sort of pleasantness to that.

Rose looked down on him, a blush on her cheeks.

“How does it feel, Master?”

“Hmph... Not bad.”

The only complaint he had was that her breathing was turning disturbingly husky.

He left the reins of the carriage to his subordinates and rested his head on a maid’s lap—now that was a Demon Lord’s life!



But truthfully, he was a bit motion-sick. They'd been on a highway for most of the time since they left the capital, but now that they were on less paved roads, the carriage was shaking considerably. Feeling the carriage's vibrations in his stomach for so long was beginning to make Diablo nauseated. But a Demon Lord didn't get carsick, so he simply said, "I am going to sleep, so hold the reins," and laid down.

—Blurgh...

Had Diablo been able to look at the forest, he'd be able to see Blackwood's entrance, but holding back his nausea was the most he could manage right now. Incidentally, Shera was also asleep on the central bench, but, in her case, she had eaten too much for lunch and became sleepy.

Rem manned the driver's seat, gripping the reins while Sylvie inspected a map by her side.

"It really does shake a lot once you get off the highway. Are you okay, Rem? Weren't you bad with vehicles?"

"...I'm surprised you remember."

"I see my Adventurers as part of my big family after all! And I remember what my family members like and dislike."

"...I've noticed this on this trip, but...I don't seem to feel as bad when I'm sitting at the driver's seat. I don't feel at all anxious."

"Wow... Maybe it's because you have a good view of the road...? Oh, we should be near the forest's entrance. Can you see it?"

The carriage was heading west, running toward the setting sun. For the last three days, they'd seen nothing but plains, with thickets of black trees to their left. That was probably Blackwood, the Dark Elves' territory.

"...Forget a path a carriage can take, there isn't so much as a trail for us to walk on here." Rem shook her head.

"Looks like it."

"...Perhaps Shera's information was unreliable? Maybe the Dark Elves'

territory is somewhere else entirely.”

“You know, I’ve never been to Blackwood either. I’ve been to the Kingdom of Greenwood though.”

“...For a quest?”

“In the name of curiosity and training, I guess. You need vast outlook to overcome the races’ limit... At least, that’s what my teacher used to say.”

“...Your teacher?”

“He’s passed away by now. He was already pretty old during the Fallen War.”

“...I see. Then judging by your words, I assume you’ve already surpassed the limit of the races?”

“Heheheh... I am the Guildmaster of Faltra’s Adventurer’s Guild after all. I don’t just lead a frontier city’s Adventurer’s Guild for nothing!”

“...Come to think of it, I’ve never asked: What’s your level, Sylvie?”

“Hmhm, that’s a secret ♪”

“...That’s why I can’t trust you.”

“Weeell, jeepers... On the other hand, I think it’s about time you consider your own future, Rem. I’m expecting a whole lot out of you. You’re simply brimming with talent.”

“...You can keep your compliments. My talent doesn’t even reach Shera’s ankles. But...I suppose I’m still considerably good by the races’ standards.”

“Huh? You serious? Your clan was entrusted with guarding a Demon Lord, Rem. You should be the same rank as Shera!”

“...I’ll be fine without your cheering me up, thank you very much. I’m aware of my inferiority, envy, and fear, and use them to fuel my ambition. Though I am grateful for your consideration.”

“Naaah, that’s not what I meant.”

Sylvie chuckled bitterly, scratching the back of her rabbit ears. Rem’s thin tail wagged left and right, signaling she didn’t quite appreciate the conversation.

“...Isn’t there a river nearby?” Rem turned her attention to the map, changing topics.

“The closest thing on the map are the shoals we crossed yesterday.”

“...It’s going to be dark soon at this rate... Though my heart already feels gloomy enough as it is...”

“Well now, let’s stay bright, then! At least in our attitudes!”

“...You being pointlessly optimistic is only making me more anxious.”

“I think I see why you prefer traveling alone, Re—huh!?” Sylvie’s rabbit ears twitched.

“Master, Rose senses a living being approaching... A large one,” Rose spoke from the bench.

“...A monster!?” However good Rem was at detecting enemies, she didn’t hold a candle to the other two.

Diablo sat up. “By large, you mean it isn’t a Dark Elf. Right, Rose?”

“Rose senses several living beings, presumably of the races, and one large one... At its current velocity, we should encounter it in thirty seconds.”

Someone of the races was there too. Sylvie peered in the forest’s direction, Rem following her example.

“...Is something there?”

“Definitely, but...”

Something flew out of the forest with a whizzing sound, grazing the carriage’s canopy—an arrow.

“Whoa... That’s one way to welcome guests.” Sylvie laughed dryly.

“The large lifeform is approaching!” Rose alerted. “It’s...a magical beast!”

“Rem, turn right!” Sylvie called out. “Run!”

“Ngh!”

As soon as those words were spoken, Rem grabbed the right rein and pulled, turning the carriage away from the forest and toward the plains. The carriage’s

right wheel floated up with the centrifugal force tilting the whole vehicle, making it teeter on the verge of falling over. Shera rolled off the bench with a surprised, “Buha!?” Diablo grabbed a rope dangling from the carriage’s side wall, which he’d grabbed onto when the shaking started earlier. The next moment—

The forest’s trees were launched into the air, as if something had kicked them away. Several of them rotated midair, showering the surroundings with leaves and detached roots. A large and wide creature—the size of a Huge-class dragon—burst out of the forest. The uprooted trees crashed down from above, several of them falling harmlessly on the ground, while others tumbled down toward the carriage.

Rem’s eyes widened. “...We’re going to get hit!”

“Doooodge!” Sylvie screamed.

A figure hopped out from behind the canopy, colliding with the falling trees as her skirt fluttered. It was Rose.

“《Magimatic Sol》!”

Two steel arms manifested out of thin air behind Rose, large enough to cradle her in their palms. They grabbed the falling trees like twigs and flicked them away.

“You did it!” Sylvie cheered. “You’re amazing, Rose!”

Rose landed, a flashy cloud of dust rising around her. They couldn’t leave it as is, so they turned the carriage to the right.

“Wha! What’s this what’s that what’s going onnnn???” Shera peeked out from the back of the canopy.

The monster that appeared from the forest had black, inflamed skin that seemed to be decaying. It looked like a wild boar and had two long tusks extending from its mouth. Two large horns grew from its head as well, which it aimed forward like a pair of spears. Thorn-like protrusions grew sporadically from the back of its head down to its tail.

Rem grimaced. “...I’ve never seen a boar so big or this decayed...”

“I usually like pork, but wouldn’t want to eat that...”

“I’m surprised you can even associate that with pork!” Sylvie’s face was unusually serious.

“Hmph...” Diablo came out of the canopy as well, observing the monster. “Its skin is a bit odd, but that’s a Black Behemoth.”

It was smaller than a Green Behemoth, but was still categorized as a Large-class magical beast, and was a tenacious, aggressive one at that.

“...That’s a Behemoth!?” Rem cried out in surprise. “According to the books, Behemoths are supposed to have thick fur! Why is its skin dripping like mud!?”

“She’s right!” Sylvie was surprised as well. “Maybe magic burned it all off? Or maybe it’s sick? Ah, but do magical beasts even get sick...?”

More arrows flew out from the forest, hitting the monster they suspected was a Black Behemoth. They stabbed into its inflamed skin, sending globs of dark red bodily fluids flying into the air. The enemy was too large however, and it was doubtful the arrows did any damage. It trampled the foliage on the ground, making the earth tremble.

“Aah, whoa!” Shera mumbled in a panic.

Rem grabbed the reins, maneuvering away from the trees rolling on the ground. “...Ugh... It seems someone is fighting this Black Behemoth.”

“Is that why it ran out of the forest? It doesn’t look like the battle’s going too well though.”

Its trajectory unchanged, the Black Behemoth rushed in the direction of those who fired at it.

A humanoid figure moved within the forest.

—So it’s the Dark Elves fighting it after all?

Rose jumped out to protect the carriage and was now several meters away, out of range of Diablo’s orders. Shera wasn’t holding her bow, and was instead merely looking out from inside the canopy. Rem was handling the carriage, and Sylvie specialized in support magic but likely didn’t have a means of defeating the Black Behemoth.

Diablo took out his staff, the《Tonnerre Empereur》.

“Stop the carriage, Rem!”

“Y-Yes!”

There were roughly twenty meters between them and the target, but since he was up against a large monster, he didn’t need to worry about missing. There was someone of the races in the forest, but seeing as they were fighting with bows and arrows, they probably wouldn’t get caught up in his spells. That said, the forest was close, so he had to avoid using fire spells.

“I’ll cut you down with an invisible blade...” Diablo pointed his staff. “《Press Shredder》!”

The air condensed, transforming into a giant blade. The blade rammed into the monster, and what was originally a single blow was multiplied by seven due to the staff’s effect. It was an air elemental spell that could be used as early as level 110 featuring a blade of atmospheric pressure that slashed into the beast, cut into its flesh, gouged its entrails, and crushed its bones.

The Black Behemoth gave a rumbling roar.

“Hmph...” Diablo lowered his spell. “You may be a Large-class magical beast, but I suppose one that appears in the races’ territories is still pretty low level.”

Its head cut in half by the magical blade, the Black Behemoth stopped moving, dissolving into particles of light. Unlike other animals, magical beasts disappeared after they died. Its dark red bodily fluids, its flesh, its shattered tusks—it all turned to light and floated up to the heavens.

“Whew, amazing!” Sylvie clapped. “I knew I could count on you, Diablo. You’re strong!”

“Maybe I should let you handle the next one.”

“Oh, you know I use support magic. I specialize in cheering people on! Go, Diablo ≡ Go, go, Diablo ≡”

Sylvie’s words felt awfully phony to Diablo.

“...Your magic is always so impressive,” Rem said in amazement.

“Of course it is.”

With a target that big and without a need to watch out for his surroundings, Diablo was free to use spells with amazing firepower.

Rose finally rushed back to the carriage. “Forgive Rose, Master. Master had to dirty Master’s hands...”

“Hmph... Taking care of a weakling like that doesn’t even register as effort to me.”

†

Someone began walking out of the forest. Diablo expected a Dark Elf, but...what walked over to them looked like a large animal costume. Its head was big, its arms stubby, and it was wide enough to be worn by someone. It was a bear wielding a long bow, but it couldn’t exactly be described as menacing.

—These *are the Dark Elves!? This isn’t some other race, is it?*

They weren’t exactly how Diablo had imagined them. He wasn’t sure if they understood his language, but they aimed their bows at him.

“Don’t move!” a muffled voice ordered Diablo and his group, sounding as if it had spoken to them from behind a wall.

It really was a costume...

The voice was high-pitched, so whoever was inside it was probably a boy. It seemed communication with these people was possible, but they didn’t seem particularly friendly...

Ten of them stood before the group.

“Wh-What’s going on?” Shera moaned in a terrified voice, hiding behind the canopy. “Why are they mad at us?”

“...Are those the Dark Elves?” Rem frowned. “Their clothes are quite strange. And their attitude is terrible, given we defeated that magical beast for them...”

Sylvie shrugged. “Looks like we really scared them.”

Rose’s right hand squeezed so tightly together it made a grinding sound, forming a clenched fist. “No matter who you may be, no one is allowed to direct

their weapons at Master. Rose sees no reason to hold back."

Realizing Rose would attack them if left unchecked, Diablo stepped forward, Tonnerre Empereur in hand.

The Dark Elves (?) in the costumes had seen his magic's power, and stood in a state of alert. Maybe finishing off that large magical beast with one blow was a bit too flashy. He needed to make the Dark Elves understand that he and the others had no wish to fight, and only wanted to learn about the ritual magic. He wanted to keep it short since the situation was so tense!

"No problem."

Diablo projected self-confidence. His communication skills were so terrible in his former world that if there were a competition for who was the least capable of holding a conversation, he'd take the gold medal... But in this other world, he talked more often, and even had companions on his side.

—Looking at me now, maybe I'm actually a great communicator!

First, a smile. Maintaining a positive expression was key for friendly discourse. He felt like this time he'd be able to hold a conversation properly. But he mustn't look down on them, for being condescending in the middle of negotiations would only put him at a disadvantage. And so, he opened his mouth to speak confidently.

"Fuhahahahaha! My name is Diablo! I've come here in search of the ritual magic passed down in these lands. I have no business with you! Lead me to the Dark Elves' dwelling!"

The people in the costumes stirred nervously. Rem and Shera, who were both used to him, respectively sighed and smiled wryly. Rose's expression said this was the obvious way these events would play out, and Sylvie cradled her head in exasperation.

Still, Sylvie didn't step forward. If the costumed people were to begin shooting at them, their lives would be in danger.

"You there!" one of the costumed people who stood at the lead (in a grizzly

bear costume) called out to them. “What was that...thing you did earlier!? You defeated the《Lord of the Black Forest》with one blow...”

“Heh heh heh... It was simple air magic. Is it that unusual? I could show you more magic, if you wish. But should I use fire magic, this forest will burn to the ground.”

“What!?”

The costumed group all visibly trembled. Diablo wanted to say that if they were to guide him, he’d show them any magic they’d like, but fire magic was dangerous so they should avoid that... Maybe he worded it wrong?

—This is getting annoying...

With the war against the Demon Lord ahead, Diablo and the others were in a rush. If they didn’t hurry along with their preparations, they could lose and the races would fall. They didn’t have the leisure of time here.

Diablo said impatiently, “How long are you going to stand idly by? Hurry up and lead me to the Dark Elves. Do you *want* to be destroyed!?”

“Eep...!?” several of the costumed people cried out in feminine screams.

The grizzly-bear-suited figure in the front lowered their bow.

“U-Understood... We’ll take you the Dark Elves’ village. You just want to learn about the ritual magic, right? Can you promise you won’t hurt the villagers?”

“Hmph... Of course.”

Diablo smiled in relief seeing his negotiation was successful, then nodded.

—See? My communication skills are off the charts!

“Y-You’re going to trust this...this man!?” Another of the costumed people, one with a mohawk, stirred anxiously.

“We don’t have a choice...”

“We can’t bring someone so dangerous to the village!”

“He’s a Sorcerer strong enough to beat the Lord of the Black Forest with one spell, what hope do *we* have of beating him!? It’s better than letting the forest burn to the ground! Let’s leave the rest to the chief.”

“Damn it...” the mohawk person cursed bitterly.

It sounded like they were intimidated by his magic, but Diablo was satisfied nonetheless.

—I really think I managed to be friendly this time!

†

It turned out Shera was right and there really was a route wide enough for a carriage to drive through, but its entrance was hidden by foliage. The costumed people moved the plants aside, opening the path.

In *Cross Reverie*, the path was easier to find and even had markers pointing in the right direction. If he’d tried leading them down this path proudly while not knowing about this, wouldn’t he just embarrass himself? That image made Diablo sweat bullets inside.

“...Asking this now feels a bit odd, but you *are* Dark Elves, correct?” Rem asked the costumed people.

“Yes, we are,” the grizzly bear suit person answered, apparently serving as their representative. “No one else lives in this forest but us, unless you count the beasts and bugs.”

So these costumed people were Dark Elves after all. They used this road to come and go from the neighboring villages via carriages. They utilized Blackwood’s unique plants and herbs to make special medicine and elaborate arrows, and traded those with the villagers for crops and ironwear.

“Stay away from the black grass.” The grizzly bear person pointed at an herb on the side of the road. “They’re all venomous. You’re dressed lightly, and it can poison you through contact with your skin. The horses could also be affected.”

“...Huh? The black grass... Wait, so all of this?” Rem, who was holding the reins, asked nervously.

There was hardly any green grass in sight; the majority of it was black.

“Even the magical beasts begin rotting if they’re inflicted with this poison.”

“...So that’s what happened to the Black Behemoth...”

“Many of the forest’s beasts absorb this poison and use it as a natural weapon. If you ever find yourself fighting them, exercise caution. Even a scratch could be fatal.”

“...Thank you for the warning.”

They used bows and arrows to keep a distance from these venomous creatures, and wore such thick costumes to protect themselves from the poisonous plants.

They progressed through twisting roads for some two hours until they had reached the village. The road eventually parted into an open space where the trees were cleared away, and dwellings dotted the place without so much as a blade of black grass to be seen. The place didn’t seem very big, and one could circle the circumference within an hour. In terms of size, it was in the scope of a village.

In *Cross Reverie*, the Dark Elves would hide between the trees, and lived in dwellings that couldn’t really be called houses. Buildings and NPCs that didn’t contribute to any events weren’t included in the game, making this village completely different from what Diablo had known. Being in a completely unknown place was a bit frightening, but was also new and fresh. Diablo couldn’t help but feel a bit excited.

“This...is the Dark Elves’ territory, right?” Shera peeked out of the canopy.

“So it seems...”

Diablo didn’t know what lifestyle the Dark Elves led, but there were less than a hundred dwellings here. Assuming each dwelling housed six people, it put the village’s population at roughly 500.

“Isn’t it kinda small?”

“I wonder... If they have several villages like this one, they could form an independent territory... Or maybe because there are only this many of them, they’re treated as a different race from the Elves.”

“Ah, I see~”

Diablo and his group were only concerned about the ritual magic the Dark Elves knew, so the question of how many of them were out there wasn't any of their business. Be that as it may, however, they couldn't hold back their surprise at how the Dark Elves were living.

"It's pretty different from what you told us."

"Yeah, it's totally different from the Kingdom of Greenwood. I'm pretty shocked."

The Dark Elves used trees for pillars, planks for their houses, and leaves and branches as their roofs, living generally on the ground. Their lifestyle was similar to the way houses were built in the past in Japan. The only difference was that the entrances were left open, and there were no planks over the doors and windows. The most they did was hang cloths or furs which couldn't have provided sufficient shelter from the wind and the rain. This probably went to show this forest wasn't subject to many typhoons or other natural disasters.

The climate was warm all year long, which must have meant it was terribly hot in those costumes. It was very humid too, and Diablo rolled up the canopy to allow some wind into the carriage, catching sight of the backs of the dwellings.

"Huh?" His eyes widened.

Since the house they were headed toward was made of wood, the hearth was stationed outside, with cooking utensils and a well beside it. It appeared to be shared among several of the households, and several Dark Elven women were gathered around it who weren't dressed in their costumes. They had dark, tanned skin, black curly hair, and dark purple eyes. Their long ears were evidence of their Elven origins, but their sensual figures gave them a different sort of impression. They stood around the well, chatting and scooping water up in buckets from the well.

That was all good and well, but the problem was their clothing. The water splashed about as they transferred it from the well's bucket to their own, which was why you would usually wear an apron when drawing water...

But these Dark Elven women were all topless.

Their tunics were hung on nearby branches, their black hair tied up, and the only clothes on their bodies were their knee-length skirts. As for their breasts...the word “abundant” felt far too lacking to describe them. Just one of them looked to be as large as Diablo’s head.

Mega boobs.

No, they were *mega* boobs.

They were *really*. *Big.*

“Uh...”

Diablo almost spoke without noticing, and just as he was about to, Shera cut into his words.

“Wow, that’s humongous.”

Diablo shifted his gaze in a hurry, not wanting to make it known he was interested in the Dark Elves’ breasts.

“O-Oh... Really? I was too occupied looking...at the forest...”

“I mean that! I’ve never seen one that big!”

Shera leaned forward. She may have lost to the Dark Elves in terms of size, but she still pushed up her plump swellings with her arms.

—Have I died and gone to heaven?

He had to hold back the urge to reach out.

“See! That house is built into the tree, but it’s so huge!”

“Yes, yes... Large, round... M-Mm? House?”

Diablo’s consciousness was reeled back from that luscious, pink world at the last second. That was dangerous; he was almost about to say something he couldn’t take back.

He turned his gaze in the direction Shera had pointed in. The carriage was headed toward a large structure, its summit larger than any other tree. It was hard to believe this was a building made out of planks. The castle and the Inner

Sanctum in the capital were larger, but they were made out of bricks and stone. But the building standing in their way was, despite being made of wood, imposing in its own way.

“Hmph... I assume that is the Dark Elves’ castle.”

“It sure is big...” Shera was as easygoing as ever.

“...Soldiers are stationed at the windows...” Rem whispered. “They’re taking aim at us.”

“Well, it only makes sense they’d be suspicious. We’re outsiders after all.”

Sylvie seemed calm. This level-headedness of hers probably came from experience.

Diablo also seemed composed, but was nervous under the surface.

—You don’t really run into this kind of pressure in-game...

He had no prior knowledge of what was going to happen, and there were no admins that could place balance fixes into effect or retries in case he failed. If there were any plans in place to catch him unaware, would he be able to get away unscathed? This was another world, and, at the same time, reality, so there was no revising your strategy if you failed.

Diablo alone may be able to get himself out of trouble, but he was working with a party now. He had to exercise caution if he were to protect everyone. He’d probably have to rely on Rose, who was as proficient as a high-level warrior, to command the front lines.

He turned his gaze in her direction.

—Huh? What’s she doing...?

Rose had placed both her hands over her breasts, lifting them up softly. Since her outfit was open on both sides, they looked like they were about to spill from her clothes.

“...Mmf.”

“Wh-What are you doing?”

“Master, by Rose’s evaluation, Rose’s mammaries are not small... Rather,

their size ranks above the average value for the races, but...does this size not satisfy Master? Does Master prefer lumps of meat that sag in accordance to the laws of gravity, like those of these Dark Elves?”

“Bfwa! I-I-I have no idea what you’re talking about! There are traps lying in wait, so stay vigilant, fool!”

“Pardon Rose, Master...” Her response was as polite as ever, but she continued lifting up her breasts in an attempt to accentuate them.

Diablo tore his gaze away from Rose’s shivering breasts. In all seriousness, they had to stay vigilant. If the Dark Elves weren’t aiming bows in his direction, he would have had more time to look though!

“Damn you, Dark Elves...” He found himself mouthing his frustration.

His anger turned into magical energy, which rolled off him like palpable rage. Rem and Shera turned to face him with tense expressions.

“Ah!?”

“C-Come now, Diablo... Strangers just walked into their land, it’s only natural they’d be nervous, right?”

Maybe they just misunderstood how he felt? But he couldn’t explain what was actually going through his mind, so Diablo folded his arms haughtily.

“Look at that, Diablo, they’re huge!” Shera, who was as detached as ever, continued looking around.

“Yes, yes. It’s an impressive castle, given it’s made of wood.”

“Not that! These Dark Elf ladies have huge boobs!”

“Buha!?”

—*You’re just* now *noticing that!?*

“...What are you saying, Shera?” Rem said with an exasperated expression.

“I mean look at them! I’ve never seen boobs this big! Dark Elves are amazing!”

“...We’re risking life and limb here and that’s what you’re thinking about...!? How shameless!”

“I-I mean, yeah, buuut... But they really are!”

While Shera was frantically trying to make excuses, Diablo thought back on Rem’s words.

—Forgive my hormones, Rem!

While Diablo’s mind was being throttled to and fro by breasts, the carriage finally stopped before the castle.

†

Diablo and his group stepped off the carriage, looking up at the castle. Wooden boards were built on top of each other, forming the shape of a castle out of five dwellings stacked on top of one another. It was similar to a Japanese five-story pagoda, a tower made of wood. A thick branch extended outside from one of the openings in the planks that served as windows, leaves blooming on it in abundance.

“...Could this place have been built around a large tree and its branches?” Rem asked, knitting her brows.

“I get it!” Sylvie nodded, a convinced expression on her face. “It’s a natural support pillar!”

Shera voiced an impressed “wooow” while Diablo shared Rem’s impression.

—It’s like a castle made of papier-mâché...

He kind of wanted to take back that moment of being impressed earlier. Though, it wasn’t like they had come here to evaluate the Dark Elves’ castle, nor did they really care much about how they lived.

“Phew!”

The grizzly bear person, who served as their guide, removed the head portion of their costume. A curtain of black hair overflowed, hiding the slender nape of their neck. They without a doubt had the head and face of a woman, but she had something of a virile atmosphere to her. Her skin was very tan and dark. Diablo couldn’t really ascertain an Elf’s age, but she looked to be about twenty-five in Human years.

“...So you were a woman.” Rem was seemingly surprised as well.

“Yes, there are some circumstances regarding that. All the Dark Elves in this village are women, with the exception of babies. Dark Elf men leave the village to work away from home.”

The others removed the heads of their costumes as well, and, sure enough, they were all women.

“...So there are no men here. I’m a female Adventurer myself so I don’t think this is reckless, but since you’re fighting magical beasts, I’d imagine you’d want to have the men around for a sturdy vanguard.”

“I won’t deny that. But the Lord of the Black Forest doesn’t approach our village often. It usually leaves us alone if we intimidate it but...its eyes were so bloodshot this time. What could have riled it up...?” Her expression seemed pensive for a moment, but her thoughts shifted back to her current duties. “Whatever the case may be, we’re grateful that you visitors defeated the Lord of the Black Forest. However, we do not welcome the other races. Especially the Elves.”

Feeling the Dark Elf’s glare on her, Shera hid behind Diablo. The fact that her appearance was unusual for an Elf on account of her breasts was one thing, but if they found out she was the Kingdom of Greenwood’s princess, things would become needlessly complicated. For this reason, she was currently wearing a robe.

“...You wear these furs to avoid the poison, yes?” Rem asked, trying to change the subject. “Is this place safe?”

“Ah, this!” The woman rubbed the costume’s belly. “We call this the《Black Cloth》. Blackwood is rife with poisonous plants, so we wear these when we go hunting. But we can’t let people who cover their faces in the castle, so, for that reason, we are to remove them here. Though, there are no poisonous plants growing within the village.”

Diablo looked up at the castle. “So this is where the Dark Elves’ leader is.”

“Our chief is there.”

“Hmph... Introduce them to me. I’ll allow it.”

At Diablo’s words, the woman who wore the Mohawk costume spoke up

angrily. It was a girl with short-cut hair and a sharp gaze in her eyes.

“How disrespectful, you fool!”

She looked to be about fifteen in Human years, roughly the same age as Shera and Rem. But even if she got angry at him, Diablo had to keep up his Demon Lord role play. He couldn’t change to some polite character at this point. The Demon Lord way was to answer coercion with even more overpowering coercion.

Diablo opened his mouth to retort, but Rem and Sylvie intervened in a flustered fashion. They’d probably realized what he was going to say.

“We’re sorry! Could you kindly take us to your chief!?”

“...Ahaha...Diablo is both from another race and a bit foreign to our culture. A tiny bit, yes?”

“Mrgrgr...”

The girl didn’t seem in the mood to fight, so she stepped down easily. If she wasn’t going to stick to her bluff until the end, she may as well have not started this to begin with.

—Her personality’s kinda off...

The woman in the grizzly bear costume took off the bottom of her outfit. Diablo took two steps back despite himself.

“Nuha!?”

She wore an undershirt that was similar to a tank top and a pair of extremely short low-rise pants.

“Phew... These are necessary to block off the poison, but it’s terribly hot in them.”



“...Aren’t your clothes a bit too thin?” Rem frowned.

“Haha! There are only women in this village. None of them will mind.”

“...Diablo’s a man, you know!?”

“But he’s from another race.” She really didn’t seem to care.

“...But he’s from the races! This isn’t exactly trivial!”

“You say one strange thing after another, guest. Your outfits aren’t much different from our own.”

“...Ugh...”

Rem had equipped—or rather, was wearing—the《Gemstone Gambeson》, an item she received from Diablo. It was a highly effective item, but was also a very revealing outfit.

And while no one seemed to care much because of her childish physique, Sylvie was wearing nothing but a bit of cloth, and Rose’s outfit was open at her back.

—The clothes-to-exposed-skin ratio is kinda skewed in this party!

The Dark Elves also didn’t seem to mind seeing each other naked. They didn’t have their tops on when they drew water after all. No, it didn’t just come down to that, some were even laughing boldly as they did.

Some of the women present seemed bothered by Diablo’s gaze, blushing profusely or turning their backs to him.

—Wait, why’s the mohawk bear girl doing that too!?

Watching the girl who glared daggers at him earlier shy away because she was effectively naked was a jarring feeling, to be sure.

“Uuu... Don’t look at me!”

The woman who wore the grizzly bear costume gestured for Diablo and his group to enter the castle. “This way, guests! Can we ask you to be friendly around the chief?”

Could the mohawk bear girl’s behavior be considered friendly though?

“Worry not.” Diablo returned a smile. “I was amicable enough, no? Were I an enemy, this forest would have been a sea of fl—”

Rem and Shera both cut him off with a loud, “Ah! Ah!” desperately trying to smooth things over.

—Huh? Are they trying to say things would go quicker if I just kept quiet? This is weird... Even if my communication skills weren’t as off the charts as I thought, I thought I made some impressive progress... No way... Am I still socially inept? There’s just no way!

All of the confidence Diablo had built up suddenly crashed against the rocks...

They entered the castle. It was dim and dark. The window was blocked by a tree branch, filling the building with the shadows of its leaves. Since the place was made of wood, there was no fire to light the place up.

“...The Elves have superior night vision, so they can see just fine in this darkness” Rem whispered in Diablo’s ear.

“Hmph.”

There was something like that in the game’s setting, come to think of it. In *Cross Reverie*, any information needed to progress the game was always visible to the player regardless of their race, so it didn’t matter. Since Elves and Dark Elves hunted in dim forests, they had night vision as a racial ability.

Their guide stopped in her place.

“This is the seat of our chief.”

Chapter 3: Meeting the Chief

Diablo's eyes gradually grew accustomed to the darkness. At the center of the building was a large tree that extended upward like a tower, and people were seated upon its meandering roots. It was still too dark to tell what they were wearing, let alone the expressions on their faces however. Only Shera, with her night vision, squeaked in surprise at something.

—What's wrong? Do they look that scary to her?

Diablo thought to use magic to illuminate the place...but right now they were visiting for Rem's sake. Angering the Dark Elves would be unwise, so he decided to let Rem handle communication.

"...I am an Adventurer." Rem stepped forward. "I go by Rem Galleu. Are you the Dark Elves' ruler?"

"Ohohoho..." a calm, womanly voice echoed in response. "Ruler? No, I am only their chief. Nothing more."

Just like the woman who guided them here, this voice's intonation was thick with an accent. But with this being another world, they should all be speaking the same language. Diablo was the only one who understood what they were saying in Japanese. He presumed that while the races did have their own language, other countries used different dialects, and this difference in intonation may be a representation of that.

"...Could I ask for your name?" Rem asked.

"'Tis Rafflesia S. Orangewood... You may feel free to simply refer to me as Rafflesia."

"...Understood, Lady Rafflesia."

"Ohohoho... You needn't be so serious. Oh, yes, I'm sure this darkness is quite inconvenient for our non-Elven guests, yes? Let us illuminate the place."

A spell was chanted and a ball of light appeared near the ceiling. A《Light》

spell illuminated the room as if someone had turned on a light bulb. Blinded by the sudden light, Diablo squinted as he tried fixing his gaze on the person speaking to them, only to swallow his spit in surprise the very next moment.

—Yup, I can see why you were shocked now, Shera!

Rafflesia had *giga* boobs.

He thought this may be the case once he saw the local women, but this sort of volume went beyond his wildest imagination. To say it was more than could fit in one's hand would be a vast understatement; one would need two hands to support them.

Her outfit was layers of fabric held together by a sash at her waist. If her stomach were to stick out here, she would have looked like some swollen frog monster, but her figure was slender and curved like an hourglass. Diablo was dubious as to how that outfit supported the weight of her upper half, but found he couldn't tear his eyes from her. Her hair wasn't black like the other Dark Elves, but a shade of silver that approached white.

"Your boobs are really big, Lady Rafflesia!" Shera said what everyone was thinking but didn't have the nerve to say without reservation.

"Ohohoho... You're quite blessed yourself, are you not, miss? I would be hard pressed to believe you were an Elf had I not known otherwise."

"Huh? Ah, hmm... Ahaha..."

Shera laughed timidly. She hid her form with a robe, but it seemed Rafflesia had seen through her disguise immediately. It was probably to be expected, but there was more to this woman than a pair of enormous breasts.

"Hmm..." Rafflesia's eyes narrowed. "This is a surprise... Are you Elven royalty? Your aura has such a luminescence to it."

"Ah, hmm..."

Shera fell speechless. She wasn't the type who was capable of lying.

"What!?" the Dark Elven women sitting in the background reacted with

surprise.

It seemed there were soldiers lying in wait in the shadows. Diablo had assumed there would be four or five soldiers—presumably archers—present, but there were far more than he imagined. It seemed even he wasn't capable of accurately perceiving Elves hiding in the woods.

"You idiot!" Rem grabbed Shera by the shoulders. "Why won't you say anything!?"

"B-But, I really am the princess..."

"...But the Dark Elves hate the Elves! Didn't you think about what would happen if they found out you were royalty!?"

"B-But, Rafflesia seems like a nice person..."

"What if she's not what she 'seems like' and tries to hurt you!?"

"Well, Diablo's here..."

Rem hung her head dejectedly. Shera's life of wealth and blessing made Shera far too hopelessly optimistic. By contrast, Rem's life of continual lonesome hardship made her a pessimist.

Diablo shrugged.

—Being depended on doesn't feel too bad.

A Dark Elven girl, the one who wore the mohawk costume, nocked a bow and arrow in Shera's direction.

"You're the Elven princess!?"

It wasn't just her—other Dark Elves had also drawn their bows.

"We Dark Elves were once betrayed by the Elves..." Rafflesia said with a severe expression. "We hold a particularly bitter grudge against the current Elven king."

"Huh!? But it's the first time you've even met me!"

"True... But even if the offender forgets, the victim cannot help but remember. Be it a hundred or thousand years ago."

“No, that’s not fair!”

Shera’s ears drooped lower than usual while Rem gritted her teeth.

“...It’s like I said. You’re an idiot.”

Rem slipped her fingers into her belt, clasping a summon crystal. Rose and Sylvie seemed to be standing still, but their senses were sharpened as they prepared to plunge into action at any second.

Diablo sighed.

—This is just like at the Grand Cathedral...

Hanging back and letting others handle negotiations just made the situation roll into the worst possible scenario. He believed in his comrades, but acting as a Demon Lord was what suited him the most.

He pulled the《Prototype Great Scythe》from his pouch. He couldn’t use the Tonnerre Empereur on them if he wanted to hear about the ritual magic, but, if he used low level magic, it shouldn’t kill them.

“I haven’t the time for your nonsense. Hear me, you Dark Elves! I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world! Your petty grudges do not concern me. Obey my orders if you value your lives!”

“A Demon Lord!? I knew the Elves couldn’t be trusted!”

The mohawk costume girl fired an arrow.

She’d done it.

Some voices called out to stop her, but it was too late. It was an attack from a short range, so even if it was from a weak girl, Diablo anticipated some damage. But suddenly, Rose stood between them, moving like a squall, and cut the arrow down with her arm.

“What a pitiful creature you are, to attempt an attack on Master...” she spoke, her eyes open so wide it was almost surprising her eyeballs hadn’t rolled out of their sockets. “You deserve a painful death!”

“Rose, don’t kill her!” Diablo strictly forbade her.

At the same time, Rafflesia also cried out, “Desist!” but her attempt to hold

the Dark Elves in check only spurred them to attack further.

The other Dark Elves fired their bows one after another, raining arrow after arrow on Diablo and his group. There were probably thirty arrows that had been unleashed. He'd used《Volcanic Wall》before to protect himself, but using fire magic here would burn the tree down. That would be going too far, Demon Lord role play or not. He felt like he probably only provoked them more than anything, but he never came here to fight them in the first place...

Brandishing his scythe, Diablo unleashed his magic.

"《Sonic Wave》!"

A defensive wind element spell that sent shock waves blowing the Dark Elves' arrows away. A barrage of air spread out around them, knocking back anyone around—namely the girl who'd fired the first arrow.

"Kha!"

Her back hit the wall, seemingly doing considerable damage. But to anyone that was even a bit further from Diablo, it felt like nothing more than a sudden gust. He'd managed not to hurt Rafflesia, but the soldiers in the tree's shadows were still at large.

—No, I can't kill them.

Diablo tried thinking of a spell that would disarm without killing them, and in the space of that moment...

A Dark Elf warrior descended from the ceiling, brandishing a broadsword. It was a woman in leather armor.

"Raaaaaaaaaaahhh!"

"Rose will not allow you to approach Master!"

Rose intercepted the warrior, but since Diablo and his companions were in close proximity, she didn't deploy the Magimatic Sol, instead brandishing her double-bladed sword.

But just before the attack connected...

"Hiya!"

The Dark Elf warrior waved her sword aside. The sword's trail turned into a shining blade which flew in Rose's direction. It was《Sword Slash》, a level 60 martial art that used MP to fire slashes from afar. This warrior was, evidently, rather skilled, and went to show that Dark Elves used more than just bows and arrows.

But Rose simply bent aside, evading the flying blade.

"Ngh!?"

She evaded successfully, but the side of her dress's skirt had been ripped in the process.

The Dark Elf warrior landed, pointing her sword in Shera's direction.

"Don't move, or else the princess—"

"Eek!?"

With a bow in her hands, Shera was a high level Adventurer, but she froze in place when she was threatened with a sword. She lacked practical experience.

It seemed she would be taken hostage, but before the situation could develop any further, Diablo chanted a spell.

"《Lightning Bullet》!"

A ball of light gouged into the Dark Elf warrior's flank, pulverizing her leather armor with ease.

"Gah!?"

The warrior flew back, the air knocked out of her lungs and blood dripping from her side as she slammed against the wall. The spell's secondary effect triggered and the ball of light burst, causing additional damage.

—Oh crap, is she dead!?

He had to think fast, so he ended up using a spell that was swift and had considerable power to it. She was apparently a high level Warrior, but he didn't kill her, did he?

"Ugh... Aaah..."

Still lying down, the warrior moaned in pain. Diablo sighed in relief, but on the

surface his attitude was the exact opposite.

“You’re quite the stubborn one. Heheheh... Who wants to be blown back next? Maybe I’ll try a dark element spell next.”

He flapped his cloak menacingly. This piece of EX-rank equipment, the《Sojourn of Darkness》, had the effect of inflicting the《Fear》status on all enemies. This warrior was, apparently, extraordinary among the others, and the Dark Elves were all visibly rattled as a result.

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“Cease this fighting!” Rafflesia raised her voice again, and everyone seemed to agree this time.

“Heheheh... How boring.” Diablo smiled boldly. “Well, so be it. I’ve come to speak to you anyway. If you acknowledge how powerless you are, I may be inclined to show leniency.”

The Dark Elves seemed to share the Elves’ proud nature, and many of those present ground their teeth in frustration. But Rafflesia held them in check, speaking with a calm smile.

“Hmm... I thank you for your tolerance, honored guest. Fighting against such a powerful sorcerer is a terrifying prospect indeed. From what I hear, you felled the Lord of the Black Forest with just one spell?”

“The Lord of the Black Forest? Ah, you mean the Black Behemoth. I hardly believe that sort of weakling deserves such a grand title.”

The Dark Elves were growing visibly restless. They’d come to realize how much stronger the opponent they aimed their bows against was, and since Rafflesia had heard the report regarding the Black Behemoth, the fight was mostly avoided. The girl who had fired at them, despite having seen Diablo’s magic, was simply short tempered.

—There are two patterns to a large group opening up with hostilities after all. Either the leader orders the offensive, or a soldier on the front lines loses their temper and attacks recklessly.

“You really defeated it with magic, didn’t you... Such massive power...”

Rafflesia spoke, her voice full of amazement. “Honored guest, what did you mean by ‘Demon Lord’?”

“Exactly how it sounds. I am different from this world’s Demon Lords however, for I come from another world.”

“Ohohoho... I see... Fascinating.”

Rafflesia’s gaze washed over Diablo like a tongue, as if trying to evaluate him. It was unsettling.

“Hmph... This one will tell you the rest.”

Diablo stepped back before Rafflesia could see through him. Rem, who had been handed the initiative in the conversation, turned a gaze to those who fell in the battle.

“...Let’s treat the wounded, first. We apologize for this uproar... We have no intention of harming or offending the Dark Elves. Please, believe us when we say so. Shera is also a friend of mine. She accompanied me here out of concern for my well-being. She may be the princess of the Elves your people hold a grudge against...but right now, she is a heartfelt attendant of mine.”

Rafflesia nodded and gestured with one hand. The Dark Elf warrior and other wounded were carried away; and there were, indeed, only women here.

Having confirmed the wounded had been taken away safely, Rafflesia opened her mouth to speak. “After we have pointed bows and swords at you, your fear of Princess Shera’s safety is rational enough. Allow me to apologize on the Dark Elves’ behalf.”

Both sides had apologized, which meant Rem was now allowed to get into the nitty-gritty.

“...I’ve heard that ritual magic capable of extracting a Demon Lord’s soul is passed down in this land.”

“I know not of such a thing!” Rafflesia’s expression suddenly turned quite severe.

“...That’s... I realize there must be some circumstances at play here, but perhaps you could hear of my own circumstances, first?”

“Your circumstances, honored guest?”

Rem placed a hand on her abdomen. “...A part of the Demon Lord Krebskulm’s soul is sealed within my body.”

“A Demon Lord!?”

“...Yes. I’m sure there’s no need to explain what a Demon Lord is at this point. But in ancient times, it was sealed within my ancestor by God...then passed down from mother to daughter for generations.”

“Such a seal is upon you!?”

“...Much has happened, but because a large amount of magical energy was infused into my body, the Demon Lord Krebskulm was resurrected.”

The Dark Elves trembled at Rem’s words, far more visibly than when Diablo had proclaimed himself to be a Demon Lord earlier.

“I-It cannot be... So, that resurrected Demon Lord...” Rafflesia rose to her feet.

“...No, Diablo really is a Demon Lord from another world. He is not Krebskulm. Would an awakened Demon Lord hold a conversation with the races? According to the scriptures, he only...ravages, and destroys.”

“Yes... That’s how it should be... It is as you say.”

“...The Demon Lord Krebskulm is now in an incomplete form. You can think of it as being sealed in another manner.”

“Very well.” Rafflesia sighed in relief and sat back down.

Rem didn’t mention it was Diablo’s magical energy that had resurrected Krebskulm since, no matter how you twisted it, their actions were like a betrayal against the races. They would be credited as Demon Lord worshipers, even though they had their own reasons to act the way they had...

Rem continued speaking. She explained that if she were to die, or have more magical energy flow into her, the remnants of Krebskulm would be unleashed. She could give birth to a daughter and have them inherit the seal, but she wanted to end this fate with her generation. She wanted to extract the Demon Lord’s remnants and dispose of it all. But she did keep it a secret that the

resurrected Krebskulm had become Klem, the biscuit-loving girl.

"...Such is my story. A trustworthy friend told me the Dark Elves may have a ritual magic that can help me, which has led me here, to you."

"Hmm... I understand your story. But I'm afraid I cannot say we truly have a ritual magic that can do away with a sealed Demon Lord's soul."

Rafflesia's attitude had become odd.

"I don't know the details, but does it have to do with what happened in the past?" Diablo asked what she'd meant, only to be answered by, "I really don't know the details."

The way things were going, their negotiations weren't moving along. It was like they were wandering through a maze with their eyes closed. Rem asked Rafflesia a few more times, and in the end she disclosed the Dark Elves' circumstances.

†

Rafflesia crossed her legs, her oversized breasts jiggling as she did. "Then let me tell you of our past. A story older than the last war, dating back much earlier than that—to the time when a Human king marched his army into the old Dark Elven forest in what was called a《Crusade》."

Diablo's mind filled with questions marks.

—A Crusade? What's that? That word never came up, not even in Cross Reverie*'s lore books.*

"The Crusade really is a thing of the distant past," Sylvie whispered. "It's the name of an order of soldiers raised by the king of Lyferia from three generations ago."

It was probably so old it wasn't even mentioned in the game's setting and lore.

"The Crusade's purpose was to prevent the Demon Lord's revival..." Rafflesia continued her story. "At least on the surface... They attacked us because the ritual magic capable of undoing the Demon Lord's seal was passed down in our traditions."

It was a horrible story. Not just Rem and Shera, even Sylvie looked shocked. It appeared the majority of the races weren't aware of this.

"Even though we only inherited the ritual magic that was passed down to us since the times of myth... Many Dark Elves were killed by the soldiers of the Crusade. They burned down the beautiful forest we once inhabited, and what few survivors remained took to hiding in this poisoned forest."

"That's... I can't believe it..." Rem moaned.

"When the Crusade attacked us..." Rafflesia continued her tale, her voice heavy with sorrow, "the Elves did nothing to defend us or come to our aid. Is it not natural we would resent them? King Greenwood, who had lived at that time, has passed away just recently."

"Father...abandoned you!?" Shera's breath was stuck in her throat.

"You did not know? Well, I suppose if you did, you never would have come here."

"They just told me the Dark Elves were scary and bad..."

"Yes, I suppose the Elves would fear us, wouldn't they? The grudge between us is simply that great."

"Ah, ooh..." Shera hung her head.

Rem fell silent, and Sylvie's constant smile was gone as well. Rose's expression was as blank as ever, and she merely seemed to be cautious of her surroundings.

Diablo, however, hated this silence. They needed to hurry these talks along, since time wasn't currently in their favor.

"Hmph... In that case, this is a great chance to use this ritual magic you've risked your life to defend, is it not? A golden opportunity, if you ask me."

Rafflesia seemed taken aback, and raised her voice the next moment. "This is *not* what we were talking about!"

—I messed up, didn't I...

It seemed like what Diablo was trying to express didn't quite come across to

her. But a Demon Lord didn't take back his words, even if they were mistaken. He had to push onward, confidently. He clicked the pommel of his war scythe against the ground.

"So you hold a grudge against the Crusade and the Elves, no!? So what? How does that relate to me? We've gone to the trouble of coming here, so you will cooperate with us!"

"Fool! You think that is any way of making a request!?"

The fact he angered her made him panic internally, and his tone only became haughtier to compensate.

"Hmph... We're finally back to talking about the 'now.'" Diablo smiled thinly. "Then allow me to revise my attitude. Would that encourage you to cooperate?"

Rafflesia was visibly upset, but she was still in a position that commanded others. She still had the presence of mind to think rationally.

"Does that revision mean you will resort to violence to get your way?"

—Well, that is *an option. But Rem would despise me for it, and I don't want to resort to extortion either.*

As Diablo contemplated as such, Rem raised her voice in denial.

"That's absurd! I just want to solve my problem... I fully believe stabilizing this situation would benefit the races as a whole. But I think forcing someone to act against their will is wrong!"

"That's a very benevolent intent to have..." Rafflesia sighed. "You are a powerful sorcerer, honored guest. But if you were to threaten us with that power, I would resist you with all my might. The Dark Elves will always choose to fight over yielding to violence."

It wasn't hard to imagine that this proud nature was why the Crusade nearly drove them to extinction. Diablo thought teaching others about the ritual magic was preferable to death...but everyone had their own set of values. There was a difference of race at play here, and the events of the past complicated things even more.

“Yeah, I understand.” Sylvie nodded, seemingly convinced. “God must have entrusted the ritual magic with you because of that disposition.”

“...Is there any way you could cooperate with me?” Rem asked.

“Why, of course—you’ve brought your friend along after all. And she’s no ordinary friend either, but the Elven princess herself! With the King’s passing and her brothers already deceased, she is the sole heir to the royal bloodline.”

Everyone’s gazes suddenly fixed on Shera.

“Huh? Me?”

“Ohoho... If you were to reclaim the trust the Dark Elves had lost toward the Elves...it would make me a friend to you, honored guests. And I would gladly extend my assistance, yes?”

Shera smiled at the sound of that offer. “Yeah, that sounds great! I don’t know a lot about what happened in the past, but being friends is a good thing!”

“I’m pleased to hear you say that. Then, as proof of our friendship...would you yield part of Greenwood to us?”

“Huh...?”

“In the past, we Dark Elves also lived in an abundant forest. But now we’re forced to live in these poisoned woods... Would my suggestion not do as a mark of reconciliation? If the Elves give us part of their forest...we could forgive them for not fighting against the Crusade with us. A plot of land three times the size of this forest is all we need, I believe?”

Rafflesia directed a gaze at Shera, trying to assess her reaction.

“Hmmm...” Shera’s expression was pensive, while Rem’s and Sylvie’s were severe.

They demanded land in exchange for the ritual magic—but that deal was in no way acceptable.

Diablo gripped his war scythe tightly.

—She never intended to cooperate with us in the first place. Maybe I should resort to violence anyway, even if they resist...

Of course, the Dark Elves sensed the shift in the atmosphere. The Dark Elven archers stood at the ready, suspense filling their expressions. Things seemed to be on the verge of exploding, when Shera clapped her hands in a dry, snapping noise.

“Okay, I accept!”

“Ohohoh... As I thought, you will not yi—” Rafflesia’s eyes widened in shock. “Huh? What did you just say?”

“I said I accept.” Shera gave a carefree smile. “You said a plot of land three times the size of this village, right? I don’t really get it, but if it’s only that much, I think we can manage.”

“S-Such foolishness! The forest is too small for the Elves as it is, and some of you are forced to live outside of it! You don’t have enough land to be able to give some away!”

“But if what you said is true, it only makes sense to share it with you. Isn’t living in a forest with nothing but poisonous plants horrible?”

“That’s... Yes, of course it is...”

“I don’t know why Father didn’t protect you—I’ll ask Mother about it later. But I think the Elves and the Dark Elves should get along.”

“Impossible! That’s impossible!” Rafflesia shook her head. “Th-That’s right... You’re a princess, nothing more. You’re not the king. You don’t have the authority to give the forest to us. That’s your angle, yes!? You’ll go back on your words later, saying you can’t keep your promise!”

“I’m not lying!” Shera tapered her lips grumpily.

“Can you swear your life on it!? Can you swear it on God’s name!?”

“Of course! So please, just help Rem!”

“Wh-What are you...” Rem cut into the conversation with a flustered expression. “Do you even understand what you’re saying, Shera!? No, of course you don’t!”

“You’re so mean, Rem...”

“Stupid Shera! There’s no way the Elves would agree to let the Dark Elves claim part of their forest! Your can’t swear your life on that type of promise so thoughtlessly like that...”

“I’m not being thoughtless. I’m not... I mean, you put your life on the line and came to save me when my brother kidnapped me... So this time, it’s my turn to help you.”

“Th-That’s...because Diablo was...”

“Yeah, I know. And if Diablo’s ever in trouble, let’s both work together to save him too.” Shera pumped her fists before her chest.

“...You really are an idiot...” Rem said in a trembling voice. “What could we ever do in a situation Diablo can’t handle?”

“Ahaha, I guess you’re right.”

“...Are you really sure about this, Shera?”

“Positive!” Shera nodded deeply. “I thought this through, and I have the perfect plan!”

“If you say you swear it on God’s name, Princess Shera,” Rafflesia continued the conversation, “I’ll believe your words. In exchange for a portion of your forest, we will put the past behind us. We shall be friends, and I shall solve our Pantherian guest’s problem with the sealed Demon Lord. I swear it in God’s name.”

Shera nodded enthusiastically. “It’s a promise! Swear to God!”

†

They were to perform the ritual magic immediately. Diablo had thought only Rem would have to take part in it...but Shera wanted to come along and accompany Rem as well. They had no choice but to trust Rafflesia about the ritual magic, but given the scale of the compensation she would receive for it, Diablo doubted she’d lied.

But what about the other Dark Elves? Could he say for certain they wouldn’t hurt Rem and Shera? Rem was about to have the ritual magic performed on

her, and Shera was weak to ambushes. Diablo was getting anxious.

“I will join as well,” Diablo proposed.

“Ohohoh... Do you not trust me? You are a wary one. But having too many people present can be a problem. The altar is a small place.”

“Very well. Rose, Sylvie, keep watch near the carriage.”

Rose seemed terribly hurt for a moment, but bowed deeply. “As you command, Master.”

“Right, we’ll wait outside. Don’t make a mess in there, Diablo.”

The two of them left the building.

Following in Rafflesia’s footsteps, Diablo, Rem, and Shera entered a room deeper into the castle.

On the other side of the great tree—

They found themselves in a small room. The room had two exits, one being the door Diablo and his group had entered from, and another door further into the room. The place had no windows, and was even darker than the room before, with Rafflesia lighting the room up again with another Light spell. At the center of the wooden floor was a small pond surrounding a rock, with fish swimming in the water.

Surprisingly enough, Rafflesia hadn’t brought any guards with her. There was no one but the four of them in the room. Were her guards on the other side of the wall, or maybe masking their presence? Not detecting them would be pretty lame...but pretending he found them when they weren’t actually there would be even more pathetic. It’d be ridiculous. How was he supposed to ask without giving up any of his Demon Lordly dignity!?

“Hmph...” Diablo snorted. “Your guards... What are you playing at, Rafflesia?”

“This place is called the《Chamber of Purification》,” Rafflesia said with a gentle smile. “The only ones permitted to enter are myself and those undergoing the ritual, so there is no need for any guards.”

So there really weren’t any guards...

“I’m surprised you trust us so easily.”

“Ohohoh... I’m already a friend to you, am I not?”

“Hmph.” Diablo made an unconvinced expression as Rafflesia continued her words.

“It may be hard for you to understand since you come from another world, honored guest...but when one of royal blood makes an oath on God’s name, it is a very serious affair. Far more serious than an exchange of gold could ever be.”

“Is that so.”

“Those of royal blood receive God’s blessing, which allows their kingdom to flourish, and this agreement is, however you look at it, to our benefit. If we were to accept this proposal and not keep our end of the bargain, our honor would be all but forfeit, no?”

“I suppose so. Receiving a section of the forest three times the size of your village in exchange for the ritual magic is an easy deal...”

“That’s not right!” Shera cut into their words. “I promised the Elves and the Dark Elves would get along!”

“True, indeed... My people are still half in doubt, but if we could live once again in a bountiful forest... If you abide by your word, Princess Shera, I am sure we will get along well. We would be neighbors after all.”

“...Is this really all right?” Rem asked with a languid expression. “I’m worried the Elves won’t take too well to losing some of their forest...”

“It’ll be fine,” Shera guaranteed.

They couldn’t help but be anxious though. This was Shera after all, and she never did think things through thoroughly enough.

Rafflesia crouched and scooped up water from the pond. She breathed in the water’s scent, then drank it.

“Hmm... It appears there will be no problems. Let us cleanse ourselves.”

“...Problems?” Rem asked.

“This land’s spring water is usually safe, but every so often the forest’s toxins can mix into it. So I just confirmed the water’s purity by its smell and taste. It is for this reason we have fish swim in this water as well.”

“...We’ll use this land’s water for the ritual magic?”

“Our honored Pantherian guest—your name was Rem, was it not? Do you not believe me?” Rafflesia nodded and asked back.

“...That’s a difficult question. We’ve only just met, and I’ve heard of what happened in the past. But Shera put her life on the line to give me this chance... So I leave everything to you, Lady Rafflesia.”

“Ohohoh... You are a wise woman indeed.”

“...I entrust myself to you.”

Diablo recalled this...

—Ritual magic, huh... That time when I had to pour my magical energy into Rem was a pretty huge mess. I had to put that into her and do that... Is this time going to be the same? Are those two going to, uh...grapple, or something?

“H-Hmm... Are you going to touch my body during the ritual?” Rem asked, her cheeks a rosy pink. Apparently the same thoughts were going through her mind.

“Why would I touch you? A ritual given by God is done by standing upright and performing earnest prayer. There’s no need for physical contact.”

“...We’ll just be standing then? And talking? No touching?”

“There’s an altar in the east of the village. We will pray there until the sun rises. You may stand, but as we’ll be spending the whole night there, sitting would probably be more convenient. But...if you insist on me touching you, I certainly could?”

“No! Please, the usual ritual is just fine!”

“Ohohoh... Very well then.”

“Yes, thank you. I was prepared for the worst, but it looks like I won’t have to go through any more humiliation this time.” Rem sighed, visibly relieved.

“I’m glad you have calmed yourself. Now, let us proceed to purify ourselves in

the pond.”

Rafflesia reached for her sash, undoing it in a swift motion. She lifted up the fabrics she wore as clothing, exposing her bosom, which already stuck out from under her clothes as it was, freely into the air.

“Fwa!?” Rem let out a peculiar squeak.

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Having stripped naked, Rafflesia reached a hand out to Rem. “We will be offering our prayers to God, so it is only natural that we purify ourselves.”

“...I-I see...”

“This is a custom passed down with the rest of the ritual, so please follow my example. First, we wash both hands.”

“...Naked?”

“Follow my example.”

“...Aaah...” Rem sighed. “All right.”

Diablo turned around so he wouldn’t look, but then Rafflesia said something absurd that made him do a double take:

“All who have entered the Chamber of Purification are participants in the ritual. Since they, too, will stand before God, they must cleanse themselves as well.”

“Fwa!?” This time Diablo made the same peculiar squeak Rem had made earlier.

“Oooh, I get it.” Shera nodded and reached for her clothes without a hint of hesitation, preparing to take them off.

The Elves were supposed to be proud, but they didn’t seem to have any qualms over being naked around people.

“...Aren’t you...embarrassed, Shera?” Rem asked, her face flushing red.

“A bit... But I swore my life to God for this.”

“...Y-Yes, you’re right. How could I neglect to notice that... This magic is for

the sake of my future...and the prosperity of the races. And you made a great promise in exchange for it, your life included. Th-This is nothing to be ashamed of!”

“Ahaha... Besides, it’s like bathing.”

“...Yes, that’s right. It’s not like strangers are looking at us.”

Rem began taking off her clothes. Diablo strengthened his own resolve too. He couldn’t just say “I’m embarrassed so I won’t participate” after everyone else decided to do it. The old him may have selfishly rejected them, but he’d been working alongside Rem and Shera since he came to this world, and a feeling of camaraderie for them had grown in Diablo.

“There’s no other way. I will accompany you as well.”

In terms of combat potential, this situation also put them at a disadvantage. Rem and Shera would respectively have to leave their summon crystals and bow behind. But if something were to happen while they didn’t have their equipment, Diablo alone would be able to use magic to defend them.

He put his war scythe into his pouch and took off his cape and top. His pulse began accelerating. Taking off his clothes in front of women was embarrassing after all. He’d bathed with Rem and Shera before, but this wasn’t something he could get used to.

—The worst part is I can’t even let it show I’m embarrassed! At times like this I have to rely on math! I’ll fill my thoughts with numbers, and make all the blood go from my groin to my brain. Pi is...3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419...

“Err... What was the next one again... seven? Or was it one?”

“...What’s wrong, Diablo?”

“Let’s hurry up and bathe!”

Shera grabbed him by the arm—

Naked.

Before the sensation of exposed skin and the color of her body that filled his field of vision, the sequence of numbers he’d memorized back in middle school

was blown to pieces like a slime that had《Explosion》cast on it.

Hot damn.

“...If you’re participating, hurry up, Diablo.” Rem reached for his belt. “The position of the stars and the moon are important for a ritual magic of this magnitude.”



As she spoke, she skillfully undid his belt, grabbed his pants, and pulled them down.

“Ah?!”

Rem’s breath caught in her throat and her eyes widened like saucers. She hopped back in a panic, her face as red as a lobster.

—You just pulled my underwear down along with my pants!!!

He stood exposed.

Stark naked.

“I-I-I-I’m sorry, Diablo!” Rem stammered, firing off words in fast succession. “A-Anyway...I-let’s hurry!”

“Aaah, hmm.”

Having been stripped by Rem and with Shera pulling him by the arm, Diablo stood before them—

In the nude!

His body temperature rose, and he wasn’t cold since they were in a closed room. If anything, he was sweaty.

To his right was Rem; to his left was Shera; and opposite him was Rafflesia:

Small, large, extra large.

“Ohohoh... You are quite innocent, yes? We’re all of different races, so there’s nothing to stress over.”

“You shouldn’t mind such pointless things yourself and just get on with the ritual.”

He tried hiding his embarrassment behind menacing words, but the impact wasn’t quite there when he said it naked. His only solace was that his body was muscular and toned thanks to his level 150 stats.

Rafflesia crouched and sank her right hand into the water.

“Now, follow my example, if you will.”

“...Very well.”

“OK!”

Rem and Shera crouched as well. Diablo emulated them and reached out his right arm. The spring’s water was, as expected, cold. He was surprised when Rafflesia told them to strip, but the purification itself wasn’t much different from bathing. They soaked their limbs, washed the sweat off their torsos, and cleaned their faces. Had it just come down to that, there wouldn’t be any problems. However...

Drops of water dripping off her wet hair, Rafflesia made way to the door opposite the one they’d entered from.

“Let us make way to the altar.”

“...H-Hmm... What about our clothes?” Rem asked, after blinking twice in puzzlement.

“Ohohoh... What are you saying? Putting on filthy clothes now would defeat the purpose of purifying ourselves.”

Rafflesia opened the door, and a gust of wind blew into the room. It led outside, to the Dark Elf village. It was the back of the castle, which meant the carriage was on the other side, but they could see several buildings of similar architecture. A shade of madder red had washed over the sky, but it was still bright outside. Dark Elf women were preparing dinner with their stoves, chopping firewood, or servicing their bows.

“...We’re supposed to walk past here...like this?” Rem asked in a faint, dry voice.

Rafflesia took the lead and stepped outside. “Let us hurry. We must begin the ritual magic before the sun sets.”

“Aaah... Err...” Not just her face, but Rem’s entire body burned red.

“Ah?! We’re going out like this?!” Even Shera was visibly flustered by this.

“If you wish...” Rafflesia turned to face them with a calm expression. “You could stay behind and Miss Rem alone will accompany me.”

Cleansing one's body and walking to the altar was a custom in this village, so she was apparently used to it.

"Th-There are only...Dark Elf women in this village, right!?" Rem asked, her voice steeped with nervousness.

"Yes, of course. When boys are old enough to hold a bow, their brothers and fathers take them outside the village for training."

"...I see..."

Rem seemed prepared to walk outside.

"Aaah?!"

A Dark Elf woman walked by them, carrying a bundle of branches. It may have been customary in this village, but seeing people walking around nude in broad daylight was still surprising. But having seen them walk in a line, the woman realized they were doing it for the ritual magic and bowed respectfully.

Rafflesia walked at the head of the line, her head held high. Rem and Shera followed her, their faces flushed.

—This is really bad!

He couldn't turn back now, so Diablo kept on walking.

"Kyaa?!" a village girl screeched, dropping her bundles of branches on the ground with loud crashing sounds. She faltered backward, her gaze, however Diablo tried to avoid thinking of it, fixed on a very specific point.

—My horns, right?! The horns on my head!

Diablo still had the《Distorted Crown》equipped, the one item he could remove. But he couldn't just say "I could actually take it off" after all this time. It was a highly efficient piece of equipment that granted him an HP regeneration effect, but had the added feature of making it seem like horns were growing out of his head. This was a feature none of the races had, so it would make sense for the girl to be taken aback. It did look like the Dark Elf villager's gaze was directed significantly below his head, but...he was probably imagining it. Definitely.

The village girls were turning their heads toward him one after another.

“Oh my...” “Well now!” “Kyaaa ≡”

As they were heading for the altar in single file, many of the villagers got on their knees respectfully, but some of the women were gazing fixedly at them. Diablo was bad enough as it was when it came to being the center of attention, so having so many unfamiliar women look at his naked body made it hard to maintain his nerve.

He turned his gaze straight ahead, only to find Rem sweating profusely.

“Haa... Haa... Haa...”

“Hey, are you all right?”

“...Huh? What is it, Diablo? Is there a problem? Because I’m fine, of course, I’m perfectly OK.”

Her words came out in ragged breaths. She was sweating as if she had just run a marathon, and her skin was a stark shade of red. Transparent drops slid down her thighs, and her knees were shaking.

“Th-They’re looking...” she murmured to herself in a delusional tone. “I’m naked...in front of strangers... This... This is...”

Contrary to her claims, Rem looked to be anything but fine.

“What’s wrong? Does your tummy hurt?” Shera, who was walking alongside her, noticed Rem’s distress.

“I-I’m...fine...”

So she said, but Rem’s knees were shaking so much she could barely walk. She was merely staggering along.

“...Aaah... They’re looking. That lady... She looked...at me...so hard... I... I’m so embarrassed...”

Rem tripped over some undergrowth, almost tumbling to the ground.

“Watch out!” Diablo reached out to catch her, grabbing her by the shoulders. The moment he did, Rem let out a high pitched scream.

“Hiyaaa!”

“H-Hey...?”

Rem spasmed as if she'd just been shocked by electricity.

"Hnnnnnnnnn!"

—Don't tell me she...?

Diablo stiffened as he held her in his arms. The drops flowing out of her pooled beneath them.

"Ahh... Guh... Hmm, aah... Diablo... D-Don't... Haa... Grab me so suddenly...please..." Rem spoke weakly, tears welling up in her eyes.

"W-Walk straight then." Diablo managed to squeeze out a response, overwhelmed by the situation.

"Aaah... I'm...fine... Yes... There's nothing...wrong..."

Rem walked forward, her body even redder than before.


SHIVER!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!
TWITCH!

“Aaaaaah...” Shera’s face was red too.

Diablo walked behind them, minding to stay cautious.

“Don’t tell me you’re going to start acting crazy too, Shera.”

Every person had their own disposition. Rem just happened to react to having to walk outside naked more acutely than others...

Contemplating about how odd things had become all of a sudden, Diablo marched on, stepping over the liquid that dripped onto the ground.

They finally reached the east end of the village. There stood a raised building that seemed to serve as a granary, with a step ladder inside that led up to the《Altar’s Chamber》on the second floor. A purple carpet was spread out in the room, and different types of ritual equipment were lined up. An old silver holy symbol stood at the end of the room.

Rem stood there, moist from tears and sweat (among other things)...

“Haaa... Haaa...”

“Now, come into the magic circle, Miss Rem. Princess Shera and Sir Diablo may sit in the back. Just try to not fall asleep.”

“Of course...” Rem took a deep breath. “I’m, I’m fine...”

Rafflesia approached the holy symbol and began chanting a prayer. Her words were full of solemn weight, meaning she was probably reciting a passage from the holy scriptures.

Within five minutes, Diablo was bored.

“Is this gonna last until morning, Diablo?” Shera whined.

“That seems to be the case. Just don’t fall asleep.”

“I’m hungry.”

“Endure it.”

“I-I need to pee...”

“Buh?!”

Diablo and Shera turned pale, realizing things were going in a bad direction indeed.

And so, much had happened...

But the ritual magic had been successfully completed.

Chapter 4: Visiting One's Homeland

Two days later—

After the ritual magic had ended, they all fell into a deep sleep, so they only left the next day. Sylvie currently held the reins, and Shera was next to her on the driver's seat, functioning as guide. Their carriage left Blackwood behind and made way to the forest that functioned as the Elves' sovereign kingdom—Greenwood.

There were three benches in the carriage, including the driver's seat. Diablo sat on the second one, with Rem seated next to him.

All they did was pray, but the ritual magic seemed to have depleted Rem's HP and MP, leaving her languid. She held a sphere tinged with magical energy in her hand, transparent like a glass orb with a black flame flickering within.

The remnants of the Demon Lord Krebskulm were sealed inside this orb—the《Divinity Crystal》. Rem had been looking at it time and time again since yesterday.

After the ritual, Diablo touched Rem's body and traced the flow of her magical energy, and, indeed, the Demon Lord's remnants were gone. They'd successfully passed the seal into the Divinity Crystal.

In the past, the only way to keep Krebskulm in check was to seal him inside a Pantherian girl... But now it was different. Perhaps because all that remained of it were remnants, or perhaps because research into magic had advanced since then, or maybe God's power had grown... Diablo didn't really understand the logic behind it. He was capable of casting advanced spells, but that was because of his level in the game. He didn't have any systematic knowledge about magic.

"Ohohoh..." a feminine voice spoke behind him. "Not to worry, my dear, the ritual magic was successful. You can trust me, yes?"

Rafflesia spoke with a gentle smile on her lips. She was seated on the third bench, alongside Rose. Diablo didn't expect her to join them, but she tagged

along to ensure the promise regarding their share of the forest was kept. Surprisingly enough, she also came alone.

"...I do not suspect you, nor am I worried..." Rem whispered, her gaze fixed on the object in her hands. "But when I think, 'It's all over now'... I still can't quite believe it. This thing has dominated my lineage's lives for so long..."

"I see. But you won't truly be free so long as you hold onto that Divinity Crystal, no? You could have entrusted it to our village."

"...I appreciate your offer...but even if these are just *remnants* of one, this is still a Demon Lord. I would feel safer with it in my care instead of leaving it with someone else. Diablo is by my side after all."

Rem turned her gaze to him. Such an expression of trust made Diablo feel oddly embarrassed, and he shifted his gaze away.

"Even if Krebskulm were to fully awaken, he would be no match for me."

"Hehe... Yes, perhaps. Thanks to your... No, thanks to Shera and everyone's support too... I've been set free. I can't express how thankful I am... Really...thank you."

Rem snuggled up to him, her head resting against his upper arm with a thud. Her cats ears made it feel like a cat had rubbed against him, begging to be pet.

Diablo reached out and pet her head. Rem's thin, soft hair was very pleasant to the touch. Not resisting his touch, and rather seeming even more exhausted, Rem pressed her body even closer against his.

"...Nnn..." Rem closed her eyes as she snuggled him.

Diablo turned to look at the back seat, only to be met with Sylvie grinning happily at him. Rafflesia took out a small harp and began strutting it, playing a soft tune.

The world was kind to them in that moment. Diablo thought it would be good if times like these could last forever.

Rose alone sat there as still and expressionless as a statue, as if she'd run out of magical energy.

At noon—

They'd arrived at a certain village. It was an ordinary Human settlement, but they could see some Pantherians and Grasswalkers as well.

"Everyone, take your luggage and get off. We'll have to leave the carriage here if we're going into the forest," Sylvie explained. "It's not Blackwood, so we won't have to worry too much about poisonous plants, but we should watch out for wild beasts."

It seemed you couldn't enter the Kingdom of Greenwood with a carriage. They'd have to walk the rest of the way from this neighboring village.

As Diablo pulled down the luggage, Sylvie walked up to him.

"Can I have a minute, Diablo?"

"What is it?"

"I think I should head back to Faltra right now. I completed my quest for Celes, and we solved Rem's problem too."

"But you didn't do a thing."

"Ahaha... That stings, Diablo. But you're right... This party will do fine even without me. And I certainly can't leave Faltra unguarded for much longer."

"Hmph."

There was a chance the resurrected Demon Lord's troops were on the march. Even with the governor's forces stationed there, the Adventurers would be crucial forces, and, as the guildmaster of the Adventurer's Guild, Sylvie needed to be there to unify them.

"And, well, here's my real question: Will you be coming back to Faltra after you're done taking care of things in Greenwood?"

"Those are my plans for now, yes."

Klem was still in Faltra too. Even if he didn't say anything, Rem and Shera would probably insist on going back.

Sylvie's expression softened. "That's great! I'm not exaggerating when I say the fate of the races rests on whether your party is present on the front lines or

not.”

“I’m not doing this for the races. I’ve simply grown used to that inn. That’s all.”

“Hehe... Mei from the《Peace of Mind Inn》will be happy to hear that. All right then, I’m off!”

Sylvie left Shera with some words of consolation, bid farewell to Rem and Rose, and, after a short exchange with Rafflesia, left the party. Saying goodbye was a bit lonely, but if all went according to plan, they’d meet her again soon enough back in Faltra. As she said, the Demon Lord’s army may launch an invasion soon, and Diablo and his group would have to help defend the city.

—A Demon Lord Subjugation, huh...?

It reminded him of *Cross Reverie*’s time-limited raid events. All players would fight the Demon Lord, and each victory would deplete an overall gauge, whittling it down over a limited period of time. During the first ever Demon Lord Subjugation quest however, the players beat it much faster than the admins expected. They’d defeated a boss that was supposed to span two weeks in half a day... So the next day it revived, stronger than before.

Those were the times...

“Does something concern Master?” Rose asked.

“No... You and I aren’t originally from this world. Rem and Shera summoned me here...but I doubt those two would have enough power to pull the《Demon Lord’s Labyrinth》over from that side.”

“All is as Master says.”

“So I’ve been wondering if some transcendental presence’s power is at play here. I do not know who that could be...but maybe this was their purpose in bringing me here...”

“What does Master mean by ‘this’?”

“Like Sylvie said, Lyferia doesn’t have the strength to defend the races from the awakened Demon Lord. But with you and me on their side...and the equipment in my treasure vault, they’d be able to match the Fallen... No, they

would be able to completely turn the tide of battle.”

“All is as Master says. Master would not falter even in the face of an awakened Demon Lord.”

—I doubt he’d be such a simple opponent to beat...

It took Diablo quite a bit of luck to solo a Demon Lord back in *Cross Reverie*, and when Krebskulm had rampaged in Faltra, it was only partially resurrected. He’d never fought a complete Demon Lord in this world, so conceit could very well spell doom for him. Yet Diablo simply nodded in a composed fashion.

“Of course I won’t. I am the one true Demon Lord after all.”

“Of course!” Rose nodded with sparkling eyes.

†

They advanced into the forest. Compared to the woods near Faltra, Greenwood was much denser. The weeds reached up to their knees, and since the grass hid the ground under their feet, they found themselves tripping over the uneven footing.

Their current party consisted of the five of them: Shera at the lead, followed by Diablo, Rem and Rafflesia, and Rose standing in the rear of the line.

“C’mon, guys.” Shera turned to face them. “It’ll be dark if we don’t hurry.”

“...We’re in a deep forest right now. We can’t walk as fast as an Elf,” Rem rebutted.

“I picked a route that’s pretty easy to walk through though.”

“...Kuh... If we were on a plain, I’d have left you behind before you knew it...”

—Hey now, no leaving anyone behind...

“We’ve been walking for a while now. Are you sure we’re going in the right direction?” Diablo asked, concerned.

“Don’t worry, this place is like my backyard.”

As she made that rash statement, Shera kept walking while looking at them, her back facing the direction she was going.

In *Cross Reverie*, the walking animation was the same regardless of the terrain you were on, but in practice, they were now advancing at half their normal pace. Diablo was fine thanks to his level 150 body, but if he were in his real body, he wouldn't be able to take another step right now. The terrain was that difficult.

—Hmm? Wait a sec...

He made progress in-game like it was nothing, but being aware of how hard it should be made it all the more difficult.

He recalled the time when he'd mixed potions. When he focused on something else, his hands recalled the feel of being a skilled《Combiner》and did the job before he knew it. At the time, he was distracted by Shera's breasts as she leaned over and managed to mix potions that way. But now Shera was a few steps ahead, so gazing at her fixedly was hard. He considered distracting himself by looking at Rem, who was walking alongside him, but right as he thought that, someone spoke to him from beyond.

"Watch yourselves, you two. There's a bump on the road ahead."

"Hmm."

Diablo turned around, his gaze meeting Rafflesia, the Dark Elf. As you'd expect from a race that lived in a forest, she seemed perfectly composed, and the two enormous spheres on her chest stuck out proudly. With each step, the two extra-large, Demon-Lord-class mammaries jiggled visibly.

—Holy hell!

He couldn't help but stare, and as he did, he wasn't concentrating on his legs. Diablo's footwork and posture shifted, becoming as skilled as an Elf's, but the moment he noticed, his focus returned to his feet and he almost tripped.

"This is harder than I imagined..."

"My, is something the matter?"

"No, nothing..."

"Ohohoh... When you stare at me like that, it's rather embarrassing, yes? Ah, or could it be..."

“Aaah?!” Diablo panicked, thinking she may have realized he was ogling her mega boobs.

“Are you trying to mimic Elven footwork, Diablo? The way you moved just now was done quite well.”

“A-Ah, yes...”

Rafflesia walked alongside him. When he looked at her breasts from so close, their massive pressure felt all the greater.

Boing, boing...

Since he’d already seen her naked before, he could imagine what she looked like under her outfit. Diablo could tell his pulse was skyrocketing.

“You can tell the ground’s location and direction from the undergrowth. The leaves’ thickness and the way they bend show you the way.” She was demonstrating what she meant.

“Ah... Right...”

“Raising your legs too slowly can tire you, so just pass the leaves with your fingertips... Oh, I see you can do it even without me teaching you. Very good.”

“Mmm? A-Aaah, yes... Of course! I am a Demon Lord after all!”

Taking Rafflesia’s advice, Rem’s steps hastened as well. Rose also maintained a stable pace, even though she wasn’t as agile as an Elf in this terrain. They upped their pace, but Shera’s back kept appearing and disappearing between the trees. She was going a bit too fast.

—Can’t blame her though.

The news of her father’s death disturbed her enough to make her develop a fever. She probably really wanted to go back home instead of going to Blackwood first.

Rem grimaced. “I understand how she feels, but it’ll be a problem if we get separated. We should call her back.”

“I know the way to the Kingdom of Greenwood as well,” Rafflesia spoke up.

“Oh, you do... That’s quite helpful.”

“At this pace, we should be there in half an hour or so.”

“Ugh...” Rem looked up at the sky. “A half hour...”

Meanwhile, Diablo had gotten the hang of it. Well, not the hang of walking through the forest, per say...but he’d burned the image of those bouncing breasts to the back of his mind and happily looked back on it. This advanced technique allowed him to hold that image while ignoring what was actually in front of him, and his gait improved while he wasn’t aware of it.

Diablo noted that he’d conquered yet another challenge this world presented before him.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

It had come from up ahead.

“Shera?!”

Diablo’s thoughts snapped away from his footwork. Any thoughts of the terrain were blown away, and Diablo rushed onward as if running on a plain. Sprinting through the trees like a gust of wind, he reached the place the scream had originated from.

†

—She’s gone?!

“What’s going on, where’s Shera...?!”

“Di-Diablooo!” a voice rang out from above.

Diablo looked up; Shera was suspended high in the air, held by vine-creeper-like tendrils. It bound her limbs and crawled all over her, as if trying to ascertain the curvature of her body. It looked like vines, but its movements were like a snake’s.

Diablo then noticed a writhing mass hiding behind the foliage. It was a green, orb-like creature, large enough to fit a person inside it. The tentacles that grew out of it looked similar to plant-like vines which it extended to support itself along the nearby trees. It had also evidently used them to capture Shera.

A section of its front ripped open, revealing a huge eyeball that glared at Diablo.

“That’s an《Herbductor》!”

It was a plant-like monster that was categorized as a wild beast. It was out of reach of swords and had high magic resistance. It would hide itself behind tree leaves and launch surprise attacks with its tentacles. It was easy to defeat with a bow, but their designated archer, Shera, was currently bound by said creature.

Diablo clicked his tongue. “I can’t believe you let a level 50 monster get the drop on you.”

However good its resistance was, a powerful enough spell would still destroy it. But it may use Shera as a shield, and Diablo had to be careful not to hit her.

He could hear footsteps approaching from behind, probably belonging to Rem, Rose, and Rafflesia.

—Should I let Rose handle this?

She was capable of jumping those ten meters into the air, and could easily defeat a monster with low defense. However, the Herbductor’s behavior was different from its in-game patterns.

Using its tentacles to swing from tree to tree, it attempted to escape, taking Shera along.

“Kyaaa—nnng?!”

Shera tried screaming, but it stuck a thick tentacle in her mouth. At this rate, it would easily abduct her.

Diablo took off after them; there was no time to wait for Rem and the others.

—Yeah, it obviously never did that *in* Cross Reverie*!*

To think it tried running off after kidnapping one of his party members!

If a party member died, they could be resurrected with magic (though that wouldn’t work in this world), and petrification and paralysis could be dispelled. But if someone were abducted, there was no continuing the adventure. It

would defeat the whole purpose of the game.

“Kuh... This pest is quick too!”

It coiled its tentacles to stick to the treetops, then pulled itself up. Repeating that process made it move faster than Diablo, who was running at full force. Thankfully, visibility wasn’t an issue in this forest, and if he didn’t have to be careful about hitting Shera he’d simply blast it away with magic...or simply use a Haste-type spell to finish the matter. But Diablo had the《Demon Lord’s Ring》equipped which would reflect and render any enchantment he’d attempt to put on himself useless.

“Nnn... Uuu... Nn!” Shera twisted her body, moans escaping from her gagged mouth.

The tentacles crawling over her body began reaching under her clothes. Shera was wearing a native Elven outfit, which just barely contained her breasts and clung to her body tightly. With the thick tentacles burrowing inside them, the outfit’s strings were on the verge of tearing. The chest portion alone came undone with a tearing sound.

“Nnnnnnnnnnn?!”

Her breasts were exposed to the air. Shera tried reaching for an arrow from her quiver, but being a monster that lived in a forest inhabited by Elves, the Herbductor recognized bows and arrows as weapons. It had dumped the whole quiver away.

The giant eyeball fixed its gaze on Shera’s body, seemingly interested in her decidedly un-Elf-like characteristics. There was no telling what a monster was thinking, but several tentacles swarmed over her breasts. Shera intended to hide her chest with her hands, but the tentacles bound her arms.

“Uuu...”

The tips of the monster’s vine-like tentacles were shaped like brushes, running over Shera’s skin as if caressing her.

“Fwa?!”

Being stimulated in a delicate spot, Shera’s voice became sweeter. The

tentacles brushed over Shera's armpits as if trying to tickle her, then bounced her breasts left and right once...then once more. Due to having been fondled, her tips became sensitive, and several tentacles climbed up the mountain of her bosom. A sense of dread mixed with curiosity filled Shera's heart when she considered what would happen if they were to touch her after they made her this stimulated.

But then the tentacles stopped, a fingertip's breadth away from the summit.

"Uuu...uuu... Uuuh...?"

Relief that they stopped, along with a sense of dread at the monster's odd actions and the throbbing of her tips... Those emotions mixed in Shera's heart. It was only then she realized it had stopped because its attention turned elsewhere.

Many more tentacles than the ones that stimulated her breasts swarmed toward her lower half, coiling around her thighs and creeping up to her crotch. They rubbed against the backs of her knees, making a numbing sensation rush up her spine.

"Anh..."

If she didn't have a tentacle filling her mouth, her voice may have been much louder. The tip of that thick tentacle shrunk, and it explored the inside of Shera's mouth. It rubbed against the gums of her teeth, coiled around her neck, and advanced deeper into her throat. Down at the lower half of her body, the tentacles began creeping into her underwear—

Unable to speak, Shera screamed silently.

—Not theeeeeeeeeeeeeeere!

Tears began welling up in her eyes, the transparent droplets flying into the air.

Quickly catching up to them, Diablo made sure to stop the incident.

"《Heaven's Fall》!"

Many giant rocks began raining down from the sky. The Tonnerre Empereur multiplied the level 100 attack spell, dropping a barrage of rocks onto the area. But the spell's range didn't include the Herbductor; rather, it was meant to destroy all the trees surrounding the monster.

"You've had your fill, haven't you, you random mook?" Diablo glared at his opponent.

In the game, spells didn't affect the terrain and their animations were only for show, but that wasn't the case in this world. If the enemy used the trees to get away, all Diablo had to do was destroy the surroundings.

Sensing the gap in strength between itself and Diablo, the Herbductor brandished Shera like a shield. It crept away, slithering through the fallen trees in an attempt to reach out to a tree outside of the spell's area of effect...

But Diablo could see through its actions.

"Crush everything along with this pathetic creature! 《Lightning Arrow》!"

Diablo launched several bullets of light that flew in the monster's direction, navigating them so they avoided Shera and hit the center of the monster's body.

"Hiya?!" The tentacles binding her slackened, dropping Shera down on the ground.

Getting caught by such a weak monster was a major miss, but Shera's skills were still fundamentally quite high. Twisting her body as she fell, she landed successfully on her feet.

There was nothing more to worry about, it seemed, so Diablo continued blasting the monster with magic.

"How about you have a taste of your own medicine—《Demon Squeeze》!"

Black ivy vines wrapped around the Herbductor's circular body. It was a level 120 darkness element spell, the improved version of 《Dark Press》. Black ivy vines would wrap up the target, strangling and crushing it. The target would also be inflicted with the 《Bind》 status ailment which used pressure to inflict damage.

But this spell was excessively strong for an already damaged level 50 monster. As soon as the spell began to squeeze it, the Herbductor exploded with a loud popping sound. If he was still in the game, this would be where victory fanfare began playing, but its perhaps unworthy replacement was Shera's wail as she ran toward him.

"Whooooooooooa, Diablooo!"

"You let down your guard, you bloody fool... Sylvie even told us to watch ourselves!"

"I'm sorryyyyyyy!"

"Well... Wait, Shera, don't!"

She latched onto him with her chest still exposed, making Diablo stiffen in another variation of the Bind status.

"Aaah... Err..."

"Whoooa, Diablooo... I was scaaared..."

"Yeah, err... Are you unharmed?"

"I'm OK... But I was so surprised! I thought I was going to become that monster's wife!"

"This is no time for jests."

"Hehe... Thank you for always saving me." She hugged him tightly.

Would it be appropriate to hug her back now? But she was essentially naked...which made Diablo settle with placing his hand on Shera's shoulder.

†

"Ah, I see it! That's the Kingdom of Greenwood!" Shera called out in elation.

Greenwood's national flag was tied to a tree, and despite there being no buildings in sight, it seemed they had indeed made it.

Two hours had passed since the battle, with Shera having obviously fixed her disheveled clothes since. Adventurers were the sort to carry sewing tools with them, in case something were to happen.

“I can’t believe you would get lost in your own forest...”

“It’s not my fault... I know the forest around here pretty well, but you went and messed the whole place up...”

After chasing the Herbductor, Diablo had cast the Heaven’s Fall spell that pulverized the trees it used to move around. But that resulted in them losing any perception of where they were. Regrouping with Rem became difficult too, so Diablo and Shera made their way to the Kingdom of Greenwood on their own.

“Do you think Rem and the others will be OK?”

“They should be fine. Rafflesia said she knew the way, so they may have even reached the place before we did.”

“That’s true...” Shera suddenly moved her gaze up. “Ah... Someone’s coming.”

“Mmm?”

Diablo braced himself in case it was another enemy, and, before long, several figures jumped down from the tree branches. It was a group of six Elves; namely, it was a group of elite soldiers Diablo had encountered once before. They all carried bows on their backs and wore tight green clothes, and their facial features were so fair one could easily confuse them for women, despite them all being men.

“Huh...? Could it be you, Princess Shera!?” The young man standing at the front of the group raised his voice in surprise.

“Whoa, it’s you guys! It’s been so long!” Shera waved both hands enthusiastically. It was likely the most easygoing homecoming of a royal heir the world had ever known.

“Princess Shera!” The Elven youth fell to his knees. “You’ve done well to return to us!”

“Yeah, things have gotten really bad, haven’t they... I’m sorry for taking so long.”

“Don’t be absurd, m’lady!”

“Oh, and this here’s Diablo.”

“I am already acquainted with him... We crossed paths once at Faltra’s Eastern Lakefront.”

“Oh, right...”

Prince Keera had tried to abduct Shera once before, and these Elves served as his bodyguards at the time. Shera was in captivity back then, so she wasn’t there to see the battle that ensued. That said, having these Elves know Diablo’s power and position saved him some trouble.

“I thank you for defending our princess back then,” the young man said.

“Are you sure you should be thanking me? Wouldn’t you think I stole Shera away from Prince Keera?”

“We are in no position to criticize the prince’s actions. However, you fought to protect us from the governor of Faltra. No words of gratitude would suffice to express how grateful we are to you.”

“Hmph... Galford merely challenged me, so I pushed him back. I will not spare mercy on any who dare oppose me.”

Shera chimed in from the side, mouthing an unneeded, “He’s just shy!”

One hour later—

Led by the elites, Diablo and Shera entered the Kingdom of Greenwood.

“Ohhh...”

Diablo couldn’t hold back a breath of amazement. The place was simply that impressive. *Cross Reverie*’s graphics were gorgeous, but seeing the place with his own eyes made it all the more stunning.

Several trees, much larger than the other ones in the forest, stood there, with scaffolding set up between them. The Elves used thick branches as rooms and leaves as their carpets. Some were playing musical instruments, some reading books, others simply chatting...

Whenever they became hungry, they would extend their hands and fruits would grow out of the trees. The Elves subsisted mostly on fruit, and while some did hunt for sport and eat meat on occasion, they mostly seemed to prize the bones, as they could be used for art.

It was a perfect paradise.

“Everyone looks depressed,” Shera whispered, eyeing the Elven Kingdom.

—What? This is them being depressed?

Diablo couldn’t see this as anything but a convenient shut-in’s life.

The Elf elites nodded. “Yes... Since His Majesty’s passing, the flowers’ colors have waned, the instruments’ music has grown hollow, and the butterflies flap their wings without vigor. But your return will surely restore everyone’s spirits, Princess Shera.”

“I hope so.”

“Will you be going on yet another adventure?”

“Yep!” Shera broke the hard news to them as if it were nothing.

“We can discuss this later on...” the elites said with nervous voices. “For the time being, let us head to Her Majesty’s side.”

“Is Mother OK?”

“Her Majesty was the most stricken by His Majesty’s passing, I’m afraid. Please, do try to comfort her.”

“I see...”

She then asked the Elven scouts about Rem and the others. The scouts had detected them, but it’d still take some time for them to arrive. Shera asked the elites to aid them, as they may have gotten lost in the forest. Rafflesia said she could guide them there, but if they ran into trouble...? Diablo was concerned, but...he simply decided to leave the search to the Elves, who were more familiar with this forest, and meet the queen first.

Shera headed to a particularly tall tree and Diablo followed in her tracks. But the soldiers guarding the king’s chambers stood in their way.

“Hold. Only Elves are allowed to enter beyond here—so has been decided by God in the age of myth.”

“Oh, right, there was a story like that, wasn’t there... Isn’t there some trial? To prove who this land’s greatest archer is.”

It was part of *Cross Reverie*'s main story. After beating the trial, you would receive the quest to save the kidnapped queen from the Fallen, though the Fallen was pretty weak.

The Elven guards flinched, as they, too, apparently knew of Diablo's power.

"N-No, there is no trial..."

"Then do not get in my way, you mere attendants. Do so, and I will reduce your country to nothing but scorched earth!"

"Uuu..." Horror overtook their expressions.

—There, there it is! That's how people should react to Demon Lord role play!

Rem and Shera had gotten too used to him lately, and would maintain their cool even if he tried to speak menacingly. Not that he wanted to threaten them in particular, but still...if he was acting as a "menacing Demon Lord," having some "terrified people" on board would be nice from time to time. It wasn't really role play unless you got the proper reaction after all.

"Heheheh..."

Shera rushed on ahead and waved her hands in his direction. "Over here, Diablo, hurry! Come on, come on!"

"H-Hey... Don't just ruin the atmosphere like that..." Diablo mumbled in complaint as he took off after her.

†

There were footholds built around the large tree, with a width of a mere thirty centimeters. In the game, they were wider, so you wouldn't fall even if you had a misstep (people would fall often at first, so it was patched out during an update).

—If I fall off the foothold, my Demon Lord dignity would plummet too...

Diablo silently poured some magical energy into his boots, the《Empty Sky's Gambol》. His flight magic should help him in case he fell. A bit of MP was a small price to pay for maintaining his dignity.

They scaled up the tree, reaching its zenith where the royal living quarters

were. The queen was the only one there now, and with the top of the tree being flat, there was room for several people to sit. Branches twisted into the shape of a crown surrounded the place, and the queen sat on a carpet of leaves, doing nothing. She wore a green dress, and while her attire was different, her face was very similar to Shera's. It was as if Shera had blossomed from a lovely girl to a beautiful woman...

Except the size of their breasts was different. The queen was flat, as Elves usually are.

"Mother!" Shera called out.

"Hm? Shera...? Oh, it is you, Shera!"

"Whoooa, Motherrr!"

"Oh you, if you were coming home, you should have at least sent me a letter. I haven't prepared anything at all."

"Aaah, sorry. There was some trouble on the way... The Church went all 'boom, bang'! And then I snoozed for a long time!"

"Really? That sounds awful... Things were quite bad for me too... Oh, yes, how could I forget to mention: Your father died. I was so shocked..."

"Yeah, I was surprised too... But are you all right, Mother?"

"I can't say that I am, but I should get used to it after a decade or so. I spent a century with him after all."

"Yeah, you'll get used to it in no time."

"Ah, I have some fruit. Are you hungry?" There were apples and grapes lined up on a wooden plate. "Oh, and I knitted some clothes for you."

"Sure, I'm starved. And you knitted me clothes, huh..."

"What, don't you like them?"

"They're always so tight around my chest..."

"That's because you're an exception, they shouldn't have puffed up like that. I wonder who you got that from..."

"Well, I mean, yeah, buuut..."

Suddenly, the queen's gaze fell on Diablo. "My, and who might you be?"

"Now you notice me!?"

He was feeling terribly awkward for walking into someone else's home. Honestly speaking, he wanted to go back to his "home" as soon as possible. But after the matter with Prince Keera, Diablo didn't feel comfortable leaving Shera alone here.

"I am Diablo! A Demon Lord from another world!" he introduced himself once more.

"My! So you're Diablo! Thank you so much for all the help you've given Shera!"

"No, uhh..."

"But my, you're every bit as terrifying as Celsior said you were... Oh, please, help yourself to some fruit."

This weird, yet familiar, feeling of airheaded detachment...

—That's definitely Shera's mom.

Diablo felt oddly convinced.

"Omnom..." Shera sat down on the leaves and picked some grapes off the plate. "Diablo may be scary, but he's really nice! He's always saving me."

"Really? How lovely... But I heard he injured poor Celsior and his troops."

"That's because Brother was..."

"Aaah..." The queen sighed. "Keera too. Why did that silly boy try to start a war with the Humans?"

She may carry herself cheerfully, but she had lost both her sons and her husband. It was only natural she'd be depressed over the fact. Not to mention that the Elves live much longer than most races, so both birth and death were rare for them.

"But it's a good thing you're here!" The queen cheered up, smiling again. "You coming back is wonderful news. Whoever you marry will be the new Elf king after all. You do remember that, yes?"

“I totally forgot, but I remembered it the other day! Greenwood will be in big trouble if there isn’t a king, right?”

“Correct. So long as we have a king, the forest’s blessings remain unwithered and the sacred treasure God entrusted with us remains protected.”

“So if I marry, I also become the queen, right?”

“Just like me. Which would make me the queen mother... My oh my, that will take some getting used to.”

“But...I still want to go out on adventures...” Shera sighed. “There are still things I have to do. But...we do need a king...”

“Adventures, you say? Well, that shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Huuuh?”

“You’re still young, darling, so go out on all the adventures you want,” the queen said, to Diablo and Shera’s surprise.

“Yay!!! Thanks, Mother!”

Diablo, on the other hand, found it anticlimactic. He figured it would be strictly forbidden and Shera would be forced to marry, so having it be so casually allowed made him both relieved and oddly exhausted.

“You can still go out on your little adventures,” the queen said with a smile. “But you still need to get married, all right? I’ve already picked a groom for you.”

“Huh!?”

“His pedigree and personality are both very respectable. I’m sure you’ll hit things off right away. You even used to play with him when you were little.”

“Wh-Who do you mean...? Actually, I wanted to marry...”

“Oh? You already have someone in mind?”

Shera reached out her hand, grabbing the hem of Diablo’s cloak. Realizing what Shera meant, the queen spoke softly.

“Greenwood is an Elven kingdom, darling. We need a king everyone would be satisfied with.”

“But...”

“We’ve been entrusted with guarding something very important ever since the time of myth. In exchange, we’ve been given the blessings of the forest. I’m sure I’ve told you many times what God told the Elves back then. But you always were a forgetful little thing, though I’m not sure who you take after in that regard... No matter what, the royal bloodline must never be allowed to die out. The husbands of those of royal blood become the new king. The king prays to God, then... Well, there are some other details, but that’s the most important part.”

It was pretty obvious who Shera had gotten her forgetfulness from...

Why did God ever entrust something “very important” to this family? It felt like a rather critical error in judgment.

“I *did* remember that, but the rule doesn’t say anything about the king having to be an Elf!”

“Why, the Elven king *must* be an Elf. It wouldn’t be an Elven kingdom otherwise, now would it?”

The queen spoke so matter-of-factly, as if there was nothing to doubt, but there truly was nothing wrong about what she said. As sad as it was to admit, Shera was the one being high-handed here.

“But, I...”

Her voice was getting smaller by the moment. Stuck between reason and emotion, Diablo’s feeling were just as mixed on the matter.

—This is getting complicated... There are too many things in this world even great magic can’t solve.

Diablo sighed softly.

†

Just as the sky began turning orange—

Diablo and Shera were sitting on a tree root.

“Aaaaaaw, what should I do...” Shera looked to be at her wit’s end. “I can’t

believe it has to be an Elf...”

“Just what was this ‘perfect’ plan you ‘thought through’ when you made the promise to the Dark Elves?”

“Well...” Shera’s shoulders dropped and her long ears sagged lower than usual. “The Kingdom of Greenwood definitely needs a new king, and that would be whomever I marry, right?”

“Correct.”

“So I figured...I’d pick you.”

There were too many holes to point out in that idea!

“No one would agree with a Demon being a king of the Elves. Even the queen was against it, wasn’t she?”

“Uuu...”

“To begin with, Demons are the most loathed of the races.”

It was just something in the game’s setting, but, in this other world, Diablo could feel real, clear-cut discrimination.

“Right...”

“If you picked a Human, it may have been different.”

“No, that’d be even worse... Humans are a majority, but they rule over the races and aren’t satisfied with just their own country. They want the other races’ territories too. Everyone hates them because they’re so greedy.”

“What about the other races? What image do the Elves have of them?”

“Hmm... I have lots of friends from other races so I don’t personally think this way, but it’s said Demons are too hateful, Humans are greedy, Dwarves are drunk gluttons, and Grasswalkers are lazy bums.”

“And the Pantherians?”

“Err...”

Shera looked left and right, as if to confirm no one was listening in on them, and brought her lips to Diablo’s ear, whispering with her face flushed red.

“...They say they’re pervs.”

“O-Oh...”

Other races probably thought Elves were arrogant. Diablo specifically thought back to Prince Keera. The Elves were said to be the closest race to the gods, and were given a special treasure to defend along with the blessed forest. While that may have been a fact, being too prideful could attract spite.

Diablo shrugged. “If you know this much, why did you assume the Elves would accept someone from another race as a king?”

“Uuu... I thought this was a good idea...”

“A-Also, you could have at least consulted me first...”

“But I always want to be with you!”

“Huh...”

Being told this directly left Diablo surprised. He could tell she depended on him as a companion, but he didn’t think she looked at him as someone of the opposite gender...much less considering him as someone worth marrying.

Shera looked at him with such an earnest gaze that Diablo was impressed she could make such a face, and at the same time felt a blush creep over his cheeks.

“You don’t want to be with me, Diablo?”

“...I...”

Of course he wanted to be with her, but he couldn’t wholeheartedly choose her as his one and only spouse. The things he understood the least were his own emotions, and he never had the leisure to focus on them. The real him was incapable of even holding a conversation with someone else, so romantic feelings, which involved exposing that aspect of himself, were simply too...

“Hey, you!”

The two heard a man shout, as well as the distinct clambering sound of metallic armor. Diablo’s awareness surfaced from the depths of contemplation

as he realized Elves didn't wear metal armor; even the Dark Elf warriors wore leather armor. This meant there was someone who wasn't an Elf here...

The armored warrior ran in their direction, issuing banging sounds with every step he made. Diablo stood up from the tree root, brandishing his dagger, 《Garuda Edge》.

"Stop right there! State your name!"

"Oh! It truly is you, my bosom friend!"

"...Bosom friend?"

The man raised a hand in a friendly fashion. "Indeed! And hello to you too, Shera! I'm sure not seeing me for so long has left you lonely and heartbroken!"

"Err..." Shera tilted her head. "Do I know you?"

"Ahahahaha!" the armored man laughed merrily. "I see you two cannot recognize me because of my exceedingly glamorous new armor!"

He then removed the helmet with a 'Well then!' revealing a young man with willful, bushy eyebrows and bright orange hair giving them a shining, toothy grin.

"I am Emile Bichelberger!" he exclaimed, striking a ridiculous pose. "Ally to all women! And an ally to all allies of women!"

"Ah... Yes, give me a moment..." Diablo pressed a finger to his forehead, visibly pensive. "Come to think of it...wasn't there someone like you in Faltra...?"

Shera averted her gaze. "And just when I managed to forget about him too..."

"Hahah, you must have gone through such eventful times to have forgotten about someone like me!" Emile was, despite the rather terrible reception he'd gotten, endlessly optimistic. "Enough to make days feel like months, I'd bet! As I'd expect of my sworn friend!"

"You haven't changed at all."

Emile had a mentality of steel: unbending, unbreaking, and unyielding. But even a man such as he heaved a despondent sigh.

“Haven’t changed, have I... That is certainly not the case! I’ll have you know, I’ve come face to face with my own limitations. When I was beaten down by the Fallen, Gregore, and beheld your great magic, I realized I couldn’t let things stay that way.”

“And that’s what brought you to Greenwood?”

“My master told me, ‘Go forth and broaden your horizons’! I’ve become apprentice to the Swordmaster Graham, who lives up in the northern mountains, you see.”

“What!?” Diablo exclaimed. “Graham exists in this world!?”

“Hmm? What do you mean...by that?”

“Ahh, never mind...”

Cross Reverie had level limits, and players had to clear a certain event to level up beyond them. Among these, the hardest quest to complete was the one for going beyond level 99, which was considered the limit of the races. Each player would meet a teacher representative of their class, travel through the different nations for each race, and complete a particular quest that would unlock leveling up beyond the level limit. Once you passed level 99 it was an entirely different world.

Graham, the Swordmaster, was the Warrior class’s teacher.

“But I thought you had to be level 80 or above to even meet them?”

“Really? Then I suppose that means I’m level 80 right now!”

“That’s a pretty vague assessment...”

“It’s completely fine! I’m the one who discerns the levels of Warrior-type Adventurers after all. If I say I’m level 80, then that means I’m definitely level 80!”

In this world, levels were a criterion for what quests one could accept, and were generally decided by those of higher ranking. Emile’s way of talking may have drawn him up as a bumbling idiot, but he was, as a matter of fact, the strongest Warrior-type Adventurer in Faltra.

Even still, a low-ranking Fallen had made short work of him. Faltra’s

Adventurers were so low level it left Diablo honestly shocked. But maybe that had changed now?

“Heheheh... Let us test you then.”

“Huh?”

Diablo brandished his dagger toward Emile’s chest, the center of Emile’s armor. However, he felt as if an invisible wall blocked his way, deflecting the dagger to the side. Just as the tip of the blade was about to touch Emile, it was pushed back as if it had struck against solid rock.

“Ah! That’s the Martial Art《Rampart》!”

“Hmph... I won’t lose as easily as last time!”

The first time they met, Emile’s fighting style was full of openings, and Diablo had beaten him down with nothing but his staff. But now, normal attacks wouldn’t be able to phase him anymore. He truly had grown.

“Impressive, given how short a time it’s been.”

“It wasn’t for lack of trouble. At first, I challenged Lord Galford, Faltra’s governor, to battle!”

“You did *what*!?”

Galford was a hero of the old war, and strong enough to fight Diablo to a stalemate. Was he perhaps the strongest Warrior-type fighter among the races...? No, Alan of the《Order of Palace Knights》and the order’s captain may cast that into doubt... But either way, it didn’t make much of a difference now.

Galford was that much of a daunting opponent. He could kill Gregore in a flash, and his nature was of a cold, calculated warrior. Diablo couldn’t imagine Emile walking away from a battle with him with Emile’s head still intact.

“I can’t say your lies impress me.”

“Trust in me, my bosom friend! I realize how vast his strength is. But even when he knocked me down, my comrades would heal me, and after many challenges I realized the trick to it all!”

“Oh...”

“Some among my friends pleaded with me to cease such a dangerous pursuit, but once I began challenging him on a daily basis, some even joined me for practice... Ah, camaraderie is truly the best!”

Dumb as he may seem, Emile was quite popular.

“And that’s how I matured!” Emile concluded, holding a finger upright.

Shera was surprised. “That’s amazing! Did you beat him at all!?”

“I did no such thing! The only one to match Lord Galford is none other than my bosom friend!”

“Oh, then, did you at least land an attack on him once?”

“Close! I managed to block a single one of his attacks!”

“Wow.”

“No, no, no, that’s plenty impressive, my fair Shera! Lord Galford’s swipes are so fast I couldn’t even see them at first!”

Diablo considered his words.

—Galford is prejudiced against Adventurers, so he must have accepted Emile’s challenges because the Demon Lord’s army is on the move.

It stood as evidence to how anxious Galford probably was in his desire to increase the races’ strength.

Emile smirked. “Once he saw how much I matured, Lord Galford introduced me to Swordmaster Graham and sent me to train with them... And now I’ve gone out on a journey to hone my skills!”

“Are you sure he didn’t just pawn you off so you’d bother someone else?”

“Ahahaha! That’s highly unlikely! Everyone is expecting great things out of me!”

His mental fortitude was as indomitable as ever. Diablo wished Emile could share some of that baseless confidence.

As they were talking, several Elven boys, holding small bows, ran up to them.

“Emile, we’re ready... Ah, Princess Shera!”

Having noticed her, the boys bowed in a hurry, though their expressions became frightened when they looked at Diablo.

Shera raised a hand amicably. “Hello there, it’s been a while! Are you going somewhere with Emile?”

“Yes! We’re off to show him the way as he hunts magical beasts!”

“Magical beasts!? This late at night!?”

“They don’t come out of their nests unless it’s nighttime,” one of the boys explained.

“I see... Be sure to watch yourselves, OK?”

“Thank you very much! And, uhm...welcome back, Princess Shera!”

“Thanks!”

Diablo could tell how much they adored Shera.

“Well then!” Emile put his helmet back on. “We’re off for a spot of hunting! Fare thee well, Shera and my sworn friend!”

“Good luck out there~” Shera saw them off with a wave of the hand.

They could hear the boys saying, “Wow, Emile, you’re friends with the princess!”

Hunting for magical beasts was part of the level limit quest, and they were small magical beasts too, so with his current skills, Emile should have no problems beating them.

“...He may become a reliable vanguard one day.” Diablo gave a thin smile.

†

The moon floated up in the sky. Night had fallen, and Rem’s group was finally brought into the village. Rem walked with her shoulders dropped, visibly exhausted. Rose was as expressionless as ever, but her maid outfit was even more torn than earlier. Rafflesia stood composed as the Elves surrounded her, their bows drawn. Shera ran between them in a flustered manner, throwing her hands in front of Rafflesia, as if to protect her from the Elves.

“What are you doing!?”

“Sh-She’s dangerous, Princess Shera! She’s a Dark Elf!”

“She’s an Elf, just like us! She’s a friend!”

“A friend!?” The soldiers began muttering in confusion.

“What’s this about one of Shera’s companions being a Dark Elf?” Having heard the commotion, the queen herself came out.

“A good day to you.” Rafflesia bowed politely. “It has been long since we’ve last met.”

“Y-You...!? You’re Rafflesia S. Orangewood... Why are you here!?”

There was a shiver in the queen’s voice. Diablo assumed as much, but it still wasn’t a very positive reaction. Rafflesia also seemed prepared for this, and wasn’t phased in the slightest.

“Haha... Haven’t you heard? Your daughter made an oath on her life—and I’ve come to see it delivered.”

Of course she would be this composed; she had an ace up her sleeve she could brandish at any moment.

“Shera, we must speak.” The queen’s expression clouded over.

“Y-Yeah...”

The queen then ordered the soldiers, “Lady Rafflesia is our guest. Treat her with due respect. Reckless behavior will not be forgiven.”

True to her long-running status as queen, her words carried a menacing weight to them. The soldiers stood upright as the queen left with Shera.

Diablo wanted to accompany them, but her attitude afforded him no opportunity to even say anything. He was concerned, but he had no intention of making a ruckus of things, so he restrained himself.

The Elves also realized Diablo’s strength, and wouldn’t do anything to force Shera to obey them.

Shortly after—

Diablo and his group were lent a building to lodge in. It wasn’t on a tree, but

an estate made out of normal bricks on the ground. It was apparently a guest house made for when non-Elf races came to visit, and was built in the style of the homes of the Kingdom of Lyferia. Since it was built in the forest though, it didn't have any candlesticks that would be lit with fire. In their place, a chandelier made of shining gemstones dangled from the ceiling.

The room was roughly the size of the common inn, and there were two bedrooms, one probably for a master and the other for their valet.

Diablo was seated on the common room's sofa.

"Hmph... It's smaller than I would expect of a country's diplomatic guest house."

Though it was much larger than his room in his world.

"...Guests must be a fairly rare occurrence in this country," Rem said, having sat down on the sofa opposite of him and fallen to the side, lying on it horizontally. She sighed heavily.

She was an experienced Adventurer, and a Pantherian at that, so she had much more stamina compared to the common person. It was rare seeing her this worn out.

"You got really lost in that forest, didn't you?"

"Forgive Rose, Master." Rose bowed her head deeply at Diablo's remark. "Rose was not there to aid Master when Master needed Rose most... Rose is a pile of mechanical waste. Dispose of Rose however Master sees fit."

"I wasn't voicing my displeasure, maid. I was merely asking what happened."

With Rem looking about ready to fall asleep on the sofa at any moment, and Rose apologizing earnestly, Rafflesia spoke up.

"We intended to go after you, Sir Diablo, when giant rocks rained down from the sky."

"That was the work of my magic."

They probably meant the Heaven's Fall spell he'd used to get rid of the Herbductor.

“...So we hurried there, thinking that’s where you were bound to be,” Rem grumbled from the sofa, still lying down. “But then we found the forest was completely wrecked.”

“Hmm.”

Diablo replied with the composed tone of a Demon Lord receiving a report from his underlings...but inwardly, he realized and was tormented by how much he screwed up. After he saved Shera, he immediately moved from his spot to make sense of where he was and find Rem and the others. But if he thought it out more carefully, he’d have realized casting such a large spell would lead Rem to him if he just waited long enough!

Diablo had played as a solo player for so long he couldn’t get used to acting in a group. He was, honestly speaking, terrible at being a part of one. But still, he had his dignity as a Demon Lord to maintain.

“Ah...that... Rafflesia said she knew the way to Greenwood. I thought you would find your way on your own even if I left you.”

“I do know, but the forest was so terribly disturbed. All the marks were gone.”

“Marks?”

“There are marks all over the trees, the type only Elves can see.”

Even if you knew where to go, you would get lost if the road itself was blown away.

“...While we were wandering through the forest, the Elves showed up,” Rem added. “We were going to ask them to lead us to the kingdom, but they attacked as soon as they saw a Dark Elf. It took some time to convince them.”

“Since you forbade Rose from killing them, Master.”

That was probably what had exhausted Rem and damaged Rose’s clothing.

Diablo nodded. “Your judgment was fine. This is Shera’s homeland, and they’re in a very delicate state of mind. Putting your strength on display is fine, but killing anyone would only complicate things.”

“Rose has a proposal, Master... If Master were to display Master’s power, Master would be able to wangle the Elves’ allegiance and resolve this situation

early on. If Master only bestows the order upon Rose, Rose can easily make short work of a force of this size...”

—For heaven’s sake, don’t!

“Hmph... Cease your foolishness. What amusement would I gain from threatening such a backwater country? Are you trying to order me into doing such menial chores?”

“Pardon Rose for Rose’s lack of prudence.” Rose bowed her head again, and retreated back to the wall.

“Hohoho... Quite right.” Rafflesia smiled bitterly. “Being in charge of people can truly be a chore.”

Diablo then asked a question that sprung up in his mind. It was something that wasn’t written in *Cross Reverie*’s lore books.

“Is the Dark Elves’ rule also hereditary?”

“It is, at least fundamentally. But I... I was to wed the Dark Elven patriarch’s son, but I came from an unremarkable bloodline.”

“You *were* to wed him?”

“‘Tis a story that dates back to my childhood, but he was my fiancé, yes.”

“Hmph. And what happened to him?”

“Wha...!?”

Diablo failed to notice just how fake Rafflesia’s smile was, but Rem sat up in surprise.

“Ohoho... My fiancé was killed, by the Crusade. Even though he was but a child then.”

Even Diablo was rendered speechless.

“...Are you plotting revenge against the Elves?” Rem’s expression turned sharp.

“Perish the thought! I would never think to do something so terrible.”

“...That’s good then... The Crusade was sent by the Kingdom of Lyferia. I don’t

know what happened back then, but wouldn't blaming the Elves be misguided?"

"Misguided?"

"...I doubt the Elves could stand up to Lyferia's elite soldiers. I believe they didn't willingly abandon the Dark Elves, they simply lacked the means to resist."

Rafflesia fell silent, only to sigh the next moment.

"I understand. I would be lying if I said I have no ill feelings in regard to this, but I carry the weight of many lives. I cannot throw away this opportunity for coexistence over a personal grudge."

"Is that right?"

"Coming to this forest after so long has dug up old memories... More memories than I am willing to share. I've said some shameful things, so please, forget what I've spoken."

Rafflesia smiled with her usual, serene expression. Things seem to have calmed down for now.

Just as Diablo thought it was about time for dinner, a bell rang from the door.

"...This is an Elven country, so I'm not getting my hopes up." Rem combed up her hair. "I'd prefer meat to fruit right now, to be honest."

The chance of weapons being aimed their way was a possible one, but it wasn't the Demon Lord way to be vigilant to the point of nervousness. Diablo sat down imposingly as Rose opened the door.

An Elf in butler's garb lowered his head respectfully.

"I beg your pardon. Her Majesty has asked to convey that you are all invited to a dinner party this evening."

"...A banquet to hold negotiations, I suppose." Rem shrugged.

"My oh my. An invitation to a dinner party by the Elven queen herself. How nerve-racking." Though Rafflesia's composed attitude remained unshaken.

"Heheheh..." Diablo rose from the sofa, flapping his cloak as he did. "Very well, we shall oblige to her invitation. Consider it an honor!"

†

The treetop dining hall was significantly different from what Diablo expected out of a royal dinner party. The large tree summit was flat, like the queen's room, with large leaves spread over the floor. Fruits in an assortment of colors were placed on these leaves, and with no table or chairs, it was like a picnic.

The queen and Shera were already sitting, waiting for them. There were no guards in sight, but some were likely hiding in the nearby foliage. Should they do anything suspicious, the guards would probably shoot them down with arrows.

"Welcome, please feel free to sit wherever you find comfortable." The queen gestured with a hand in the direction of the food. "You may not be used to Elven etiquette, but there's no need to be worried about the little things."

When they first met, the queen felt more like a friend's mother, but right now she had the face of a country's representative. And people who carried this much responsibility could be a pain to deal with.

"...We thank you for your warm hospitality despite our sudden arrival, and for inviting us to this feast." Rem bowed politely.

Rafflesia sat opposite the queen. "Being surrounded by green leaves truly is nostalgic."

Diablo sat without a word. His Demon Lord role play probably demanded he say something haughty, but he realized doing so would be the equivalent of blowing the conversation up with an explosive spell.

Even Shera was uncharacteristically quiet. Diablo fixed his gaze on hers, but was only met with silence. It looked like she had much to say, but couldn't find the words; as if she were so deeply troubled she couldn't even ask for help.

Diablo sighed. Things were probably all decided already, and not in a way Shera was pleased with.

The queen lifted a wooden goblet filled with fruit wine. "To God's blessings, and our meeting here tonight. We cannot make a toast in this time of mourning, but do feel free to converse pleasantly."

She then brought the goblet to her lips. Diablo and the others did the same.

“...Allow me to properly introduce myself. I am Rem Galleu, an Adventurer from Faltra,” Rem said. “I often work alongside Princess Shera.”

“Yes, I’ve heard of you. You’ve saved my daughter on more than one occasion, I understand.”

“...We are comrades. Helping one another is a given.”

The queen’s brow furrowed at the sound of the word ‘comrades,’ but she didn’t inquire any further.

She then directed her gaze at Rose, who stood away from the rest of the group, but it seemed she didn’t count an attendant as one of their rank.

“The fruit would surely go bitter if we keep probing each other’s motives like this, so allow me to put aside all the unimportant details and ask,” Rafflesia opened the debate, then went straight to the point. “Do you intend to honor Princess Shera’s promise?”

“Yes, of course!” The queen surprisingly smiled.

“My oh my... What very pleasing news!”

“I have put much thought into it as well. The Elves and Dark Elves are related races, and despite what happened in the past we should still strive to coexist.”

“Quite true, what has happened, happened, and we now live in the present.”

“Very much so.”

“So, what part of the forest will you give us? And when will it happen?”

Rafflesia was forcefully pressing the queen, whose expression turned pensive.

“Mmm. Regarding that matter, I believe we should each dispatch a representative and begin negotiations. As for when, what say you we do it after our new king is appointed? That way we should have everything decided before next winter. After that, I think we should hold a festival to celebrate the reconciliation of the Elves and Dark Elves.”

Shera seemed to be in favor of this suggestion, as her stiff expression softened. Rafflesia’s temples, on the other hand, shivered with emotion,

despite the smile plastered on her face.

“...Are you quite serious?”

“Certainly.”

“You truly intended to... honor Princess Shera’s promise, Your Majesty? I believe the Elves...loathe us Dark Elves.”

“The majority of the Elves wish to reconcile with you. But many still fear you. I myself truly wish to put this grudge behind us. We once lived side by side after all.”

“Then, why didn’t you...!?” Rafflesia clenched her fists.

“Calm yourself.”

“Why did the Elves abandon us back then!?”

The queen took a deep breath. “It was during the Crusade. He... King Greenwood tried to oppose the Humans. But he couldn’t win.”

“Wha...!?”

“With the king taken hostage, we, the Elves, had no choice but to obey the Crusade, even though we knew what a terrible fate it would bring upon the Dark Elves. I’m so very, truly sorry.”

“Wh-Why... You’re telling me...after all this time... Do you honestly expect us to believe that!?”

“I can offer no evidence. That’s why you didn’t believe us at the time. Is this the first you’re hearing of this, Miss Rafflesia? We’ve tried reaching out and explaining to the Dark Elves many times. But that wouldn’t bring back all those lost lives, or your forest.”

“Exactly so... Even now...I find it all hard to believe.”

“But if it’s possible for us to reconcile, I believe that would be wonderful.”

“I do not believe you!” Rafflesia glared the queen down.

Shera and Rem listened to the argument impatiently, but kept out of it.

The silence lingered. Diablo hated this sort of atmosphere, and parted his lips

to speak with annoyance.

“Calm yourself, Rafflesia. I didn’t think you to be so emotional. It seems you’re incapable of looking at the other person properly. All you can do is reflect upon, and see your own reflection in the process. Just as your heart is so full of hatred, you assume the other side must surely hate you as well.”

“So you are saying we are merely assuming things?”

“You carried a grudge for a thousand years, and never stopped to consider the Elves may not have had any ill will toward you. That alone speaks of how lacking in rationality you are. That said, the queen has no proof to back her words. You are free to believe or doubt her story of the Elven king’s defeat. Do as you will.”

This was a promise only the Dark Elves could resolve. How they accepted this and acted was entirely up to them. The words of Diablo, an outsider, couldn’t solve this problem. He was well aware he lacked the charisma and speechcraft for that.

Rafflesia rose to her feet, laughing dryly. “Aha, ahaha... We’ve been robbed of so much we lost sight of what was around us... Is that what you are saying? That we are only stubbornly wallowing in our grudges?”

“I didn’t think your grudge ran that deep. Please, forgive us. But do know, I truly have been waiting for a chance to reconcile. And I was sure things had changed.”

“Changed?”

“I was truly surprised when I heard Shera had visited your village. If it were the past, you would have surely shot her down without question.”

“...That is true.”

“So I thought that enough time had passed for that not to have happened.”

“It’s all too pitiful. It was all our misunderstanding in the end.”

“We truly did abandon the Dark Elves. That much is fact. It is only natural you resent us for it.”

“But King Greenwood...”

He did earnestly fight for the Dark Elves.

Rafflesia closed her eyes, and fell into a brief silence. She may have been mouthing a silent prayer.

“...The air here truly makes me nostalgic. I believe I’ve said all I had to say, so I will take my leave first. Princess Shera seems displeased with the man she is to marry, but...if I were to say anything on the matter, it would surely harm future relations between our races.”

She noticed Shera’s anxiety, it seemed. In that regard, she truly exemplified a leader of the races.

“I’m glad we’ve spoken, Miss Rafflesia.” The queen bowed forward.

“I will...believe your words. I *wish* to believe in them.”

“Thank you. We will hold Shera’s wedding in a few days. Will you stay and celebrate with us?”

“Why of course.”

Rafflesia turned on her heels and walked away. Rem sighed seeing her do so.

“...With the Demon Lord awakened, we would need all the races to cooperate and unite to defeat him. I hope this is a step in that direction.”

“Yes, I hope things are now settled with this.”

If anything, now was when the real challenge began...

†

Every race has its own standards of individual beauty and ugliness, and the Elves were no exception, it seemed.

“I thank you for graciously inviting me to this dinner party.”

The man who appeared had a slimy, viscous voice and looked less like an Elf and more like an Orc. Or, put more simply, he looked like a pig, and—not considering everything else—was incredibly fat.

Diablo wondered who he was as the queen beckoned him closer.

“Come, sit.”

“Duhuhu... Thank you, Your Majesty. Excuse me.”

He had a very distinct, somewhat greasy tone of voice. The Elves typically looked to be young and handsome, but he looked like some middle-aged man.

Wiping the sweat off his skin with a handkerchief, the man sat near the queen.



“...Um... Who is this...person...?” Rem inquired with a peculiar expression on her face.

“This gentleman is Drango,” the queen said with a smile. “I’ve chosen him to be Shera’s groom. He’s to be Greenwood’s next king!”

“Huuuuuuh!?” Rem’s eyes widened like saucers.

Shera was pale with shock.

“Drango is a very exceptional Elf,” the queen continued, unperturbed. “He is one of our finest archers, and he learned economics and proper governing skills outside the kingdom. And doesn’t he just seem so sturdy and dependable?”

“...So this is the Elven sense of aesthetics...”

“His facial features are a bit distinguished, I’ll admit.”

“...How do *you* feel about this, Shera?”

“Aaaaaah...” Shera shook her head desperately. For better or worse, her sense of taste certainly didn’t come from her mother.

“No, Shera.” The queen sighed. “If it were another Elf it would be one thing, but you tried to make a Demon our king. No one would agree to such a foolish idea.”

“...A demon... You mean...Diablo!? You were expecting to marry him, Shera!? Make *him* king of the Elves!?”

Rem’s tail stood on end. She wasn’t there to see Shera say it, Diablo came to realize.

Forgetting that she was in front of the queen, Rem bore her fangs. “Are you an idiot!? No, that’s not even a question, you *are* an idiot!”

“You’re so mean...”

Ignoring Shera’s meek whisper, Rem pointed at her face. “*This* was your ‘well-thought out, perfect plan’!? It’s definitely not thought out, and not even remotely perfect!”

“Uuu... But...”

“...Aaaaaargh...” Rem cradled her head in despair. “Your Majesty, what do you think? Maybe you should postpone her marriage? She’s young and still needs time for her...brain...to develop.”

“I agree she’s still young. My, she’s only sixteen years old. But Greenwood needs a king as soon as possible. We have a commitment to God to abide to, and if we’re to keep our promise to the Dark Elves, we need Shera to marry as soon as she can.”

“...You’re telling her to put up with it for the good of the kingdom!?”

“That should be a given. That’s what it means to be royalty. Shera has lived a life without hardship, received exceptional education when she was little, and even received special equipment that is part of our national treasury. She received such treatment simply because she’s a princess. She’s been treated as a unique individual since the day she was born, so she has no right to be selfish when the time comes to give back to the kingdom.”

“...But Shera never chose to...”

“And do people choose to be born into poor families? To be the children of knights? Did you choose to be born a Pantherian?”

“...N-No, but...”

“A princess is to live as a princess should. Now that she’s the last heir to the royal blood, Shera has to fulfill this duty.”

This world had Demi-Humans and magic, and its society was roughly equivalent to the Middle Ages. It was a feudal era, based on hereditary inheritance. Your birth decided the life you’d lead.

—But I guess even in modern society, your environment influenced the life you’d lead as well.

Recalling all manner of unpleasant memories, Diablo fell into social-withdrawal mode. He sunk into the bog of the events of his embarrassing past, and when he came to, he found the conversation was already proceeding again.

“Duhuhu... Personally, I don’t want to force this on her,” Drango changed the subject. “But the Kingdom of Greenwood urgently needs a king. I’m afraid

there’s no choice.”

The Elves depended on the blessings of the forest, and those were only granted to them by fulfilling their promise to God.

They needed a king.

“But the king doesn’t have to be an Elf...”

“How many times will I have to say no!?” the queen snapped at her. Shera’s shoulders drastically sagged.

“Incidentally, that collar is also an issue,” Drango changed the subject once more.

“Ah...” Shera placed her hand over her neck, blushing.

“I’ve heard about it from Celsior.” The queen sighed. “Apparently she had a《Slave Collar》placed on her.”

“No! This is an Enslavement Collar! When I summoned Diablo, his magic reflection went all ‘whoosh,’ then it was on my neck!”

“It’s all the same, really. But as you can see, she wasn’t given any strange orders and none of the sacred treasures are missing. You can rest easy, Drango.”

—The Elves’ sacred treasures...

He recalled Prince Keera mentioning the treasures. The Elves seemed to have some pretty powerful artifacts slumbering in their vaults.

“Used goods...” Drango whispered.

“Huh?”

“Ah, no, I don’t mind! But, err... Well, we can check and see if she was given any strange orders, but the collar would stick out during the wedding... Please, excuse me.”

He moved from where he was sitting, moving to Shera’s side, and reached for the collar. Shera tensed up and looked ready to flee, but, realizing it would be rude, she merely stiffened.

“Hmhm...” Drango touched the collar. “This is amazing! It would take more

than a day or two to remove it.”

“O-Obviously! Even Diablo couldn’t get it off.”

“But if you have it on during the ceremony, the citizens would surely be anxious. In that case, let’s do this... *Let light and wind cloak thee, and nothing be reflected upon you...*”

Drango recited an incantation, and snapped his fingers. Just like he’d performed some sort of magic trick, Shera’s Enslavement Collar disappeared.

—He dispelled it!?

“Impossible!?” Rem rose to her feet. She knew firsthand how difficult it was to remove the collar, so her reaction was only natural.

Diablo was also surprised, of course, but letting his surprise show on his face would ruin his Demon Lord role play.

“That’s an interesting trick you pulled there, Drango,” he said confidently.

“I thought this would be a good solution for Princess Shera. I cast a concealment spell on this powerful magical tool, but it may be unstable.”

“Hmph...” Diablo scoffed.

—Concealment magic, huh?

He hadn’t dispelled the collar, but rather rendered it invisible. Still, his skill with magic would have to be considerably high to do that. *Cross Reverie* didn’t have any spells to render equipment invisible though, so Diablo had no way of knowing how strong his magic was.

“...Unbelievable...” Rem’s eyes were wide with shock. “This is, without a doubt, high level magic...”

“Duhuhu... I don’t have much magical energy though. I shamefully admit I was born with a rather small capacity.”

“Isn’t he resourceful?” The queen beamed, apparently pleased to see the groom she’d chosen for her daughter prove his worth.

In contrast, Diablo’s heart was awfully discomposed...

Chapter 5: The Elves' Sacred Treasure

The following day—

As they all went to sleep late at night after the dinner party, Diablo had just woken up after noon. He could hear music in the distance, and, sitting up in the bed, he could feel Rem's breathing tickling his ear.

"Meow... Nnn... Ah, good morning, Diablo."

"Hmm."

"...It's rather lively today, it seems."

"I'm sure Shera will know the reason."

A princess wasn't allowed to spend the night in the same room as another man right before her wedding day. Shera wanted to be with them like always, but last night the queen insisted on spending the night with her instead.

Rose stood against the wall, as she didn't need sleep and instead received her magical energy from Diablo.

"Good morning, Master. Rose awaits Master's commands."

"Hmm. What is the meaning of this disturbance?"

"Rose will proceed to purge and silence them."

"That's not what I meant..."

There was a knock on the door, and Rose walked over to welcome their guest. Rafflesia, the Dark Elf, raised her hand in greeting.

"Good morning, friends. I heard your voices and reckoned you were finally awake. Hohoho... You are quite the sleepyheads, given you are Adventurers."

"Hmph... Being a Demon Lord is demanding work. Getting proper rest is part of my duties."

"Well, our food has been prepared. Or do you still need more sleep?"

Rem jumped out of bed at the offer of food. Diablo adjusted his clothes and went out into the common room after them.

They all sat around the table, their meal consisting, as was usual in these lands, of different fruits. They were certainly good, but Diablo was surprised the Elves never got tired of them.

Rafflesia sat opposite of him, her massive breasts resting on the table. “My, this is convenient... Perhaps I should get a table like this for my room back home.”

“They’re heavy, are they?”

“Ohohoh... Would you like to try picking them up? They’re quite bountiful.”

“B-Bountiful!?”

Diablo leaned forward despite himself, only to feel Rem’s cold glare stab into him.

...Staaaaare.

“Master...” He could feel a terribly menacing aura coming from Rose as well.

Putting his best efforts forward to kill his sorrow, Diablo pretended to laugh scornfully.

“H-Hmph... I do not care for such frivolities. I’m a Demon Lord after all!”

“...Incidentally, do you know why there’s such a ruckus out there?” Rem shifted her gaze outside. “Is it like this all the time in the Elves’ country?”

“Singing and dancing are the norm here, but this is a rather special occasion. They’re celebrating the wedding.”

“...Wedding?”

“Princess Shera’s of course. Apparently the ceremony will be held the day after tomorrow... Did you not know? I’ve heard the Elves discuss it here and there.”

“That fast!?”

It usually took at least a year to prepare a program for a wedding, or three months if one were in a hurry. And with royal weddings, it wouldn’t be

surprising for it to take many more years to prepare, especially with how long-lived the Elves are.

“It’s been half a month since the king passed away. If you were to neglect watering a flower for two weeks, what do you think would happen?”

“...So that’s why they’re in a hurry. How absurd. They’re tending to Shera’s life like it’s a garden to maintain.”

“Ohohoh... Leaders are essentially slaves. They’re expected to sacrifice themselves for the well-being of the people, and aren’t allowed to run away.”

“...This is far too impatient, even if it is for the good of the forest.”

“It could be more than just that, you know.”

“...I do not know very much about the Elves. Could you teach me about them, Lady Rafflesia?”

Rafflesia rested both of her hands on top of her impressive breasts, then rested her shapely chin on them.

“I’m not an Elf, so all I know are stories I’ve heard from the past.”

“...That will be more than enough.”

“Rumor had it that the Kingdom of Greenwood was entrusted with something very important from God, and ordered to defend it forevermore. The presence of a king was necessary to do so.”

“Something...important?”

Diablo bit into a nut, then crushed and swallowed it, before rising to his feet.

“I will not rely on rumors and hearsay. Let us have Shera and the queen explain it to us. Whether that will convince me or not is another matter.”

†

They all walked through the forest, guided by Shera. When they approached the queen’s room to ask for an explanation, Shera told them:

“I have something I have to show you. Could you follow me?”

For the past hour, they walked through the emerald forest. Eventually, they

reached a mound made up of large rocks. It looked to be an Elven monument of some sort. Diablo inferred it had been there for many years, judging by the vines and moss covering it.

“It should be here...”

Shera walked behind the monument, her face unusually serious. There, she found a stone door with a peculiar pattern etched on it. Diablo couldn’t see it clearly because of the moss covering the door, but it did seem familiar.

—Isn’t this the same as the holy mark from Lumachina’s church?

When Shera laid her hands on it, the stone door opened to the sides with an ease Diablo wouldn’t have assumed from its aged appearance. A staircase leading down had revealed itself.

It was similar to Diablo’s personal dungeon, the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth. Could this be the Elves’ dungeon? If so, there could be monsters lying in wait. He had the Tonnerre Empereur in hand, just in case.

They descended down the stairs. It was dark, so after confirming with Shera that there were no problems doing so, Diablo cast a Light spell.

The staircase led underground, with brick-like, triangular stones—set together so as to leave no gaps—making up the walls. It was clear to see this wasn’t a natural cavern, but an artificial structure. It was quite wide, so while casting spells in a cramped space was usually dangerous, as it could hit himself and his allies, that wouldn’t be much of a problem here. Diablo had become used to unconsciously confirming these things, which he never had to consider when playing the game.

The ceiling drew an arch, and was also made of painstakingly carved stone. Unlike the structure’s exterior, there were no vines or moss there.

Lowering his gaze and examining along the walls, he saw an oblong stone. It was roughly at waist height, and was too low to be a work table. So what could it have been used for?

“...Isn’t this a bit strange?” Rem asked, looking up at the ceiling. “I’d assume an Elven structure would have tree roots serving as the ceiling.”

“That may mean this place wasn’t built by the Elves.”

“Huh? But isn’t that odd, Diablo? This place is in the depths of the Elven territories...”

“Hmm. Maybe...”

He was going to jokingly suggest that the map designer probably got lazy, but realized that joke would go over Rem’s head. Diablo just decided to leave it as him being cool by “saying something suggestive and leaving it at that.”

Rose was walking behind them silently...though Rose always had her eyes on Diablo and no one else.

Rafflesia’s gaze was fixed on the depths of the underground chamber. The Light spell’s illumination didn’t reach that far, but her night vision allowed her to see despite that.

“I believe you are correct, Sir Diablo.”

“What makes you say that?”

“The far wall has God’s holy mark etched on it. And not just that. I can’t find the Kingdom of Greenwood’s crest anywhere here.”

Had the Elves built this place, they would surely put their crest somewhere to mark it as such. For example, Faltra’s church had not only the holy mark on it, but also Lyferia’s flag.

“Are you saying God made this place?”

There were many traces of God’s existence in this world, and Diablo believed it was an entirely different sort of existence from the God he’d heard about in his world.

“Yeah.” Shera nodded. “God definitely made this place.”

“...Back in the capital, I recall hearing the Grand Cathedral’s Inner Sanctum was made by God too.”

“Right, there was that as well.”

“...Is this some sort of Elven church? Is this where you’ll hold the wedding?”

Maybe Shera had come to terms with the wedding, and brought them here to

say she was intending to go through with it?

“No, it’s not.” Shera shook her head. “We hold our weddings in much brighter places than this. We all gather up on top of the tallest tree in the kingdom, where we sing, dance, eat, and have fun.”

“...Then what’s this place?”

“It’s a grave.”

Diablo felt chills run down his spine. Looking around, he saw oblong stones set along the walls which he thought were work tables of some sort... But they were containers with the holy mark etched on them.

These were sarcophagi.

Shera said these were the tombs of past Elven kings, and, stopping before one of the sarcophagi, she brought her hands together. Unlike the other ones, this one was covered with a new, black cloth.

This was the deceased king’s, Shera’s father’s, tomb.

Realizing this, Rem also brought her hands together, and Rafflesia followed suit. Diablo closed his eyes, and wished for the king’s peace in the afterlife.

“Haaa...” Shera raised her head, wiping her eyes. “I finally got to visit his grave. Thanks, you guys. This was my main goal, but it took a pretty roundabout way to get here.”

“...We know the situation didn’t allow for it. Are you ready to tell us what you wanted to say?”

“Hmm, I didn’t intend to keep anything secret. I just didn’t know where to start.”

“...We’re well aware your memory, sense of judgment, and communication skills are worse than a common rat’s.”

“Rude...!?”

“...Let’s try to put things in order.” Rem suggested. She sighed, wearing a pensive expression. “The Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed inside my body. And we removed the majority of it through a certain ritual. You two already

know this.”

They nodded. They did, however, keep it a secret that they hid the gluttonous Klem in Faltra. If the king of Lyferia were to learn of that, her current way of life would surely be lost.

“Some faint remains of the Demon Lord remained sealed inside me...” Rem continued. “And however faint these remnants were, there was still a chance they could awaken. That was when Celes’s letter informed me the Dark Elves may have a ritual capable of extracting the Demon Lord’s soul.”

“That happened while I was sick in bed, so I don’t know the details about that.”

“...The details don’t matter... Anyway, we visited the Dark Elves’ village...and with Miss Rafflesia’s ritual magic, finally removed the Demon Lord’s soul from my body!” Rem raised her voice dramatically, which showed how important that was to her.

She placed a hand on the pouch dangling from her waist. That was where the Divinity Crystal containing the Demon Lord’s soul was.

“...But the promise Shera made to enable that has put us in a complicated position. Which brings us to you, Shera.”

“I still think the Elves and the Dark Elves getting along is a good thing!”

“...I won’t deny that, but do settle down. There is an order to things. Firstly, your objective was to return home. Even if you ran away again, you can’t leave your mother be now that she’s left all alone after your father passed away.”

“Yeah, I think so too.”

“...Regardless of that, you made a promise to the Dark Elves. An oath. You swore on God and your life that you’ll give the Dark Elves part of Greenwood’s forest.”

“So the Elves and Dark Elves would be able to live together.”

Rafflesia, who stood nearby, nodded. “I’m sure everyone has their own thoughts on the matter. And it would be hard to have everyone change their minds immediately. But I believe that if we are allowed to live in this forest, we

would surely be able to coexist peacefully.”

“That’s right!” Shera smiled happily.

“Nnnn...” Rem crossed her arms, moaning in exasperation. “You did promise that the Elves would relinquish some of their territory to the Dark Elves to regain that peace.”

To begin with, the reason for the dispute lay with Lyferia’s king from three generations ago. He sent an army called the Crusade against the Dark Elves, suspecting them of being Demon Lord worshipers. That was because they possessed knowledge regarding the Demon Lord which was entrusted to them by God—the very same ritual magic that saved Rem.

It was an unforgivable act of foolishness, but that was all in the past. Diablo couldn’t do anything to change that now. And when the Dark Elves were subjected to that attack, the Elves abandoned them. They didn’t fight. Doing as much forced a wedge between the two races...

But the truth was, the Elves had no choice but to obey the Crusade, as their king was taken hostage. So said the queen, but alas, there was no proof to her words. And yet, Rafflesia still chose to accept them as truth.

“...I think that’s a very good thing...” Rem stated her feelings on the matter. “Especially since the Demon Lord awakened in the west. The races will have to fight for their existence again very soon. It’s important we unite our powers. Having the grudge between the Elves and the Dark Elves clear up would be a very joyous thing.”

Shera nodded enthusiastically.

“I think so as well,” Rafflesia agreed.

“...But without a king, the transfer of territories can’t be arranged. The Kingdom of Greenwood still follows many old traditions, and this is one of them... No, I’m sure it’s the same for the other races too. It’s impossible for a nation without a ruler to delineate territory. Convincing the people to agree is too difficult without one.”

Decreasing a country’s territory made it harder to live in, and it was a king’s job to defend his people’s way of life.

“I’m also sure there are those among the Elves who hold a grudge against the Dark Elves as well.” Rafflesia cast down her eyes.

“...Let us put that idea aside for now. Whatever the case, the Kingdom of Greenwood needs a king. Based on what the queen says, he is necessary to maintain the forest... To fulfill that old promise, they have to coronate a king.”

Shera pouted. “Mother just keeps saying, ‘An Elven country needs an Elven king.’”

“...Well that’s obvious.”

“Whaaat!? Nooo!”

“It is quite obvious.”

“Very obvious.”

Even Diablo thought the queen was in the right.

“...If we are to summarize our situation,” Rem began wrapping up the discussion, “we have multiple issues, like the oath to the Dark Elves and the forest’s condition. But it all comes down to Shera marrying an Elf. But, with the way things are, she’ll have to marry Drango.”

“Auuugh...” Shera let out a peculiar moan.

“You don’t like him? He looks to be a very capable Elf. Though I’ll admit he looks more like an Orc than an Elf.”

“Uuu... It’s not about it being Drango... There’s someone else I want to be with forever...”

“...You mean Diablo?”

“Y-Yeah...” Shera gave him a fleeting glance.

Diablo almost blushed in response.

—No, no, no, no...

He remembered his past experiences, and would never misunderstand things and think someone had fallen in love with him.

Never.

—I mean, it's Shera. She's probably thinking something like, "I want to go on adventures with him forever." This isn't romantic love. If I fool myself into thinking she does love me, once it comes down to doing adult business, she'll just back off and say, "I didn't mean it that way." Shera may have a mature body, but mentally she's still a kid!

"...You do realize Diablo is a Demon?" Rem furrowed her brows.

"I-I do, but—"

"...It's just one dumb thing after another with you... Are you a crossbreeding fetishist? To think you're a pervert on top of being dumb. Yes, a lewd Elf..."

"Th-That's not it! The person I always want to be with just happens to be from another race!"

"...You are aware of what a king and queen are supposed to do together, right?"

"Huh? They pray to God to make the forest bountiful. Then they listen to people in need, and protect the 'important thing' God left us."

—Rafflesia did mention that. What exactly is this "important thing"?

"...Those are important, yes, but isn't there an equally significant duty they have to fulfill?" Rem shook her head. "You can't be this ignorant... Royalty and nobility have the important duty of producing their progeny."

"P-Progeny!?" Shera took a step back, blushing profusely.

"...They have to make children. Or do you intend to let the Greenwood dynasty end at your generation?"

"I don't, but...I really thought this through!"

"...An Elf and a Demon can't produce children together. That is purely fact."

"It is, but that's not absolute."

"...They can't normally produce children. That's why no matter how much affection and kinship you feel toward someone from another race, it can never blossom into romantic love. In many cases, it's the same as someone being the same sex as you. But maybe you're simply misunderstanding your own feelings

because Diablo has saved you so many times.”

“I’m...misunderstanding...?” Shera seemed confused at her own budding emotions.

Rem took a deep breath, grit her teeth, and clenched her fists.

“...I realize this must be painful, but I’m telling you this directly, exactly because we’re comrades: Shera, you should pick an Elf man to marry. If you don’t like Drango, you should tell your mother that. But for the sake of the kingdom, and for your own sake, you should pick a husband everyone will respect. That’s what I think.”

“B-But, but I... But...” Shera stood with her breath stuck in her throat, her eyes darting about.

“...Just calm down. Think this over carefully. You may be dumb, lacking in foresight, and utterly shallow, but you do know what matters most. I’m sure you’ll come to the right decision. I believe in you.”

“But does that really count as believing in me!?”

“...Do you really understand? Even if you are royalty, you can’t give away land without the people as one with the decision. Do you intend to forfeit an oath you swore your life on!?”

“Aaaaaah... I know, buuut...”

Shera looked to be at wits’ end. She was never a clever one, and was now torn between her feelings and her duties on top of that. Up till now, Diablo may have wandered through this inescapable maze alongside her, sharing in her anxiety. But he wasn’t troubled any longer.

“A question, Shera. Answer me truthfully: Do you truly wish to walk alongside me? Put aside your duties to the kingdom and this oath. Declare here and now if these are your true, honest feelings.”

“Erm... I don’t really know yet... But I want to see just how much I can do, and how far I can go. And I don’t want to do it alone. I want you and Rem to be by my side. I mean, we’re comrades after all!”

She hadn’t changed since the day he met her. There was no end to her desire

to challenge herself, seek out new frontiers, and be among her friends. She was a lonely Adventurer who craved the company of her comrades.

“I see.” Diablo nodded. “I understand perfectly. That was all I wanted to... No, there’s actually something else I should ask you. You just said it’s the Elven king’s duty to defend an ‘important something.’”

“Mmm? Yeah, I did.”

“Just what type of ‘thing’ is that?”

“Aaah... I don’t know actually.”

“You never change, do you...” Diablo shrugged.

“...I swear!” Rem shouted in annoyance. “How can you not know about something that influences your life so much!?”

It seemed harsh, but Rem was this angered by Shera’s carelessness because she truly did care for her.

“Ahaha...” Shera’s ears drooped in dejection. “Mother told me once that I’ll ‘understand when I see it.’ At the time, we didn’t think I’d be queen...”

“...If you’re so curious, you should first be interested in what’s around you. Did you really run away from home without even understanding the circumstances?”

“When I was still here, all I did was run away from my brother...”

“Yes... He was a very troubling person, so I can’t say I blame you. I see life wasn’t all that easy for you either. I sympathize.”

Shera smiled sadly at Rem’s words.

“Why don’t you check now then?” Rafflesia suggested. “If the queen said you’ll ‘understand when you see it,’ that means you’re allowed to see for yourself. I don’t think checking what it is will do any harm.”

“You’re right! Since we’ve come all the way, I may as well find out!”

Surprisingly enough, it seemed the ‘important thing’ was right in their vicinity.

“...Isn’t this a burial mound?” Rem cocked her head in confusion.

“It is, but the important thing is here too.”

With an expression that seemed to have completely forgotten her doubts from a moment ago, Shera walked into the deepest part of the underground chamber. She was one who fundamentally loved exploring new and unknown things. She was optimistic, assertive, and brimming with curiosity.

“...Should you really be doing this with the wedding being only two days away, and you still not having made a choice?” Rem asked with an unpleasant expression on her face.

“We shouldn’t let such trivialities bother us.” Diablo tried to soothe Rem’s anxiety. “If there is a legendary treasure in this place, it’s only natural to want to see it.”

“...You’re right. I, too, am an Adventurer.”

“In the end, whatever comes will come. And, no matter what...”

“...Diablo?”

Shera reached for the furthest wall.

“Here I go...”

She placed her hand against the holy mark on the wall, then began reciting words in a language Diablo hadn’t heard before—like an incantation for a spell.

“Rood terces nepoi.”

In Diablo’s ears, the language of this world sounded like his own mother tongue, but what Shera just said didn’t sound even remotely familiar. The logic of how it was all translated was beyond him, to begin with... Those could be utterly meaningless words, for all he knew.

But, if this was where the Elves kept their ‘important thing’ hidden, it made this place a vault. That meant whatever Shera just said was the password.

A shrill sound echoed through the underground chamber. Diablo felt a dull pain inside his ears. A pale blue light began emanating from the holy mark on the wall, magical energy flowing through it like water filling up a ditch. The blue light curved, split, and intersected, drawing an intricate pattern over the wall.

“...Is this a magic circle?” Rem whispered.

Rafflesia narrowed her eyes. “I’ve never seen this type of magic circle before...”

“Mmm?”

The pattern struck Diablo as somehow familiar. He recalled the magic circle that appeared in Faltra’s skies when Krebskulm had awakened.

—It’s so similar...

Resembling a magic circle that appeared when a Demon Lord had awakened...

But despite being of a similar type, there were some differences to it. Diablo was a Sorcerer capable of incredible spells, but that was only because he’d increased his in-game level. He wasn’t actually knowledgeable about this world’s magic, and couldn’t derive any information from a magic circle. All he could do was stare as things unfolded, as if watching a game’s event movie, and marvel at its quality.

The magic circle seemed to have been completed, having spread over not only the four walls, but the floor as well.

Then, their field of vision completely changed...

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A desolate, barren field spanned before them. A red, rust-colored land spread out for as far as the eye could see. Cracks ran through the soil, without a single blade of grass to be seen.

The sky was dyed crimson as well. It wasn’t just a sunset; the clouds themselves were red and cast a gloomy shadow over the surroundings.

“What...is this place...?” Diablo looked around nervously.

“Mother calls it the《Terminus》,” Shera answered. “It’s my first time here though.”

Was it teleportation magic that brought them here? Or was this an illusion? Diablo’s field of vision shifted altogether, but the others were still here. Not just Shera, but Rem, Rose, and Rafflesia too.

“...The Terminus. I’ve never heard of this sort of mechanism being in an Elven burial mound.”

“This is amazing. I can’t hold back my surprise...”

“...Just to make sure, there are no problems with you showing this place to members of the other races, like Diablo and me, right?”

Shera’s face froze in a shocked ‘ah’ at Rem’s words.

“Maybe it isn’t!?”

“...You didn’t ask the queen for permission to bring us here!? Aaah... Fine... We’ll pretend this never happened.”

“Thanks. It should be fine so long as you don’t say anything though! You keep it a secret too, Rafflesia!”

Rafflesia said nothing, merely looking off in the distance in a daze.

“Rafflesia?” Shera walked up to her, waving a hand in front of her eyes.

“Whoa!?” Rafflesia jumped with a start. “Wh-What is it...”

“U-Umm... Are you all right?”

“Y-Yes... But of course. I was just a touch surprised it seems.”

Rafflesia and Shera laughed nervously.

Diablo lowered his gaze, looking at something half buried into the ground. He picked it up, finding it to be a giant crystal.

“Master,” Rose approached him. “That is a Summon Crystal for a《Force Hydra》.”

“What!?”

“It has no level restriction, but it does for race. Only Elves may use it.”

“What is this doing...”

Rem also knelt down, digging up a rapier from the ground. Despite being covered by red dirt, its intricate design was still easily noticeable.

“...What about this one?”

“That is an《Acid Orion》, a sword enchanted to have its attacks inflict the《Corrosion》effect. It requires a level of 160 to wield.”

Rem’s eyes widened in shock. Diablo was startled as well.

—A level 160 restriction!?

The max level in *Cross Reverie* was 150, so no existing player should be able to equip this sword.

As Diablo suspected, this world wasn’t based on *Cross Reverie* at the time he’d played it. The level limit was bumped up once every six months or so, and his initial suspicion was that this world was based off the game. So maybe when the game implemented its next set of features, this world would be updated along with it? Which would mean the level limit was much higher than Diablo imagined. Whether a limit even existed was dubious at this point.

“...Is this an Elven treasure vault?” Rem looked around. “It’s different than what I imagined. If anything, it looks more like a waste disposal site to me.”

“The Elven royalty must not understand what these treasures are. There’s no list documenting them, and you have to dig up the items first. But there’s normally no way to appraise an item by sight. We can only do it thanks to Rose.”

Rose was the only Magimatic Maid that existed in this world, as far as Diablo was aware. He doubted the Kingdom of Greenwood even had one of them.

“Rose is happy to know Rose is of use to Master.” She bowed her head respectfully.

“Yes, your work is commendable.”

With her body still bowing, Rose’s shoulders shivered. Her breathing turned nasal and wild. Diablo’s words seemed to have put her in a state of excitement.

“Diablooo~ Over here! Here, come here!” Shera called out from afar.

“Hmph... It seems the items lying around here aren’t the ‘important thing.’ These are no doubt Elven treasures however.”

“Though it’s hard to understand why Elves would treat them this carelessly.”

As Rem and Rafflesia spoke to themselves, they and Diablo moved toward where Shera was currently standing. They could see that the ground suddenly cut off ahead of them.

A cliff.

A great chasm was open before their eyes, forming a large valley. While it could only be described as a valley, its other side was so far away they could hardly make it out. It was so deep they couldn't make out the bottom either.

"Th-There!" Shera pointed downward. "That's the 'important thing'!"

Looking at the bottom of the ravine, they saw something black. At first, Diablo thought it was a water deposit, but he soon realized he was wrong.

Monsters.

At the center was a mysterious sphere, several times larger than Diablo. Cable-like wires were coiled around it, squirming over it like tens of thousands of serpents.

"...I-Is...!? Is that...a Demon Lord!?" Rem took a frightened step back from the cliff.

"What!?"

"...Ah... I, hmm... I've never seen it before, but that's what it feels like to me... Maybe because one has always been so close to me?"

She touched the pouch on her waist, as if to affirm it was still there. The remnants of the Demon Lord sealed within her had been transferred to the Divinity Crystal stored inside.

"Wait, by Demon Lord, you mean a *Demon Lord*!? A real one!?" Shera asked, as if clinging to them in fear.

Even Diablo himself was disturbed.

—It's a new monster, so I don't know what it is if its name isn't displayed!

Unfortunately, this world didn't come with any convenient features that made a window pop up with the monster's profile and information. He turned his gaze to Rose for help, but she just looked down at the ravine silently. She

was his treasure vault's guardian, so she was keen when it came to items, but probably wasn't as knowledgeable when it came to monsters.

Rafflesia, however, opened her mouth to speak, as if whispering to herself in the vacant expression of someone wandering through a daydream.

"The《Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia》... They are the origin, that which brings upon the flame of life... The power to reshape this world..."

"Hey, if you know what it is, speak up!"

"Huh!?" Diablo's voice seemingly made Rafflesia come to, as her expression was washed over with confusion. "Ah, no... I was merely recounting an old story I'd heard once... That's the name of the Demon Lord once sealed in these lands."

"So that truly is a Demon Lord after all. The Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia, you said?"

"In all likelihood."

Hearing their words, Shera's face lost all its color.

"A D-D-Demon Lord!?"

"Please calm down, Princess Shera. While that is indeed a Demon Lord, they are still sealed."

"R-Right..."

"They do seem to be stirring, if only a little... But if they were revived, I doubt we would be unharmed. So I speculate."

"I'm so happy it's sealed..."

"...So the important thing God entrusted the Elves to protect was the Demon Lord," Rem said, her gaze fixed on the Demon Lord.

"So it seems. The seal itself should probably be somewhere nearby."

"Err, I think it's this? *Elosnoc.*"

Shera spoke in that odd language again, and a rainbow-colored jewel orb, roughly the size of a basketball, appeared in mid-air. A multiplex of rings surrounded it, like the rings of Saturn.

“Ah... This...is amazing...” Rafflesia said, her eyes wide. “I’ve never seen such a large Divinity Crystal. Truly fitting for the container of a complete Demon Lord!”

“Ah...” Shera looked at the rainbow-colored orb.

“What’s wrong, Shera?”

“Well, this seal is like Greenwood’s forest. God gives it power. But now that Father is dead...”

“Wh-What!? Isn’t that bad!?”

“The seal shouldn’t break today or tomorrow, but it is getting weaker.”

Shera said it lightly, but it was a fairly big deal: The Demon Lord’s seal was weakening! If Greenwood went without crowning a new King, the seal would eventually break.

“...I now understand why the Queen is forcing her daughter into marriage and is being this impatient about it,” Rem said, wiping sweat from her forehead. “This has to do with more than just the forest’s blessings.”

Diablo was in agreement.

“It’s not just the Elves. The existence of all the races is on the line here.”

“...Despite that, the fact that they never told us anything about this must mean it’s some sort of Elven secret?”

“Or maybe just the Elven royalty are in on it. The more people know of a secret, the likelier it is to come to light.”

“...True, there’s probably no need to tell the common civilians. I think it also explains why the Elves haven’t come to collect all the treasures lying around here.”

No one would want to willingly come near a Demon Lord, even if it were a sealed one.

The Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia was far more grotesque than any other monster Diablo had met so far. And just how strong could he be?

The players always grew gradually stronger; that was how MMORPGs worked, so monsters featured in newer events were as a result progressively stronger as

well. If Diablo didn’t know about Kardia, it must mean they weren’t implemented. Basically, it was probable Kardia was set to appear in a future event.

In the game, he’d beaten the《Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros》solo, but Kardia was likely on a higher level. Unlike Lyferia, the Kingdom of Greenwood wasn’t as prepared to face this type of threat. The races’ defensive lines were in the Demon Lord’s domain to the west, but Greenwood was deep in the races’ territories. There were no large defensive strongholds between it and the capital.

Diablo thought back to Alicia in the capital, Lumachina in the Grand Cathedral, the Firebird Inn’s employees, and the many people he’d met in the capital.

—If this thing awakens, they’re all going to die...

Interlude

She stood in a pitch black room. There was nothing here in the depths of this dream. But she could hear a voice crying out to her from the ground.

“Have you forgotten?”

This wasn’t the voice of a man. It was something no one should ever lend an ear to. Realizing this instinctively, she covered her long ears.

A single spot lit up in the darkness. A child was standing there, a Dark Elf boy.

“...Have you forgotten me?”

Her eyes widened. Her lips quivered. How many decades had it been since she last mouthed his name?

“Have you forgiven them?” the boy spoke. *“Even though I died because of them!”*

No.

That was wrong. Her common sense knew this. The Humans were at fault.

“Then once we’re done with them, we’ll do away with the Humans. I will never forgive the Kingdom of Lyferia.”

But that was a thing of the past...

The boy’s eyes moistened with tears.

“You have forgotten...”

No.

I didn’t forget you. I could never forget you. But we have a future we have to march to now.

“If that isn’t forgetting about the resentment in your heart, what is!?”

Streaks of red trailed down from the tips of the boy’s lips. A massive sword, far too large compared to his small body, burst out of his chest. A cross-shaped spear pierced through his back, blood pouring out of his body.

“Even though I’m in so much pain! Even though I was killed!”

Red fluid danced through the air.

Something wet was on her cheek. She reached out to it. A wet, slimy sensation against her fingers.

She screamed.

“SeeK mE oUt”

The voice of the black lump submerged beneath the earth rattled inside her skull.

Chapter 6: Holding a Wedding

For the first time since he arrived in this world, Diablo had spent the whole night wide awake in bed...

The next day—

Before the morning mist had a chance to clear, the music of flutes and harps could be heard. The Elves were probably preparing for the wedding ceremony.

Diablo sat up, turning his gaze to the door. Rose, the Magimatic Maid, was standing against the wall, bowing at him politely.

“Good morning, Master. Are there any problems with Master’s physical condition?”

So long as Diablo was awake and within a certain distance from her, Rose was capable of charging her magical energy. She likely knew he hadn’t gotten a wink of sleep.

“I haven’t used any magic since we arrived in this forest. So much so that my body almost feels dull for it. What problems could I possibly have?”

“Pardon Rose, Master...”

Rem, who was in the same bed as him, was still fast asleep. It was still early morning, so Diablo decided to let her sleep a while longer.

Climbing out of bed quietly, he headed to the room’s door.

“Rose, just in case, stay by Rem’s side.”

“...As Master wishes.”

Showing her discontent at being away from Diablo with only a short pause, Rose nodded obediently.

He went out to the common room, immediately realizing the front door was slightly open. Other dwellings in this country didn’t have walls, let alone doors,

as the Elves made tree branches their homes, so he couldn't quite call it a lack of caution.

—Did someone come in?

The common room had doors to the two private rooms, with one being the room Diablo just came out of. The other was the room Rafflesia was using, her door also half-open. Come to think of it, the dwellings in the Dark Elves' village didn't have doors either. She probably wasn't used to closing doors behind her.

"...Did she go out for a walk?"

Perhaps Diablo wasn't the only one who couldn't fall asleep tonight. If a new king would be coronated during today's wedding, Rafflesia would be one step closer to her goal. But whether the new king would agree to giving away territory was a question no one knew the answer to yet. The life of Shera, the new queen, was on the line, so it was doubtful the king would refuse, but...

But still, the world of politics could be quite unreasonable at times, and the sort of people that would take all they could to not honor a promise despite that were a dime a dozen.

"I can see why she'd feel anxious..."

Diablo stepped outside. If he recalled Shera's words correctly, the wedding should be held at a plaza near the forest's largest tree. He thought the Elves would be in a great hustle, but was surprised to find that wasn't the case. As always, some of them were lying down on branches, strumming some stringed instrument or other, and others were eating fruit.

Then it came into his field of vision.

"Ooh..." He said despite himself. The tree was simply that large and magnificent. It was tall enough to make Diablo think it would pierce the heavens, and was thicker than a sorcerer's tower. It made all the other large trees around look like saplings in comparison.

An altar was set before the large tree, though it wasn't fully decorated yet. The flower beds surrounding the plaza were only half done, and the Elves were still carrying in chairs. One of the Elves seemed to be in charge, giving everyone else instructions.

“Good, good, that chair can go over there. Hurry up, we need to have the bottom half done by eight o’clock. Now what about the decorations for the top there? Tell them to hurry it up too.”

“Sir Drango, we brought another bench.”

“Oh, good. Huh...its design is a bit different... All right, put that one in the back.”

Diablo’s eyes widened in shock.

—That’s Drango!?

He still had a distinctly un-Elven pig face, but everyone seemed to respect him. The oddest part of all was that he wasn’t talking in that odd, greasy tone from before.

“How are preparations for the food going...? There isn’t enough meat... No way around it, send five people out to hunt. We need it done in two hours.”

“Sir Drango, half of the decorations for the top were delivered just now!”

“Terrific! Hmmhmm, wonderful, they’re looking good. Now let’s get to placing them. Work in teams of two, one putting up the decorations, one carrying them for the decorator to take up. It should be faster than one of you having to climb down each time to take more decorations.”

“Right! Let’s get to it, fellas!”

The young Elves divided into groups of two, as per Drango’s instructions.

“Hmph...” Diablo had walked up to him. “Impressive leadership skills. As one may expect from the future king, I suppose.”

“Ah!? Oh my, hello there. You’re up early!”

“You, what’s with that odd way of speaking...”

“Duhuhu... Is something wrong with the way I talk?”

It was like he was forcing himself to act, but why? It certainly wasn’t going to make him seem more appealing to women. The queen was the one who nominated Drango to be king, but she never did compliment his appearance or gestures. Diablo, with the Demon Lord role play, knew very well that keeping up

a façade wasn't something one could do half-heartedly. There had to have been a reason he went to such lengths. But asking wouldn't be enough to get him to reveal his motives.

"You're a suspicious one."

"My, what am I to do. My wedding with Princess Shera will begin at one in the afternoon. Feel free to help yourself to some rich fruit until then. We've prepared some truly delectable ones, so feel free to sit back at your leisure."

"I've eaten enough. But forget that. There was something I've been meaning to ask you."

"Hohoh, whatever could it be?"

"Shera wishes to continue adventuring. She'll most likely say she wants to leave the kingdom again after the wedding."

"Duhuhu... It sounds like our future queen will be a troublesome one."

"So you'd think."

Drango placed a hand over his mouth, his gaze turning into a sharp glare.

"...You've seen it, haven't you, Sir Diablo?"

"Hmm?"

"I've had scouts keep an eye on Princess Shera. I've been informed she took you to the royal family's burial mound, and that you all left with pale expressions on your faces."

"Then you know what's in there?"

"I was aide to the king once."

"That simplifies things then."

"I will have to ask you to keep silent on that matter, and not say a word to the other Elves."

As he thought, the Demon Lord Kardia's incarceration was a royal secret. Drango only knew about it because he used to be the king's right hand.

"Even if I take the throne, we would need to produce heirs. Otherwise, should

anything happen to Princess Shera during her travels, the royal bloodline would die out.”

“Hmph.”

Being an Adventurer meant frequently brushing against death, so Drango’s concerns were understandable.

“It would only really be a problem if she left Greenwood before giving birth to at least three children. That’s my view on the matter.”

Diablo sighed. They were treating her like a cow that needed to give birth to a quota of children. The reason he decided on three was probably because the former queen gave birth to three children, and only one of them—Shera—survived. Diablo now realized why even a vile person like Prince Keera was cherished by the kingdom.

“But do not make that matter known, at any cost,” Drango emphasized.

“Were it no longer a secret, even the governor of Faltra wouldn’t cut off your prince’s head.”

“Perish the thought! If that matter were to be exposed, the royal family would be hunted down as Demon Lord worshipers!”

“Hmph... I understand what you’re trying to say.”

Diablo still didn’t know why Drango kept up the acting and his silly manner of speaking though. But if he knew about the seal, it was probably only natural he’d come to that decision.

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The time was one in the afternoon, in the plaza before the large tree. Colorful decorative strings dangled from the treetops, glittering and sparkling as glass beads were tied to their ends. Flowers blossomed around the plaza, as if embracing it. They weren’t in pots, but rather grew from the ground like flowerbeds. But this ceremony had been organized on such a short notice, so they were probably placed there since there was no way to time their blossoming properly to match the wedding.

Benches were lined up, with smooth fabrics spread over them. Those of high

standing in Elven society participated while sitting on them. Everyone else watched the proceeding while standing up around the plaza.

A large audience of Elves, more than one would believe actually inhabited this forest, were gathered around. The vast majority of the Kingdom of Greenwood was here. The king's enthronement was tied to the forest's survival, so interest was high. Of course, the people wanted to attend just for the festivities as well.

A carpet weaved with golden threads was spread out, leading up to the ceremonial hall. Its design was made to appear luxurious while still appearing harmonious with nature.

All in all, it was a beautiful sight.

As a national guest, Rem was sitting at the end of the first row. Rose sat near her, leaving a single seat's gap. It was a bit nerve-wracking.

"...Isn't Diablo coming?"

"Rose's sensors do not detect Master either. Perhaps it is because there are too many people around... Tch." The Magimatic Maid seemed to be rather irritable whenever Diablo wasn't around.

The ceremony was just about to begin, but there was no sign of Diablo or Rafflesia.

"...So the two of them went out separately?"

"Affirmative. The Dark Elf left before dawn."

"...Did something happen to Lady Rafflesia? She told the queen she would participate in the wedding... I find it hard to believe the side that wants to see a promise kept would break a promise of their own."

"Insufficient data. It is impossible to form conjecture."

"...What if she was attacked by a wild beast?"

"While Rose cannot say with certainty, Rose does not detect any animals capable of harming the races in the vicinity."

"...The Elves do have scouts deployed around here, I suppose."

"Yes."

“...It looked like Diablo had something in mind.” Rem sighed. “He could have told me what it was though...”

“Perhaps Master does not trust you.”

Rem glared at her with a miffed expression. Rose, meanwhile, stood as expressionless as ever, facing forward like a statue.

The reason Rem made her displeasure so visible was because she felt Rose’s words were on the point. The fact Rose may have hit the nail on the head annoyed her to no end. Had Rose simply pointed out something that felt wrong, Rem would have been amazed, or laughed it off even.

“...That may be true.” Rem’s shoulders drooped. “Should we split up and go looking for them?”

“Rose refuses to do such a thing. Master ordered Rose to ‘stay by Rem’s side.’”

“...Oh, so that’s what happened.”

If it weren’t for her, Diablo would have had Rose at his service for whatever he was doing right now. Was Rem just in his way?

“I’m so pathetic...” Rem whispered to herself.

Ding!

Stringed instruments rang out, and the orchestra began their performance. Instruments gradually joined in, turning that soft sound, as gentle as a bird’s chirping, into a magnificent song. Perhaps owing to them playing year round, the Elves’ skill with music was impressive. Even Rem, who wasn’t knowledgeable when it came to this subject, could tell how good they were.

The music died down, then the host announced the opening of the ceremony.

“Oh God who is in the heavens, His Majesty, Her Majesty, all those in attendance, and all the citizens of Greenwood! Let us bless this wonderful day!”

He spoke in a sonorous tone as he began reading a passage from the holy scriptures. After that, Drango, the coming King, rose to take the stage.

It was said anyone could look good with the right clothes, but seeing a pig-faced man in a white outfit was all sorts of dissonant...

“...It really is odd.”

“Rose feels the same way.”

“...It’s not often we agree.”

“No it is not.”

Drango stood in front of the altar, thanking the priest, then lowered his head to the queen in the front row.

The host raised his voice once again in a flowing fashion.

Enter the bride!

Rem turned around. The other end of the golden thread carpet was covered in a veil, and crossing through it—was Shera.

A princess clad in a white dress.

Rem was enchanted, just as everyone else.

For a moment, the orchestra stopped playing, the wind ceased from blowing, and the chirping of the birds died down, culminating in a silence so total it was somehow audible.

A moment later, the audience began to stir.

Rem had thought Shera was beautiful at times, though her bumbling stupidity made such impressions come about much less often than was probably deserved. But now there could be no doubt.

—She’s gorgeous...

It may have been odd to see someone of the same gender in such a light, but it wasn’t in the sense of sexual attraction. Rather, it was the sort of admiration one may feel toward a beautiful view or a lovely painting.

The dress also accentuated and beautified Shera’s un-Elf-like curvature. It exposed the nape of her neck, probably because of the Enslavement Collar. It was only hidden by concealment magic, which meant it still existed and she couldn’t wear clothes over it.

She was so beautiful, the only thing Rem could do was sigh.

However, Shera's expression was dark. Her heart was elsewhere, but she still chose to fulfill her duties as a princess.

Rem knew this. She was the one who encouraged Shera to walk this path.

"...Shera..."

"You should pick a husband everyone will respect. That's what I think."

She still thought that was the right choice to make. But seeing an expression of utter despair on Shera's face for the first time, a tinge of pain ran through Rem's heart.

—I may have made a terrible mistake... Did I forget what it was that I should be protecting?

Her hands shook.

Shera walked down the golden thread carpet slowly. Once this ceremony ended, Drango will have made Shera his and become king of the Elves. While he should be rather smug with victory right now...his brow was, oddly enough, furrowed. He was biting his lower lip with frustration. Or maybe it was pity in his expression?

"...You went on a perilous adventure to shatter the shackles of the past, and eventually succeeded in removing a Demon Lord from your body."

"Eh? Y-Yes..."

"...So you intend on having a Demon Lord bind the Elf next."

"Ah!" Rem rose to her feet. Rose, by comparison, didn't budge an inch.

"What's the matter? Was this not the right thing to do?"

"...I... I've made a mistake!"

The orchestra's music blared, drowning out Rem's sorrowful cry. The instruments' sounds jolted the air, as if to forbid anyone from interrupting the ritual.

An Elven soldier, with a longsword on his waist, rushed to Rem, who'd stood up so suddenly.

"Are you feeling unwell, my lady?"

"No..."

"Come with me, my lady. We are in the middle of a ritual right now. Either vacate your seat and leave if you are unwell, or please sit down."

The fate of the Kingdom of Greenwood rested on the success of this wedding, so of course there were guards entrusted with protecting it.

Rem sat back down. Leaving the ritual now would only be tantamount to running away.

The Elven guard went back to his station, still keeping a vigilant gaze on her.

—I'm so...foolish, and powerless...

The only thing Rem could do right now was sit quietly and watch everything unfold.

Completing their slow advance down the aisle, Shera's legs stopped before the altar.

"Do you, Drango," the priest began, "take the princess to be your lifelong partner, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, in days of abundance and days of famine, to love, to respect, to console and protect, to devote yourself to her for as long as you draw breath?"

"I do."

"And do you, Shera L. Greenwood...take this man to be your lifelong partner?"

Shera opened her mouth, but remained silent. The attendants all looked puzzled, and began whispering. The queen, who sat in the front row, jerked her chin. The priest gave a small nod.

"Dear bride, know that silence will be taken as consent, now answer: Do you take this man to be your lifelong partner?"

"...Nn."

“Very good! We have ascertained both of your feelings. Now seal your vow with a kiss, here in the presence of God!”

Drango nodded and took a step toward his bride. Shera stepped back in retreat, but he quickly grabbed her by the arm.

“Prepare yourself.”

“...Nng.”

Shera looked to be on the verge of tears. But despite her companion making such an expression a mere ten steps away, Rem could only sit and watch.

That truly was all she could do.

“...Kuh... I’ve, made a mistake...”

“Did you now?”

“...Who cares about this country? Who cares about the Demon Lord!? Wasn’t I the one who resolved to shatter all these chains!?”

“Rose believes your opinion was a correct one.”

“...Yes! I was right, and that’s what makes me wrong here!”

Rose, who’d kept gazing forward unflinchingly, turned her head to Rem, her lips upturned in a smile.

“Of course. And Master has realized that as well.”

“H-Huh...?”

Something sparkled above them, blasting the tree’s leaves away.

—An explosion!?

The shock waves had scattered the orchestra’s music.

†

Several bullets of light rained down from the sky, the result of a single spell: Lightning Arrow. Just shooting one took considerable skill with magic, and Rem only knew one sorcerer capable of firing several at once.

The spell smashed away the decorations, bore into the flowerbeds, and cut into the tree trunks. The guests all screamed in terror, some of them running

away out of fear. The host shouted hysterically, trying to calm everyone down, while the priest was the first to flee the altar.

Drango hurriedly hid Shera behind his back, trying to protect her, when a bullet of light crashed against his shoulders.

“Gah!?”

He took to the air like a pebble that had been kicked. But the Queen’s faith in his capabilities wasn’t misplaced, as he maintained his posture and landed safely.

Then the wind coiled about as someone descended from above. His black cloak fluttered wide like a pair of wings. He held a staff in hand and had a pair of demonic horns on his head. Proof of the Fallen blood running through his veins—of him being a Demon—was tattooed across his face.

“Heheh...” He laughed maliciously, standing at Shera’s side. “Even if God acknowledges this wedding, know that I do not, you puny piece of waste. She belongs to me! I won’t let you do as you please!”

“Diablooo!”

Throwing away the bouquet in her hands, Shera clung to him with all her strength.

—Whoa there...

Diablo leaned over, caught by surprise.

“Hmph, I will not allow you to marry without my permission! You belong to me. The Demon Lord Diablo orders you, stay devoted to me for as long as you draw breath!”

The guests broke into a panic the moment he spoke the words “Demon Lord.”

Drango pulled a longsword from a nearby guard’s scabbard. His expression was the exact opposite of his dark expression from just a moment ago. He was even grinning.

“Nonsense. A Demon Lord? Did you truly just claim to be a Demon Lord?”

“Heheheh... I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world!”

“How dreadful. A Demon Lord, you say... I will take back Princess Shera, no matter what!”

“Hmm... Do not misunderstand, pig. She is already mine. It is I who will take her back.”

“You speak lies and weave fabrications!”

“If I recall, the Kingdom of Greenwood needed a king, did it not? Then I, the Demon Lord Diablo, will become king of the Elves! Ahahahaha!”

“Nonsense... No one would ever acknowledge you!”

“Then you will allow the Demon Lord sealed in these lands to awaken?”

“Silence!”

What guests hadn’t run away managed to maintain their cool, listening attentively to the conversation.

“Hear me, you common rabble!” Diablo shouted loudly. “God has sealed the Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia, within these very lands! The presence of a king merely serves as the wedge that holds its seal in place! Should the country postpone the crowning of a new king, the seal will be undone!”

Drango braced his longsword and shrunk the distance between them by a single step. “You cretin... What good does revealing that to them do!?”

Hugging Shera by the waist with his left hand, Diablo used his right to aim his staff in Drango’s direction.

“If you do not acknowledge me as king, the Demon Lord will surely awaken!”

“So you were an agent of the Fallen after all... Have you come here to awaken the Demon Lord!?”

“I care not either way.”

“Wh-What!?”

“Acknowledge me as Greenwood’s king, else Kardia will be revived. Don’t, and perish. Your choice matters not to me.”

“Hogwash. If that Demon Lord awakens, the races will be destroyed!”

“Hmph... I won’t let that happen.”

“What nonsense are you spewing!?”

With confidence, Diablo declared:

“There is only one true Demon Lord! I will pulverize any pretenders to my title!”

“...P-Pulverize!?” Drango’s eyes opened wide. “You intend...to defeat that Demon Lord...!?”

The other attendees looked astonished as well.

By contrast, Shera smiled the happiest grin Diablo had ever seen her smile, tears glistening in her eyes.

“Whoooaaa! Diablo! Diablo, Diablo, Diablo! Diablooo!”

“H-Hey, cut it out...” Diablo pushed Shera, who had clung to him, away.

Rem stood stock still, feeling a warmth build up in her eyes as tears trailed down her cheeks.

“...I was a fool.”

“None can understand the Master’s wisdom and foresight. But if you’ve come to realize what the right thing to do here is, Rose acknowledges that, if nothing else, you are qualified to serve as Master’s subordinate.”

“...How pathetic of me.” Rem wiped her eyes. “But I won’t make this mistake again. Because I am Diablo and Shera’s companion!”

“To call Master a ‘companion’... How shameless.”

“Come on, let’s go, Rose!”

Rem ran ahead, and the Magimatic Maid followed her, half a step behind.

“Rose does not need you to tell Rose that.”

†

With Diablo’s declaration, Shera had clung to him shouting out his name in a

chant-like nature. She was dressed in bridal attire and was three times prettier than usual. Her dress bore her cleavage, which was currently rubbing against Diablo...

It was extremely embarrassing.

If he were to blush now, his Demon-Lord-like presence would be gone.

“H-Hey...” He pushed her away. “Cut that out...”

—Stooop, don’t cling to me with that booby dress of yours, I can’t take it!

As that happened, Rem and Rose ran up to them.

“...Diablo!”

“Rose is awaiting orders, Master. Should Rose dispose of Master’s enemies?”

“Enemies, huh...”

Elven soldiers, carrying swords and bows, gathered behind Drango. Apparently the Sojourn of Darkness’ effect wasn’t enough to neutralize their fighting spirit.

They were desperate, too. The Elves were willing to fight if it meant getting Shera back.

“Heheheh...” Diablo smirked. “So be it. I’ll show you just how weak you are.”

The Elves’ weapon of choice was the bow, but Diablo had Shera by his side. They wouldn’t shoot out of fear of accidentally hitting her. Their only choice was to use swords, but they’d have to be at least as fast as Faltra’s governor, Galford, to even hope of landing their blades on Diablo. With that much speed, they’d be able to cut through a Lightning Arrow easily.

—Sorry, but I can’t afford to hold back now... I’ll have to make this as one-sided as possible.

“You dare oppose me? Know your place, fools! I will destroy you all!”

Diablo swung his staff.

《Freezia》.

A level 80 water element spell.

The Elves screamed as they were suddenly chilled to the bone and brought to the brink of defeat quickly.

“Gyaaaaaah!!” “M-My fingers!? My fingeeers!” “F-F-Freezing... I’m freezing...!?”

Drango’s strength of will was impressive as he successfully triggered his magic resistance.

“Grrrrrr! All of you, get back! Spread out!”

The Elves who were still combat ready dragged their injured comrades into the forest.

“Hmph... Aren’t they too unskilled?”

“Such powerful magic... It’s like you really are a Demon Lord...”

“I see you can’t exhibit your own strength without a bow in hand, Drango.”

“Ugh...”

Drango stepped back. His level as an archer may have been high, but a man with sword in hand wouldn’t normally step away from a sorcerer. Did he have some sort of plan in mind?

The guards escorted the attendees away, who fled from the altar in a panic. Perhaps owing to their pastoral lifestyle, they were awfully timid and weak when time did come to do battle.

Only the queen stayed behind, ignoring the guards’ pleas.

“Shera! What are you thinking!?”

“Mother...”

“This is unforgivable!”

“I’m! I’m picking Diablo to be king!”

“This is no laughing matter! This person just proclaimed to be a Demon Lord! We can’t even count him as a member of the races!”

“But I still think Diablo is worthy of being Greenwood’s king!”

“Nonsense! Why are you always like this!? Explain yourself! What is your reasoning!?”

“I just... I just think so, that’s why!”

—Intuition, huh... Shera’s never been very articulate, so I didn’t expect her to talk anyone into this, but this is worse than I thought...

The queen, naturally, wasn’t convinced.

“Well, what will you do about producing children? If you don’t give birth to an heir, the Greenwood royal bloodline will die out!”

“Aaah...” Shera turned as red as a lobster. “Everyone keeps talking about kids this, kids that... You’re all pervs!”

“It’s a very important matter!”

“Well, I did too think this through! I even got...th-this, from Diablo!”

Shear held out her right hand, presenting a silver ring.

“I-Is that...?” The queen’s eyes widened. “An engagement ring!?”

Rem and Rose stiffened, their breaths stuck in their throats.

Shera nodded, while Diablo tilted his head in contemplation.

—Huh...? Did I ever give her something like that? Wait... Does she mean what happened in my dungeon’s treasure vault!?

Shera’s gaze suddenly fell on an item sitting on one of the pedestals: a silver-colored ring.

“You gave Rem a ring, right? I want a ring too. Can I have this one?”

“Do as you wish.”

There shouldn’t have been any cursed items in the vault, and there was plenty of useless collector’s items in here. That was why Diablo didn’t bother to check what she took.

“With this ring, I can have kids with someone from another race!” Shera

shouted.

—This ring does what*!?*

Diablo was just about to scream himself.

In *Cross Reverie*, the engagement ring was just a useless item that took up an inventory slot. Some players complained you could only obtain this item through an event that could only be accessed by a couple, and it was said players who had this ring equipped were highly likely to be actual couples, and therefore normies. Diablo, being a dedicated item collector, even obtained this disgusting item for his collection.

So, who did he participate in that couple-only event with, you may ask?

That was a piece of history Diablo dreaded touching on...

—I just made a duplicate account and married myseeelf!!!

He never imagined this engagement ring, which carried nothing but shameful memories, would enable you to produce children with any other race. He also didn't realize that he technically gifted it to Shera.

—But wait, wasn't there a ban on transferring that thing between accounts!? And I just transferred it to Shera like it was nothing! Is it because this is reality and not a game? Goddamnit, other world! Try for a little less immersion next time!

Diablo broke into a cold sweat.

—I can't even hold a proper conversation with a stranger, much less have any romantic experiences. And now I've proposed to a princess? Me, marriage? Are you telling a pill bug to fly? Just leave me out of this... It's nice under my rock. Don't drag me out under the sun!

Diablo's thoughts were spinning in his head in an incomprehensible swirl.

"Ha, hahaha..." A peculiar laughter was the only thing that escaped his throat.

"...It seems to me Diablo didn't know what that engagement ring was capable of." Rem sighed.

“There is no match for it in Rose’s database either.”

“...Probably because it’s not a weapon.”

“Rose wonders if equipping that ring would permit Rose to bestow Master with a child as well...”

“...Didn’t you claim to be a doll before? That’s not considered ‘another race.’”

“Tch!”

As that exchange came to a close, Diablo’s thoughts finally settled after their crazy trip. They were in the middle of battle right now after all. If he allowed himself to be distracted by unrelated thoughts, he may get attacked off guard.

—Focus!

He shelved the matter of his interpersonal relationships by focusing on reality and the battle before him, in what amounted to an impressive show of convoluted escapism.

“That’s...impossible...” the queen said, bewildered.

Her daughter had received an engagement ring from a Demon claiming to be a Demon Lord. She was probably beyond shocked as a mother.

But one man stood calm even in the midst of this chaos. Bracing his sword, Drango stood before the queen.

“Get back, Your Majesty! There’s no point in speaking to him any more!”

“But...”

“What are you doing, guards!? Take the queen away!”

Having been ordered, the Elven guards finally went into action. Several of them picked the queen up, carrying her away, leaving only combatants in the plaza. The spectators watched from further away, anxiously gulping.

Diablo faced Drango. “It’s time I defeat you then. Surrender now, if you value your life.”

“Hmph... You’re a peculiar one.”

“What?”

“You speak so viciously, but won’t lay a hand on fleeing soldiers or spectators.”

“That’s...”

He tried to speak, but Shera cut into his words.

“That’s because Diablo’s really kind!”

“Th-Th-That’s not true! They’re just too insignificant for me to even regard them! Now back down, fool!”

“Kyaa!?” He pushed Shera back. Catching on quickly, Rem caught her and clasped a hand over the blabbering Elf’s mouth.

“...Are you an idiot? Diablo’s probably trying to show off his power and use that terror to buy the Elves’ obedience.”

“Mmphmmph.”

Having it explained like that didn’t help set the atmosphere much either.

Diablo directed his Tonnerre Empereur at Drango.

“Enough squabble... Come at me!”

“Very well, to battle!”

Then, the ground shook.

—Huh?

The trees moaned restlessly, birds flying away as the nearby beasts began howling.

Fireballs rained from the sky.

They didn’t target just on the plaza, but the nearby Elves as well, blowing up upon impact.

“What’s going on!?” Diablo cried out.

“How cowardly of you!”

“Fool! This isn’t my magic!”

“Master, Rose detects a high density of magical energy, due north-northwest!”

Diablo could feel it even without Rose alerting him. The magical energy poured over the area, blowing like a gale. Looking in that direction, a sense of dread crept over Diablo.

“...Grr... The burial mound...”

“It can’t be! It’s too soon!” Having come to the same realization, Drango spoke in a panic.

“Tch... The seal must have been weaker than we anticipated. Or perhaps its magical energy was strong enough to tear the seal open by itself...”

“No, the seal shouldn’t have broken this quickly! It never has before!”

A black mass, as large as a castle taking to the skies, rose between the trees. It had the shape of a distorted strawberry and pulsated offbeat in sickening thumps.

The Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia.

The black sphere floated slowly through the sky, countless tentacles extending from it that squired like a swarm of enraged serpents.

A person stood atop the Demon Lord’s ominous form, no doubt the instigator of this unexpected awakening. They held a red shining crystal, their bright silver hair wavering in the wind. Their eyes were black, their skin a tanned shade of brown, and their ears were long.

It was none other than Rafflesia S. Orangewood.

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With the heart itself levitating in the air, Rafflesia was carried along by several thin tentacles. They descended on the plaza, Rafflesia’s black eyes gleaming with a crimson glow.

“A PRESENCE—I SENSED—ABOVE ME—WITH MAGICAL ENERGY—MERELY THE RACES—”

Her appearance and voice were Rafflesia's, but her pronunciations were entirely different. The tentacles extended upward from her, connecting her to Kardia like a marionette's strings. Diablo was nearly overwhelmed by the grotesquerie of it all.

But faltering here would spell defeat. Diablo took a deep breath, trying to maintain his cool.

"You... Are you Kardia?"

"CORRECT—RACES CHILD—"

"I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world. Do not treat me as one of the races, fool."

"DI—ABLO—UN—FAMILIAR—"

"Heheh... Of course a mere fragment of a Demon Lord that lost to God wouldn't know. I am the true Demon Lord; commit my name to memory!"

Drango, on the other hand, was shocked. "Is that really Kardia...!? Why was he resurrected...!?"

Rafflesia grabbed her own hand with a simple, crude gesture, the lack of any expressions on her face making it all the more unnerving.

"DARK ELF—DYED—HATRED—GRUDGE—REVENGE—LUST TO KILL—ELVES—HUMANS—SLAUGHTER—"

Rafflesia's fingers dug into her forehead, blood trailing down her face.

"Are you saying you're controlling her?" Drango moaned in fear. "A Demon Lord, manipulating that Dark Elven priestess..."

"SET FREE—DESIRES—TRUE WISHES—VEN—GEANCE—VEN—GEANCE—VENGEANCE—"

Diablo and the others lost the ability to speak in the face of Rafflesia's unnerving atmosphere and words. But Shera alone brushed the terror aside, calling out in defiance.

"You're wrong! Rafflesia said it herself, that the Elves and Dark Elves should get along! She really said that!"

Rafflesia's eyes, shining red, widened suddenly.

"G-GAAAHH—ELF—TRAITORS—I WON'T—FORGIVE—GIVE—HIM BACK—"

As she screamed, Rafflesia held out the red orb. Kardia's tentacles then extended in Shera's direction like whips.

"Princess!"

Drango covered her, guarding her with his body, but Diablo aimed his staff faster than Drango's motions.

"《Flare Burst》!"

The air exploded, immolating the approaching tentacles.

—Good, magic works on it!

It would have been a problematic opponent if it had magic reflection or nullification, but the damage didn't even seem to be reduced. Diablo had been cautious since it was an unimplemented enemy he knew nothing about, but it was surprisingly weak.

"This is strange..." Rem ran up to Diablo. "The orb Lady Rafflesia is holding was supposed to seal the Demon Lord... But if it's awakened, there's no point in holding onto it."

"Hmm. And she's holding it like it's something precious..."

"Maybe the seal is still in place!?" Rem asked, her voice brightening with hope.

"Hmph..." Diablo furrowed his brow. "Another 'incomplete Demon Lord.' This world really does seem to be holding back on me. Standing before me in such a state... You dare mock me!?"

Diablo changed his staff into a sword of light, the《Tonnerre Empereur Libre》, aiming it not at Rafflesia who stood in front of him, but at the black, heart-shaped mass floating above.

"Be reduced to nothing in the face of my magic! Have a taste of bombardment by lightning—《Enercannon》!"

A magically-generated magnetic field was formed, a cannonball beside it. In

the blink of an eye, the ball was launched, accelerating beyond the speed of sound and leaving a trail of flames from its friction after making contact with the air.

“Kyaaa?” Rem covered her cat ears at the sudden rumbling sound.

Thanks to his weapon’s effect, the spell was cast seven times over, but the MP consumption was considerable, as one may expect.

“If you don’t want to get caught up in this, then get away!” Diablo shouted.

“...Y-Yes!”

The cannonballs hit Kardia dead center, blowing away some of its tentacles.

—But what about the main body’s magic resistance?

“Impossible!” Rem’s eyes widened. “It’s unharmed!”

“Hmph... It’s only natural. It wouldn’t be a Demon Lord if a spell or two were all it took to take it down.”

Diablo’s words were confident, but his mind was in a state of panic. If it had complete magic resistance, forget a spell or two—Diablo could fire hundreds and it wouldn’t matter! It really was difficult without any pertinent information on hand.

—Well, I guess that’s par for the course for the guys writing the strategy guides...

Diablo used an MP recovery potion and a magic boosting potion he took out of his pouch.

“Tremble in fear, you deficient excuse of a Demon Lord! My barrage won’t end until your defeat! Freeze,《Ice Age》!”

“GYAAAHHH—” Rafflesia screamed, as if trying to push the spell back.

Kardia’s tentacles shot out again, bending and warping. Ten were launched...and another ten behind them, avoiding the chilling wave of sub-zero temperatures.

“Aaargh!?”

An impact smacked against Diablo’s body, sending him into the air. There was

quite a bit of force behind the blow, and Diablo's back smashed into the large tree.

"Gaaah!"

All the air in his lungs escaped at once, and he could almost feel his lunch coming back up his throat. Rem and Shera screamed at the sight unfolding before them.

—I can't stay down like this!

Bending on one knee, Diablo stood up swiftly. His body felt heavy, like there was a ball made of lead in the pit of his stomach. He'd taken considerable damage.

—That was some impressive strength...

It had an incredibly high range, and could launch so many attacks at once that it was hard to believe it was only one enemy. Even keeping up with the tentacles' movements was challenging. Its abilities were, all in all, unbalanced and utterly broken.

"Ahahaha... Good... That's what I'd expect of a final boss—of a Demon Lord!" Diablo hadn't taken his beating sitting down either.

His Ice Age spell did freeze most of Kardia's precious tentacles in place, but it still didn't seem like Kardia's main body had taken any damage.

Even as he stood confidently, Diablo kept calculating and thinking. In the game, there were also times when, despite hitting an enemy, their HP gauge didn't budge. Maybe there was some sort of trick at play here? Or maybe its HP pool was so large, Diablo's attacks hadn't managed to visibly deplete it yet.

Rafflesia grit her teeth audibly.

"Oh, what's the matter. You can't possibly be relying on your tentacles alone. I've still got plenty of vicious spells I want to try on you!"

"KILL—EVERY—ONE—STOLE HIM—FROM ME—NEVER—FOR—GIVE—A-AAAHHH—"

She wasn't even looking at Diablo. It was like fighting a berserker.

Diablo grit his own teeth in response.

“This again... If you claim lordship over others, at least have the dignity to keep your dignity intact! Fighting isn’t forgiving enough for one to win with the intelligence of a mere beast!”

“A-AAAHHH—”

Another attack by the tentacles was coming his way.

“Stop boring me, Kardia! 《Lightning Storm》!”

The high level wind and light spell trapped the tentacles in a maelstrom of wind as they were zapped by lightning. As fast as the tentacles’ attack speed may have been, they still weren’t faster than lightning. Diablo fired the spell faster than the tentacles could carry out their attack, effectively halting them.

The tentacles were reduced to ash. If Diablo kept this up, he wouldn’t be pushed back at the very least. He just had to figure out why the main body didn’t take any damage. Was it really a trick, or was it simply that bulky?

Magic energy began spilling out from the glittering orb, flowing into Rafflesia.

“A-ACK—” She coughed, blood spewing out.

“Diablo!” Shera cried out. “The Demon Lord’s magical energy is coming out of that sphere!”

“Mm...”

—So the magical energy is flowing out of the sphere and into Rafflesia...then to Kardia floating above us? Shouldn’t it be the other way around?

He’d thought the mass floating above them was the main body, and it used the orb as a means to turn Rafflesia into its medium for communicating with them...

But he once again considered what Rem had said earlier.

“Heheheh... I’ve figured you out, Kardia. Forget being incomplete... You’re still sealed, aren’t you!?”

“SHUT—UP—”

“You’re just controlling Rafflesia from inside that orb and having her fight for

you. That big lump floating there is just an illusion.”

That explained why Diablo’s spells, no matter how powerful they were or what element he employed, didn’t visibly damage it.

Diablo shifted his staff, aiming not at the heart floating above them, but at Rafflesia holding the orb.

“Lightning Arrow!”

A bullet of light was fired at the orb in her hands, traveling at a blinding speed and lethal precision. Rafflesia remained still.

The bullet of light...

...veered away before hitting the orb.

Diablo intentionally missed. Rafflesia was being manipulated, so her expression never changed. But Diablo had noticed the Demon Lord’s emotions from the fluctuations in the magical energy emanating from the orb. It had flickered for a moment. Was it from confusion? Surprise? Perhaps disappointment?

“Judging from Rem’s case, if that orb is destroyed or has magical energy poured into it, you’ll be resurrected, correct?”

Or if a ritual magic to unbind the seal was performed... Rafflesia should have known how to perform it, but didn’t. Kardia used her hatred to manipulate her like a puppet, but she probably hadn’t completely submitted to Kardia.

“Whatever the case, did you hope to get someone else to break the orb for you? Pathetic... Utterly pathetic! Do not think me to be a fool who attacks so indiscriminately.”

—A true gamer knows that the second before you snatch the win is when you have to be the most cautious!

Rafflesia’s shoulders trembled. *“UUU—U-UUU—”*

“Hmph... Did your confidence boost because you were able to wiggle your fingers outside the confines of your seal? Well, you’ve made quite the error in judgment, fool. And that was to challenge me when you were still sealed!”

“G-GAAAHHH—DAMN—YOU—DAMN YOU—”

The Kardia floating above them disappeared, as it really was nothing more than an illusion. But now it had been unmasked. All that remained was Rafflesia, standing with a vacant expression. Countless black tendrils began growing out of the orb in her hands.

“Did you think none among the races were capable of recognizing the flow of magic?” Diablo smirked. “It’s no wonder God beat you when you’re this foolish.”

In place of a scream, magical energy began flowing out of the orb. The tendrils made the air tremble, and a fireball, glowing with a light that was nearly white, appeared in the air. It was as if a small sun had appeared close to Earth. Even from a distance, Diablo could feel the heat waves, the ground gradually burning underneath his feet. Rafflesia, who stood directly beneath it, wouldn’t get away unscathed. He’d never seen this attack before.

—Is this magic? Or some sort of special attack?

Reaching out toward the small sun, Kardia bellowed using Rafflesia’s lips.

“DISAPPEAR—《FALLING SKIES》—”

“An incantation spell!”

Diablo stuck out his left hand and brandished the Demon Lord’s Ring wrapped around his finger. It was capable of deflecting all manner of magic, including a spell fired by a Demon Lord.

A shrill, high-pitched sound rang out, and the air around them undulated. The fireball, which had begun descending on them, was blown back into the sky. Kardia looked on with shock through Rafflesia’s eyes as it happened, momentarily forgetting how to form words.

“Heheh... Oh, did you try to do something just now?” Diablo said, in the most overbearing fashion he’d ever spoken. Inwardly, though, he was sweating

bullets.

—I'm so happy I have magic reflection right now!!!

Honestly speaking, since it was an attack Diablo had never encountered before, he was incredibly nervous. It looked like the type of attack that would spell doom for him had it hit.

Kardia was never implemented in the *Cross Reverie* Diablo knew. It was probably set to appear later on, and was a monster beyond level 150. That meant the spell it had just used was probably of a level that was higher than 150 as well. Diablo trembled, having felt that his life had been threatened for the first time in a long while.

The orb rolled down to the floor with a gentle sound, slipping out of Rafflesia's grasp. Her expression as vacant as it was before, she mouthed words of hatred.

"DEMON LORD—BEATEN—LOWLY RACES—IMPOS—SIBLE—"

"Is that really your defeat line? Awfully unsophisticated."

"USE—LESS VESSEL—HUMILIATION—YOUR DOING—"

"What!?" Diablo suddenly had a bad feeling.

Tentacles had spread out languidly from the orb lying on the ground near where Rafflesia was standing, having lost their strength. But a single tentacle had hardened and sharpened itself like a sword and extended toward Rafflesia, piercing her abdomen and coming out of her back.

"Gyaaah!?" Rafflesia screamed, this time with her own voice, as if the pain had brought her back to consciousness.

Kardia's tentacles dissipated and the malevolent magical energy ceased flowing from the orb. But now wasn't the time to worry about that.

Rem and the others all shrieked in surprise, and Drango bit his lip bitterly. A terrifying amount of blood had sprayed out as Rafflesia crumbled to her feet.

"Aaah...!? Aaaaaah!"

"Don't make a fool of me!"

—Know when to call it quits, you third-rate jerk! You used her to make your own ends meet, and now you're trying to take her down with you!?

Diablo broke into a run. Kicking away the orb, he knelt down next to Rafflesia, who was lying in a pool of her own blood.

"Don't you die on me!"

"Aaah... Guh... I'm...sorry..."

"Lady Rafflesia!" Rem had run up to her as well, with Shera in tow.

"Rafflesia!"

"It's no good..." Drango said, vexed. "There's no saving her when she's this badly wounded..."

"Sorr... P-Please...rgive...me..."

"It's all that Demon Lord's fault!" Shera clasped Rafflesia's outstretched hand with her own. "There's nothing to forgive. This isn't your fault, Rafflesia!"

"For...ive my...eakness... The Dark Elves...the forest..."

"I'll keep our promise!"

Rafflesia's bloodstained lips curled into a smile. "I'm...glad...you were...th...princ..."

All strength abandoned her hand.

Diablo quickly used an《Elixir》.

Rafflesia's wounds instantaneously closed, and her HP was fully recovered. It also replenished all her MP and cured any bad status effects.

"...Eh... Wh...at...?" It was all so sudden, Rafflesia could only blink in puzzlement.

"I told you not to die on me, did I not, Rafflesia?" Diablo spoke confidently, but was relieved he'd made it in time.

"Wha!? You revived her!?" Drango, who had given up hope, stared at them in

amazement.

Even the elixir, the strongest healing potion Diablo had, wasn't capable of resurrecting the dead. He'd managed to treat her in the nick of time, and that was all there was to it.

"Yaaay!" Shera hugged Rafflesia close.

"Phew..." Rem sighed in relief. "As amazing as ever, Diablo. I've lost count of how many people you've saved by now."

"Hmph... The thought of Kardia getting its way irked me, so I merely undid its efforts."

"I'm...not dead...?" Rafflesia stared at her own hand in amazement.

"You've caused us a great deal of trouble. Once you calm down, tell me everything that happened. Though I already have a pretty good idea."

Rafflesia stood up, albeit somewhat unsteadily, then fell to her knees, lowering her head.

"Sir Diablo, I nearly robbed many innocents of their lives. Not only did you stop the Demon Lord Kardia's revival, you even saved me... Please, let me thank you somehow. I offer my life to you."

"I merely thwarted the plots of the fool that dared call itself a Demon Lord in my presence. Saving you was a bonus."

"And yet I will never forget this debt for as long as I live!"

"Do as you wish."

Just when everything seemed to have finally settled down, Rose, who had stood in the back the entire time, called out.

"Master, Rose detects a high-density magical energy approaching!"

†

Diablo turned around to find two figures descending from the sky.

One was a slender, well-proportioned girl. She wore what looked like a cheongsam, with a diamond shaped opening around the chest. Her black hair was tied into a side tail on the right, and a Chinese broadsword dangled from

her waist.

She was a gorgeous young girl—but she wasn't of the races. A scaly, dragon-like tail extended from the slit of her China dress, and there was a pair of wings on her back.



—A Fallen!?

The other one was a huge Fallen, presumably a man, twice the average size of the races. He wore a suit of armor, and there was a single eye on his face.

This was a《Cyclops》-type of Fallen.

He held a Bishop's staff in one hand that was slightly taller than him, making it roughly five meters in length.

The cyclops opened his fanged mouth to speak, and his words came out surprisingly fluently.

"I thought I'd sensed Kardia's magical energy in this direction..."

Despite being Fallen, Diablo got the feeling they weren't Kardia's underlings.

"Well, he ain't here." The cheongsam girl pouted with displeasure.

"My apologies. But is that not the《Sealing Crystal》we've been ordered to find?"

The orb Diablo had kicked away just a moment ago—or rather, the Divinity Crystal Kardia was sealed in—rolled on the ground next to their feet.

"No!" Drango shouted. "We can't let the Fallen get their hands on that!"

"One mess after another, when will this end!?"

Diablo brandished his weapon, only to be met with Rose stepping forward.

"Rose will keep them in check!"

Rose's judgment was sound. If Diablo would have to use magic powerful enough to stop the Fallen, he ran the risk of damaging the orb as well. Holding them at bay through melee combat would be the optimal solution.

Rose kicked off the ground, charging at the Fallen as a massive mechanical hand materialized behind her.

The Magimatic Sol.

"《Crius》!"

She unleashed her strongest attacks right off the bat, the mechanical arm swinging its blade horizontally in a mowing slash.

But the Cyclops blocked the blow with his staff. Judging from what Diablo had seen of Rose so far, he assumed she would have cut the Fallen in half right about now, but...

A deafening metallic sound rang out as the weapons clashed, and the next moment the Cyclops immediately changed his stance to a thrust. He moved so swiftly, it almost looked like he'd skipped through most of the motions required to make such a movement.

"Gaaah!?" Rose was blown back at a speed surpassing even that of the thrust that had just hit her. She then crashed against the ground, a cloud of dust blowing around her.

"Rose!?" Diablo shouted despite himself.

"Aaah... Ugh..." Propping herself with her left hand, Rose lifted her body up.

—Good, she's still alive...

But her right hand, which should have held up her weapon, was gone. From the shoulder down, Rose's right arm was missing from its socket. It was lying on the ground a distance away, still gripping its weapon.

The Magimatic Sol disappeared, as if tracing the fate of her real arm. Diablo wasn't sure if it vanished because Rose did so of her own will, or if it was because she took too much damage...

"Oh, so you can still move, doll," the Cyclops said, seemingly impressed.

"I'll be taking this back." The dragon-tailed, China-dress Fallen picked up Kardia's orb. "You stay back here and sweep these specks of dust up, all right?"

"Roger."

"W-Wait!" Drango stepped forward. "Where are you taking that!? Do you intend to awaken Kardia!?"

Awakening the Demon Lords should be the Fallen's objective, but all they would have to do to achieve that was destroy the orb. What was the point of them taking it away?

"Heheheh... You've got it wrong, porky," the girl sneered. "We're not gonna awaken Kardia. Our great master, the Demon Overlord Modinaram, will absorb

this crystal!”

“Demon *Overlord*!? Are they the one who awakened in the Demon Lord’s Domain to the west!?”

“I don’t know or care about what the races call him.”

“And you’re saying he’s going to...absorb Kardia?”

“Master Modinaram says that if he were to fight the races while incomplete, he may eventually get pushed back. The races may be puny and weak at times of peace, but the longer the war lasts the stronger they become. So that’s why he wishes to become a complete being A-S-A-P.”

“We weren’t supposed to talk about that,” the Cyclops whispered.

“Mmm? Ah... Well, whatevs. Just slaughter ’em all. Me saying anything won’t matter so long as they’re all dead.”

“Roger.”

“Hehehehehehehh... I’m sure the Overlord will praise me for bringing him this prize. Maybe he’ll even make me stronger for this!”

“Wait!” Drango tried stopping her. “We can’t let her go!”

“Concentrate on the foe in front of you, fool!” Diablo shouted.

The Fallen girl held Kardia’s orb close, like it was terribly precious to her. If Diablo were to fire a powerful spell, he’d only end up destroying it, and letting a Demon Lord awaken in this situation was the worst thing that could happen right now.

—At worst, we’ll have to handle two Fallen on top of a Demon Lord! Any one of them is a complicated enemy to beat...

Rose’s Magimatic Sol was able to fell a Large Black Dragon with one hit, and cut smaller Fallen into pieces with no effort at all. But this Cyclops had downed her with one blow. He was a challenging foe, no doubt about it.

Judging from the dragon girl’s attitude, she must have been even stronger than him.

—These guys definitely aren’t mooks...

They were on the same level as Varakness, the Demon Lord's army general who attacked Zircon Tower, if not stronger.

The Fallen girl spread out her draconic wings, orb in hand, and began ascending into the air .

"Smell ya later then. Take care of things here."

"Roger."

The girl flew away, but Diablo kept his gaze fixed on the Cyclops.

"Rem, Shera, keep Rafflesia safe!"

"...Y-Yes! Leave her to us."

"Yeah! Watch yourself, Diablo!"

Having the two of them by Diablo's side while he fought a powerful foe was dangerous. He'd just be worrying about them keeping a safe distance from his attacks.

"Hmph..." Diablo aimed his staff at the Cyclops. "I see your strength in melee combat is impressive. But let's see how good you are when it comes to a battle of magic."

"Ridiculous."

"What?"

"When one stomps out an ant, they do not concern themselves with what skills or talents it may have had. The races are all powerless and weak."

"Heheheh... So you dare treat me as an insect, do you? Let's see if you have the skills to stand up to your bravado then!"

Diablo poured magic into the Tonnerre Empereur: Libre just as the Cyclops stepped forward. Despite his massive frame, his speed was inconceivable, and he closed the distance between him and Diablo rapidly.

"Zaaargh!"

He stabbed the bishop's staff forward, but Diablo unleashed his spell even faster than that.

“《Darkness Cannon》!”

It was a high level darkness element spell that fired a pitch black cannon ball at the opponent. Thanks to his weapon’s effect, it became a bombardment of seven shots.

“Gaaaaaah!?” The Fallen’s silver armor crumbled away as he dramatically leaned back.

However, Diablo’s eyesight was dyed in red as well.

“...Guh!?”

Even though he picked a powerful spell that was quick to take effect, all he managed to do was hit his opponent just as his opponent struck him. And even though the attack didn’t seem particularly powerful, Diablo still took considerable damage.

“A weakling of the races has damaged me...!?” The Cyclops seemed surprised at them mutually hitting each other. He raised his voice in surprise, but Diablo smirked confidently.

“Good... I felt that one. You’re more formidable than Kardia was. Even though you’re nothing but a stupid underling!”

“I’ll crush you!”

Using his superior height, the Cyclops brought down the staff down on Diablo. The moment Diablo perceived it, it had already smashed against the earth. It really was much too fast.

“But your movements are nothing short of predictable!”

And if Diablo could predict how he’d attack, Diablo could also evade his attacks easily enough.

This ability to foresee the flow of battle along with his reaction speed were what enabled Diablo to prosper in close quarters combat, despite being a Sorcerer.

He brandished Tonnerre Empereur: Libre, which was in the shape of a broadsword now.

A Sorcerer’s low Strength stat meant that even with a powerful weapon, he couldn’t expect to deal much physical damage. That was why Diablo depended on spells that required being in close proximity with the target.

“Be reduced to dust—《Matoi Izuna》!”

A sphere of electricity jumped out of the tip of his blade, sinking into the Cyclops’s massive frame.

“Gahahagah!?” the Cyclops screamed, his body twitching as sparks of electricity ran out of it. His massive eyeball seemed to be seething in its socket.

Matoi Izuna was a spell that mixed the wind and light elements, which then continually depleted the enemy’s HP over a fixed period of time while also stunning them in place, resulting in massive overall damage.

An explosion enveloped the Cyclops and a pillar of light burst out, extending to the heavens.

When the Fallen are defeated, they turn into particles of light. However, the Cyclops still stood before Diablo, even with his flesh charred and burned.

“Kill!”

“Sturdy bugger, aren’t you...”

“Oooooh!”

As he screamed, the Fallen swung his staff around blindly. He began fighting haphazardly, in a way Diablo wouldn’t be able to predict. Even when driven to this situation, the Cyclops’s judgment remained sound.

With his choices whittling down, Diablo had to retreat, but the Cyclops was faster when it came to closing the distance.

“Die!” The Cyclops brandished his staff.

“Your attacks are precise, I’ll give you that. But you’re not looking around you.”

“Ah...!?” The Cyclops’s head went flying.

Standing behind him was Rose, with the Magimatic Sol manifested. She was missing her right arm, but her left was swung horizontally, and the massive

hand extending out of thin air slashed in a clear line, tracing the movements of her real hand with the gigantic two-bladed sword in its grip.

“Haa, haa... Do not lay...a hand...on Master!”

“Well done, Rose. Leave the rest to me.”

“...Y-Yes.” Her lips shivered.

Rose was a Magimatic Maid; a machine. Her expressions and gestures were all handled by an AI. But still, her emotions were painfully obvious to Diablo. She had her pride, and she couldn’t take this defeat lying down.

Diablo had enticed the Fallen to come after him in a straight line, so Rose would be able to attack him. But even with a severed head, the Cyclops didn’t disappear. Devoid of eyesight or thought, the Cyclops’s fighting spirit hadn’t diminished in the slightest, and the body continued swinging the staff. The Cyclops’s flurry of attacks remained as fervent as ever.

Diablo brandished his longsword. “Persistent fool. It looks like once wasn’t enough to teach you the lesson! Matoi Izuna!”

The Fallen’s massive body crumbled away, finally dissolving into particles of light.

Rose nodded in satisfaction, while Rem and Shera cheered as Rafflesia sighed in relief.

Drango stood stupefied, having borne witness to battle of a scale and dimension he never knew possible.

The Elves ran toward them all from the forest, raising their voices. Diablo put himself on guard, preparing for the worst, but the Elves simply called out to him, their words praising his victory.

Epilogue

A large number of Elves returned to the plaza still covered with the scars of battle.

Drango knelt down before Diablo, his sword at his side.

“Please forgive me for the many indignities I’ve inflicted upon you, m’lord.” Apparently seeing the vivid gap in their abilities made Drango change his mind.

They had no more reason to fight, but a Demon Lord couldn’t be kind enough to put grudges behind him so quickly.

“Hmph... What’s the matter? Aren’t you going to pick up from where we left off?” Diablo said tauntingly.

“Surely you jest, m’lord. I could never best you. On the contrary, I see now how hard you endeavored to not hurt us needlessly...”

“No, ah...”

He tried denying it, but the fact he was holding back against Drango and the Elves was clear as day after they’d seen him fight seriously.

Shera stood beside Diablo, a grin on her lips. She’d usually be clinging to him, but right now she was hugging Rafflesia’s arm.

Rafflesia, on the other hand, frowned despondently. Her conscience was probably tormenting her over the destruction she’d caused while Kardia was manipulating her. And sure enough, some of the blame did lay with her, but perhaps because Shera was as friendly to her as she was, no one criticized or blamed her.

Perhaps her being part of Diablo’s—their savior’s—group was also a factor.

“...Please don’t collapse here,” Rem said, supporting Rose with her shoulders. “Getting crushed to death by a maid is not how I pictured my final moments.”

“Rose reports a peculiar phenomenon. For an unexplained reason, Rose feels quite prone to collapsing at the moment.”

“...Stop that.”

If only in terms of attitude, Rose seemed to be back to normal, but her right arm was still missing. Potions or healing miracles apparently weren’t capable of treating this. Rose may have been extremely efficient, but was equipped with the flaw that she couldn’t be treated by normal means. They’d have to find another way to deal with this.

“Isn’t Diablo amazing!?” Shera exclaimed, facing the other Elves with a smug expression.

Being showered with compliments was an awkward affair, and the fact no one denied it made it even worse.

Drango nodded. “We are all humbled by your discerning eye, Princess. Were it just us, we wouldn’t have been able to defeat those Fallen.”

—One got away though...

Diablo didn’t put that thought to words however. He didn’t want to rain on such a victorious parade. The Elves didn’t skimp out on their praise after all.

“Hear me, one and all!” Drango rose to the half-destroyed altar. “The races are facing an unprecedented crisis! This matter pertains not just to the Humans or the Elves, but to the races as a whole! For the Fallen have said that the Demon Overlord has been revived!”

“...Demon Overlord...!?” The Elves all stirred nervously.

“The Demon Overlord Modinaram is said to be the《Demon Lord of Madness》. It seems he absorbs the other sealed Demon Lords in an attempt to become a complete Demon Lord. What is the Kingdom of Greenwood to do in the face of this crisis!? Who is to be our king!?”

Some voices from the crowd seemed to encourage and recommend Drango. It was only natural some would think so, as his leadership skills were true enough.

But Drango shook his head. “Forgive me, my brethren... I cannot take on the crown. I’m sure you all understand after having seen that battle. I am not fit to rule in such turbulent times.”

“Who should it be then!?”

“...Greenwood needs a king right now,” said one young Elf. “And with the hard times looming ahead, it would have to be a strong king. An overwhelmingly powerful king, capable of fighting the Demon Overlord and surviving to tell the tale!”

The Elves’ gazes all naturally focused on one point, settling on Diablo.

“I ask of you once again, Lord Diablo.” Drango stepped down from the altar. He knelt once more. “Please, protect the Kingdom of Greenwood and Princess Shera.”

The other Elves followed in his footsteps, getting on their knees before him. Only one remained standing, frowning in astonishment.

The queen stood there, gazing at him wordlessly.

“Unsatisfied, are you?” Diablo crossed his hands, standing before her.

“There’s no doubting that an unprecedented crisis is upon us. And I agree the Kingdom of Greenwood needs a strong king. Your strength is overwhelming...to a terrifying degree. Had it not been for you, the kingdom would have been lost and Shera and myself would have been put back into the earth.”

“I’m not an Elf though.”

“That doesn’t matter. A king can only be considered worthy when the people acknowledge him as such. So long as you’re still resolved to fight, that is.”

—I fundamentally don’t have that kind of gut. I’m a shut-in gamer for crying out loud!

But he couldn’t abandon them at a time like this. He knew he’d regret it if he refused now.

“I am a Demon Lord summoned from a most chaotic other world!” Diablo declared haughtily. “I go wherever I please and fight whomever I wish. So long as you understand and abide by that, I will protect you whenever the mood takes me.”

“Thank you. Please, do keep this country safe.” The queen bowed respectfully before him.

“All hail the king! All hail God! The Kingdom of Greenwood is eternal!” the Elves all cheered enthusiastically.

A melody accompanied their voices, the commotion gradually becoming a hymn of praise.

—They look so happy...

Shera raised her voice in song too, Rem and Rafflesia looking over everything with soft expressions.

Diablo felt his lips slacken into a smile as well.

†

The plaza was still filled with the Elves’ singing, but Diablo and his group retired to the guest hall, claiming they needed time to recover from the battle.

Diablo was alone in his room with Rose. She had taken off the top of her now tattered dress and they inspected her right shoulder.

Diablo wasn’t very knowledgeable when it came to machinery, but the joint on her shoulder, which looked like a metallic bowl, was visibly crushed. Likewise, the ball joint on her detached arm was out of place.

Put simply, her arm was completely and utterly broken.

“He really did a number on you.”

“Pardon Rose, Master. This defeat was beyond embarrassing.”

“A potion or a priest can’t do anything about this, can they?”

“No, since Rose is Magimatic.”

“Is there anyone who could have you fixed?”

For starters, the game’s story didn’t mention anything about how Magimatics were made or who invented them.

“There is no record in Rose’s database regarding who may have created Rose, but there is a maintenance bay Rose can use in Master’s base.”

“The Demon Lord’s Labyrinth...”

“Rose will not be able to service Master properly with only one hand.”

“Yes, that much is true...” Diablo sighed.

He put her top back on, so as to not accidentally lay eyes on her exposed front.

“Specifically, Rose has been rendered incapable of performing specific jobs with Rose’s hands and fondling Master.”

“You’ve never done that to begin with!” Diablo shouted. He then coughed dryly to compose himself. “I’ve no need of such services, but you won’t be able to perform as our vanguard like this. You should get yourself repaired as soon as you can.”

“Yes, Master.”

Diablo’s base, the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth, was in the Demon Lord’s Domain, near Zircon Tower. But the citizens of Zircon Tower had evacuated the city after the Demon Lord’s army attacked them, and it wasn’t a stronghold of the races anymore.

“Traveling by foot may be an issue. I guess we’ll have to teleport again.”

Diablo had countless teleportation items in his reserves, but since Rose was considered an item, she couldn’t use them on her own. She was capable of easily transporting herself within the labyrinth itself, but Diablo would have to teleport there first.

“Rose is causing so much trouble for Master...” She hung her head. “Rose is a failure of a maid.”

“Rose...”

Diablo embraced her lowered head, to show how precious she was to him.

“M-Master...!?”

Rose was uncharacteristically flustered, but she didn’t reject him.

Diablo did this because he thought she wouldn’t mind, but he was still relieved to see she didn’t dislike it.

“You always tackling great dangers before the rest of us is a great help to me.

You only got hurt because I was too slow to deal with the situation. I should have noticed everything sooner, and done something to keep the Fallen in check before they snuck in on us."

Dealing with both of those Fallen while trying to protect everyone around him would have been difficult though...

"Master is always perfect in everything Master does!"

"...No, I'll have to get stronger to become someone who's capable of that."

He then began speaking of something that had been on his mind for a while.

"If you level up a second class in this world, you get to keep your abilities from your first class."

"Yes."

"So I think I'll try my hand at becoming a Warrior."

"A warrior, Master!?"

"Does it not suit me?"

Diablo didn't know anything about the Demon Overlord Modinaram, but if he were a Warrior-type Fallen, he'd be even faster than the Cyclops. Even that Fallen girl in the China dress was possibly leagues above Diablo when it came to speed.

Just evading like he had until now wouldn't be enough if he were to fight them while defending his companions, and suppressing them with superior firepower wouldn't always cut it. He needed to be capable of taking hits too.

—Never thought the day would come when I'd decide to become a Brawler Sorcerer...

"I've heard an interesting rumor from a certain Warrior. Once matters settle down in this country, I intend to visit the northern mountains."

"If that is what Master thinks is for the best, there can be no better path to tread. Do what Master thinks is right, Master. Rose will heal these unsightly wounds on the bed, dreaming of the day Rose will be able to serve Master again. For as long as Rose has to wait..."

“I don’t intend to squander my time though.”

Leveling up in this world was difficult. It would normally take him a lifetime to master the blade. But if he was able to train as a Warrior while retaining his skills as a Sorcerer, it would offer a shortcut that’d never be possible in the game.

This was an experiment he would need to try.

†

At night—

Nights in the Elven country were always so dark. They were blessed with night vision, and didn’t have need of lighting.

Diablo looked down on his surroundings from the royal living room atop a large tree.

—All I can see is a dark forest...

Drango was standing by his side. “Fine work today, Your Majesty.”

He still couldn’t get used to it, but since he’d been crowned and became the king of Greenwood, he was now in a position to be called, “Your Majesty.”

It was after Diablo had delivered Rose to his base...

Diablo held a meeting that lasted into the night with those in high positions in the Elves’ society, discussing their policy going forward. That said, a novice like him wasn’t in any position to comment on how to run a government. Diablo mostly just watched the ensuing debate.

The idea of a person from modern times being thrown into the middle ages and revolutionizing everything with nothing but words was an absurd one. A country was a collective, and a foolish, emotional, lazy one at that.

That didn’t apply just for visitors. History has shown that wise idealists and their accurate suggestions could easily be discarded by the foolish people, and there were more examples of that than Diablo had free time to name them all. So if anyone were to suggest revolutionizing these middle ages, Diablo would simply say, “It’s the same as trying to send monkeys to a school.”

The wise may offer ten good suggestions, but before they could finish explaining the third, the people would simply get bored and start dancing. That's what the masses...what the country, was like.

He'd become king because the people wished him to, and he wished to protect Shera's homeland from the Demon Lord. But he didn't care for the Elves' easygoing lifestyle, and had no intention of getting involved with their internal affairs.

"I leave all matters of government to you. Do your job well."

"Yes, I will do as you say to the best of my ability. Having served as the late king's aide has given me quite a bit of insight into these matters. You needn't worry over internal affairs, Your Majesty."

"Good."

Were it a more peaceful time, Drango becoming king would surely have been better for the Elves.

Diablo then remembered something that had been bothering him.

"Hmph, when we first met, you kept talking in this really weird tone."

"Th-That's..."

Drango's acting was so bad that even Diablo, who wasn't very keen when it came to seeing through lies, had noticed.

"Were you trying to get Shera to dislike you? Why?"

"I never was one for acting, was I..." Drango scratched his head awkwardly. "I suspect the mother queen had seen through me as well, same as you."

"I think you had Shera fooled, though, thanks to her being so simple-minded."

Drango looked left and right. "If possible, I'd like to keep this a secret..."

"Speak, I order it. I will decide to keep it a secret after hearing it."

"How outrageous..." Dropping his shoulders, Drango opened his mouth to speak with an unusually serious expression.

"You see, I prefer women with smaller breasts."

“...What?”

“Elven women are slender, and that’s quite lovely and all, but having flat chests means they can be indistinguishable from male Elves. That’s a bit lacking in charm. Ah, I’m not interested in men of course. Female bodies that don’t have needless flab are, in my eyes, sublime beauty, and have a certain perfection of shape that borders on art. I’d even go so far as to say that the sight of a rib cage sticking out of a slender body is one I find sexually appealing. Young bodies are attractive, of course, but I find the fact that you cannot easily communicate with children off-putting. In that regard, Grasswalkers are quite the treasure, and—”

“Shut up before I smack you.”

“P-Pardon.” Drango blushed shamefully.

Diablo sank into thought.

—Hmm, I guess it makes sense. Shera is busty, unlike most Elves, and her head is lacking to the point of being as hard to communicate with as a child. She’s the polar opposite of his tastes.

Diablo was personally of the opinion that all boobs are equal, without discrimination of size and shape, but... Everyone was free to have their own sexual preferences, and Diablo felt like it would be bad to not help him out here.

“Continue along the path you believe in.” Diablo nodded. “I permit it. There is value to be found even in the absence of things.”

“Oooh... You are so open-minded! Your clemency humbles me and makes me feel like such a small man for taking these strides to hide my interests. You truly are a worthy king!”

“No, keep it a secret.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

Diablo wasn’t sure how he felt about being dubbed a “worthy king” just because he showed solidarity with a small breasts enthusiast.

The direction of the wind changed, and Diablo playfully caught a leaf fluttering through the air.

“Isn’t it time for you to go, Your Majesty?”

“Hmm... Is it better to do this so soon?”

“Yes.”

“The blessing of the forest has returned. The mother queen understands that we must set out on a journey, so I have no need to linger in the forest for much longer. There’s no telling when the Demon Lord’s army may march, so we should leave as soon as possible.”

“Ah, no...”

“You mean the Fallen? True, I beat the Cyclops, but the other one may attack us again. If that happens, run. You can’t ever hope to match her.”

“That’s not...what I mean, Your Majesty.”

“What is it then?”

“It’s time for the first night... Princess Shera... Pardon. *Queen Shera* is awaiting you.”

—For real?

“F-First night...?”

“The people are looking forward to seeing an heir. Oh, the royal bedchambers are just beyond that branch. They’re on the third tree away from this one. The mother queen has already moved out of the room, so you can make yourself at home there.”

“R-Right.”

“I’ll take my leave then, my liege. Do be gentle. I’m sure you’ve already consummated your relationship by now, so I’m sure you’re used to it however.”

—Shera and I aren’t in that kind of relationship!

Diablo got the feeling Drango had the wrong idea about them...

“There’s no need for you to think about those sorts of things!”

“As you say, Your Majesty. I will be off then.”

Drango bowed and left, going up the tree.

Rem and Rafflesia were already fast asleep in the guest house, and Rose was resting on her bed in the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth.

The Elves were expecting him and Shera to produce an heir...

Diablo turned his gaze to the forest’s branches and saw a faint light flickering in the night’s gloom. The Elves had no need for illumination, which meant these lights were meant for him, to guide his way to her...

—The first night? Seriously!?

To be continued...

Afterword

Thank you very much for reading Volume 7 of *How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord*.

This is Yukiya Murasaki, the author.

I've gotten halfway through writing Horn's academy arc, but I ran out of pages, so I hope I'll be able to find the chance to include it next time. I already have the story in mind, so I think I'll be able to publish it at some point.

At first I planned this volume to be the opener for the Demon Overlord arc, but the Dark Elf segments ended up having more content than I planned, so it ended up only going as far as the Elven forest part. I did manage to introduce the Demon Overlord's underlings, so I somehow ended up fitting in something of what I wanted in the end...

If I'd have written it with the same page restriction as a typical light novel, I wouldn't have managed to include everything, but I have my editor's approval for this and we can deliver a somewhat larger page count than usual this time around.

I think it's the first time I introduced two towns in one volume? And I introduced some new characters too. Nothing would make me happier than to know you enjoyed it.

Next volume is set to include Diablo's training arc. Look forward to see him power up even more!

Now for some thank-yous:

To Takahiro Tsurusaki, thank you yet again for another volume of wonderful illustrations! They're only getting more extreme and cute with each volume. You've now reintroduced me to the wonders of brown Elves.

To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow, thank you as always.

To my editor, Shouji. You set up the schedule so we'd have more than enough time...but somehow things ended up the same way as always. I'm sorry. It's thanks to you this volume got published.

To everyone at Kodansha's editorial department and all those involved with the work, to the family and friends who supported me, and to my many readers who read this book: I offer a thank you of the highest level!

Yukiya Murasaki

1. Cover
2. Color Illustrations
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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 7

by Yukiya Murasaki

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