HOW NOT TO SUMMON A DEMON LORD

VOLUME 8



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Beads of sweat began
forming on Rafflesia's skin.
"Nnn... Nnn... Nnn... Nnn...
How is it, Your Majesty?"


Klem nodded with an
absentminded expression.
"Haaa... Diablo.
Bathing feels good..."


...someone barged into the dining hall.
"Diablo?!" Rem appeared, raising her voice while wearing her sleeping gown.

CHARACTERS



Diablo

A top player of a game very similar to this world. He is in fact socially inept, and can't communicate without acting the part of his in-game character. AKA: "The Demon Lord from Another World"



Rem Galleu

A pantherian summoner. The Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed in her body, but she finally removed her after much hardship. Serious to a fault.



Shera L Greenwood

Princess of the Elves. Choosing Diablo as the king of her country, she finally became queen. Claims to be a summoner, but is a much more skilled archer. Speaks in a light, easygoing fashion.



Rafflesia S Orangewood

Chief and priestess of the dark elves. Has *giga* boobs.



Drango

Has the appearance of an orc, but is the astute chancellor of the elven kingdom. Secretly a flat chest aficionado.



Klem

The Demon Lord Krebskulm who was sealed within Rem's body. Surprisingly took the form of a young, biscuit-loving girl upon revival. Lives in Faltra, pretending to be a member of the races.



Edelgard

A Fallen who endeavoured to revive Klem. Works at a bakery to finance her Demon Lord's biscuit-guzzling ways.

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 led 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's 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.

While there, Diablo claimed back his own dungeon, gained many pieces of helpful equipment and items, and fought off the new Demon Lord's army, gaining new allies in the process: the grasswalker, Horn, and the magimatic maid, Rose.

Diablo and his group then made their way to the Royal Capital, where they stormed the Grand Cathedral and faced off against the Cardinal Authority and the paladins. Lumachina's unshakable faith made Diablo's plans go off course, but they had still somehow cleared the church of its corruption.

Shortly after, Horn decided to change classes and study to become a sorcerer, leaving for the magic academy.

The group, minus Horn and Lumachina, then headed for the dark elves' village, seeking to remove what remained of the Demon Lord's soul within Rem's body. After some hardship within the dark elves' secluded dwelling, they got the chief, Rafflesia, to join their side. Thus they successfully removed the Demon Lord's vestiges from Rem's body.

But they could not celebrate, however. Having been informed that the elven king, Shera's father, had passed away, the four traveled to her homeland where Shera was already engaged to a pig-faced elf called Drango (for the sake of the country, of course). Diablo attempted to prevent the wedding, but it was all interrupted by Rafflesia, who's body had been subjugated by the Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia.

Forced into combat with not just Kardia, but the servants of the Demon Overlord Modinaram, Diablo just barely achieved victory. These battles forced Diablo to recognize that he would need to level up to face the challenges ahead, so he declared: "I think I'll try my hand at becoming a warrior."

But having become the new elven king, Diablo would first have to overcome what would be perhaps one of the most menacing obstacles he'd ever been confronted with...

The first night? Seriously?!

Prologue

Looking up, Diablo made out the twinkling of the stars between the foliage overhead. Surrounded by the chirping of insects, Diablo looked down at the ground from the peak of the high tree. There was nothing in sight, as if a bottomless pit had spread out beneath him.

The elves were graced with night vision, and didn't use fire to illuminate darkness. On top of that, the people of this world went to sleep when the sun set, and awakened at the rise of dawn. Diablo had gotten used to living by that rhythm, and was already feeling sleepy.

Looks like this world's making me lead a healthier lifestyle...

In his original world, online games made up the entirety of Diablo's life. *Cross Reverie* had player vs. player gameplay, so many among its player base spent nights competing and trying to get stronger (though this wasn't relevant for Diablo as his lack of interpersonal skills meant he never participated in things that required cooperation). Back then, Diablo would fall asleep just before the crack of dawn and wake up in the afternoon.

The sound of footsteps rustling against the leaves snapped Diablo out of his thoughts. He was met with an orc-faced elf.

"Your Majesty," he said.

Diablo had become king of the elves, the new ruler of the Kingdom of Greenwood. He'd always presented himself as a Demon Lord, but to actually lord over the elves was a...peculiar thing, to say the least.

The tree Diablo was standing on right now was the residence of the royal family, and the pig-faced elf who spoke was Drango. While his appearance may have been distinctly orc-like, Drango was quite adept with economics and politics, and a decent warrior as well. He did have some peculiar tendencies, but that was neither here nor there.

"A fine job today, Your Majesty."

"Hmph..." Diablo nodded with a haughty expression.

Diablo was bad when it came to talking to people, and if he attempted to respond as his true self, he'd find himself choking on his words. What if he angered the other side? What if he disappointed someone, or was made a laughingstock of? The anxiety paralyzed him.

Instead, he acted out the image of the character he played in-game. The Demon Lord Diablo was in fact a timid, socially-inept man incapable of communicating.

"The meeting lasted longer than expected, until such a late hour. Forgive me, My Lord." Drango lowered his head apologetically. "Small as we may be, we are still a country, and we must ensure the people all agree with your ascension."

How exactly do I reply to that?

How was a Demon Lord supposed to respond to appreciation? He should be proud and overwhelming; a presence that struck fear in the hearts of others.

But Diablo realized the elves were terribly confused by this menacing situation, so he wished to appear cooperative. The most he could do was fight the enemy, so he parted his lips with the intention of presenting that aspect of himself.

"I will annihilate them all."

"N-No!" Drango said in a flustered panic. "The people are all pleased with your coronation, and accept you with awe and trust! I apologize if my words have offended you, Your Highness!"

"...Hmm?" Diablo didn't expect Drango to act this frightened. He thought Drango would seem encouraged or think he was dependable.

"Your Majesty, was what those Fallen said this afternoon really true?" Drango changed the subject.

"Hmph... I doubt it. Merely their strength was no lie."

"So the Demon Overlord Modinaram...truly has awakened."

Diablo knew Modinaram's name from *Cross Reverie* where it appeared as the "Demon Lord of Madness," a boss in a time-limited event during Golden Week. In the game, it utilized both a spear and magic to deal damage, and its stats

were abnormally high. However, it would commit all sorts of odd, illogical actions during battle, like buffing its opponents or debuffing itself. As such, even low-level players had a lucky chance of beating it. Conversely, higher-leveled players had a chance of losing.

In response, the players complained to no end. Posts like, “This is too RNG dependent,” “Keep your gacha out of the boss battles,” and, “The admins are the mad ones here,” filled up the message boards. But the boss did drop a very rare item, so for all their complaints, the majority of players participated in the event, Diablo included of course.

I doubt he’s the same as the one in the game though.

Modinaram never called itself a Demon Overlord in *Cross Reverie*, and didn’t absorb the other Demon Lords either. This one was completely different, so it would probably be best to consider him an unknown boss monster and not even try to rely on knowledge from the game.

“Was Modinaram after the Demon Lord of the Heart, Kardia, that was sealed in these lands?”

“Yes, though I’m sad to say they managed to steal it away... There is no end to the shame.”

“Hmph... I need only defeat it. That weakling can consume as many of its fellow underlings as it wishes, it will not change what it is. I am the true Demon Lord, and I will roast it to ash!”

Can I really beat it though?

Diablo spoke confidently, trying to keep with his Demon Lord role play. But his senses as a gamer warned him clearly.

The way I am right now, it would be difficult.

Fighting a level’s mooks often gave one a glimpse into how strong its boss would be, and Diablo didn’t think he would win for certain.

But Drango’s expression, who didn’t know what was going through Diablo’s mind, slackened in relief. “It’s so encouraging to have you as our king, Your Majesty.”

“Hmph... I’ll take care of everything.”

“It seems God has acknowledged your coronation as well. The withering trees are regaining their vigor and producing larger fruit already.”

Drango pointed as if to demonstrate, but Diablo couldn’t see anything in the dark. Even if there were light out, Diablo wouldn’t be able to discern those sorts of changes in the forest’s flora.

“God, you say...”

“I’m sure you have His blessing. Some had their doubts at first since we’ve never coronated someone who isn’t an elf, but it seems there was no cause for concern.”

“It’s odd.”

“What are you referring to, My Liege?”

“You say this forest keeps giving you its blessings for as long as the country has a king, correct?”

“Yes, that is because of our oath with God.”

“At first I thought it was merely that a country goes into decline without a ruler, but you say the trees are actually reviving and bearing fruit.”

“Yes, without a doubt.”

“And in this world, priests are capable of performing ‘healing miracles of God,’ which can even restore lost limbs.”

“That would be a miracle of particularly high degree, I believe.”

“Very recently...I was in the capital, where I fought against the church. The current High Priest’s faith is true and honest. She was willing to offer her life up to God.”

“I would expect no less from a person of such standing.”

“But even as assassins turned their blades on her, when a deadly curse tormented her, or when she sat imprisoned, God did not reach out to save her.”

“What?! Such things happened to the High Priest...?”

“Does God truly exist in this world?”

“...God does exist,” Drango said after a pause. “But the mortal races cannot comprehend his intentions and ways... At least, that is what I believe.”

“Hmph.”

Drango’s words reminded Diablo of what Lumachina would say. And while he was far from convinced, all he could do was accept those words for now.

The two exchanged words for a while longer...

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Eventually, Drango said, “It’s time for the first night... Princess Shera...pardon. *Queen* Shera is awaiting you.”

“F-First night...?”

“The people are looking forward to seeing an heir.”

The elven kingdom flourished so long as it had a king, so the people naturally wanted to see an heir as well. With two princes dead and their king recently having passed away, Shera was the last remaining bearer of the royal bloodline.

“Oh, the royal bedchambers are just beyond that branch.” Drango pointed toward the forest. “They’re on the third tree 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 you must be used to it however.”

Drango definitely had the wrong idea about Diablo and Shera’s relationship, though there were a few times he’d touched her body on accident...

Put simply, Diablo had no experience whatsoever when it came to this. A grand total of zero experience points when it came to...bedtime etiquette.

Rem and Rafflesia were already fast asleep in the guest house. Rose, who’d lost her right arm in battle, was resting on a maintenance dock in the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth.

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 those lights were meant for him, to guide his way to *her*...

The first night? Seriously?!

"No, no, no... It's way too early for me to be having kids... I'm not emotionally prepared for this..."

Forgetting his Demon Lord persona, Diablo turned his back.

But I'm a king, and Shera's my queen, so this isn't actually all that early... If nothing else, the elves want this, and Shera realizes what this means...

Diablo swallowed nervously and began walking toward the luminescent light.

"...Well, it *is* Shera we're talking about here. She's probably fast asleep by now... Yeah, I can see it already..."

The branch was magically illuminated, and the room was covered by vines extending in a half-globe, shielding it from peering eyes. Inside, the bed was made of grass and leaves stacked together. Shera sat on it, clad in a wedding gown, wearing a nervous expression.

She's still awake...



Chapter 1: Experiencing the First Night

“Ah...” Noticing Diablo’s arrival, Shera turned her emerald gaze to him.

“Hm.”

“Hm” what?! Diablo asked himself, but couldn’t even provide himself an answer.

“Erm...I may be in-ex-per-ien-ced but...um... Please be gentle with me...”

Stammering out those words with difficulty—likely having been told to say them by her mother—Shera lay back on the leaf-covered bed. Diablo, on the other hand, had no idea what to do.

“A-Are you going to sleep?”

“Erm, no? I don’t really know... Mother said that, on the first night, I should just give my body up for you like this and leave everything to you, and it’ll all be fine.”

Diablo didn’t know how it went for other couples, but in his case, leaving everything to him wouldn’t result in any sort of “fine” result! He somewhat hoped it’d be like his dating sims, where all he had to do was click the mouse and the scene would progress on its own.

Why didn’t this world implement auto-mode yet?!

That said, a Demon Lord being inept when it came to handling a woman would be awfully lame.

“Hmph... Leave it to me,” Diablo said, his lips curving up.

“Yeah...” Shera said, blushing. “You really are amazing, Diablo. It’s like you know everything.”

“Of course I do. I’m a Demon Lord after all.”

He broke out in a cold sweat. This was more nerve-racking than fighting Kardia!

If I screw this up, the shame would kill me!

“...Diablo...” Shera parted her crimson lips to speak. “Thank you so much for always saving me.”

“Hmm? Ah, it just happened to suit my interests...”

“I mean when you beat Keera and his soldiers when they tried to kidnap me... Or when those weird adventurers carried me away... You even protected me from Faltra’s governor, and from the dragon, and all those monsters too.”

“It all just aligned with my interests.”

“I was almost forced to marry Drango, but you saved me from that too.”

“You’d be surprised how articulate he can be. He might have granted you a happy home, you know?”

He may look like an orc, but his abilities and personality weren’t too bad. It was no wonder the queen nominated him to be the next king.

“Mmm...” Shera tilted her head. “He may be a really nice elf, but...something feels off about him.”

“Your intuition is as sharp as ever.”

Drango was a bona fide small breast lover, while Shera was the unusual case of a busty elf after all.

Diablo felt his gaze wander toward Shera. Her dress didn’t have that much fabric to it, and exposed her skin a fair bit. Her natural swellings seemed propped to spill out of it.

Am I allowed to touch them now?

He’d only ever touched them on accident, never voluntarily for no reason other than simply wanting to touch them.

I can touch a girl’s boobs just because I want to now?!

“Am I really allowed to do that...?”

“What’s wrong, Diablo?”

“Ah, nothing.”

It’s okay, right?! Diablo shook his head. *We’re a married couple now! A*

married couple*! Even though I can't talk to women... I never even had a girlfriend!*

It felt like a pill bug was not only forced, but also suddenly able to fly under the sun.

Is Shera really happy marrying a pill bug like me?

Diablo's pacifism was settling in at full force. Shera was the sole survivor of the elven royal bloodline, and had to marry someone or the forest would lose its blessings. This was a political marriage, and she chose Diablo because he was wrong. That was the only reason.

Shera called him her companion before, but he didn't recall her ever having looked at him romantically. She'd just said it herself, "Thank you so much for always saving me." Gratitude and romance were different, something even a socially inept dunce like Diablo could understand.

Defending someone from an enemy, healing their wounds, rescuing them from poverty... Those acts brought upon gratitude. But someone being grateful didn't mean they'd fallen in love with you. If that were the case, doctors and police officers would all be hosting harems.

Gratitude was one thing while love was another.

Any guy who thinks a chick would fall in love with them just because they saved her are fundamentally overconfident.

Diablo stopped his hand from extending toward Shera.

"*Diablo...love you...*" Shera whispered as she closed her eyes.

Diablo's breath stuck in his throat. Those words echoed in his mind time and time again, their meaning becoming gradually clearer in his stupefied mind.

"Shera, you..." He couldn't hold back the tremor in his voice.

"Aaah... Mmm..." With her eyes shut, she sighed quietly as she slumbered.

"Huh? H-Hey?"

"Nnn... Mmmm... I love...fruit too..."

Diablo heaved out the breath that was stuck in his throat, sighing. "You're

talking in your sleep?!”

I should have known!

Shera’s chest moved up and down in accordance with her breath, as large and round as ever. But Diablo couldn’t do anything. If he was ever the kind to just act on his desires, he would have surely led a different life.

Should I just go to sleep too...?

That didn’t seem possible. If he’d spend the night lying next to Shera, unable to lay a finger on her like this, he’d probably be too agonized and end up staying awake the whole night.

“...No... Guess I’ll sleep in the guest house.”

He’d planned to leave Greenwood tomorrow, so he needed to recover his lost MP. Leaving behind Shera, who was fast asleep, Diablo walked out of the royal bedchambers.

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He descended the large tree that made up the royal residence, using a branch he’d borrowed that was illuminated by magic. Its light soon illuminated someone’s figure.

Who’s there?

His gaze fell on a girl with black cat ears. Her limbs were short and her chest was small and level, but her form was toned and supple.

“Huh?! Diablo, why are you...?!” Her dark eyes widened in surprise.

“Rem. I could ask you the same question... What are you doing here?”

“Err... I, uhm... When I thought of you and Shera spending the night together, it...it left me rather distraught.”

“Hmm.” Diablo nodded sagely, but didn’t really understand why she was bothered.

Maybe she knew how inexperienced he was, and was worried he might not do it well? Maybe she was worried about Shera? Or perhaps the idea of the Fallen attacking again left her anxious?

“...I take it you’ve finished already?” Rem asked, her expression darkening.

“Of—”

He was about to say “of course,” but stopped himself. She’d likely talk to Shera tomorrow, and he’d be exposed for lying if he did. And lying just to keep up airs would make him look...put simply: really, totally lame.

Diablo shrugged. “She fell asleep halfway through.”

Rem sighed. “Yes, that sounds like something she would do. But I thought you would sleep beside her.”

He couldn’t tell her the anxiety alone would keep him awake if he stayed there.

“A bed of leaves does not agree with me.”

“...I see. I imagine some would find it uncomfortable.”

“We’ll be leaving tomorrow, as soon as we are able. You should get some rest.”

“...Are we going back to Faltra?”

Rem seemed to have returned to her usual, intelligent self. Diablo wondered why she’d acted so strangely a moment ago.

As the two of them began walking toward the guest house, Diablo illuminated their surroundings with the branch he borrowed from the royal bed chambers.

“Yes. For the time being, we’ll return,” Diablo told her of his plans.

“...After that, will we be heading somewhere else? Sylvie asked us to help defend Faltra, if you recall.”

The Citadel City of Faltra was a stronghold located on the frontlines of the races’ line of defense. The guildmaster of its Adventurer’s Guild, Sylvie, had asked Diablo and his friends to help in its defense against the Demon Lord’s army.

“That is precisely why I must set out.”

The way he was now, Diablo doubted his chances of beating the Demon Overlord. The Modinaram Diablo knew from *Cross Reverie* had extremely high

stats, so if it grew stronger from absorbing other Demon Lords, there was no telling how powerful they were now. If nothing else, they'd be stronger than the event.

Fighting a fused boss you've fought before is pretty standard in games though.

"...If you say this is necessary, Diablo, it means it probably is," Rem said with a small voice. "I intend to do everything within my power as well."

"Speaking of your powers..." Diablo suddenly felt inclined to ask something. "There was something I've been meaning to ask... Why did you choose to become a summoner, Rem? Pantherians are a race that excels at strength and agility. You would be more suited to be warriors."

"...Yes."

"Conversely, Pantherians also have low MP. This isn't the most favorable class for you."

Summons would continually deplete their summoner's MP for as long as they were materialized, and maintaining multiple ones meant the drain was that much more rapid.

"...I thought it would be the safest path to take as an adventurer," Rem said after a moment of silence. "I couldn't allow myself to die, no matter what."

"Mm."

The Demon Lord Krebskulm had been sealed inside Rem's body, passed down from mother to daughter like some hereditary curse.

"...But, thanks to you, I was able to extract the Demon Lord's soul from my body. And while I certainly have no intention of dying, maybe it would be a good idea to study a class I'm better suited for."

"Do you wish to become a warrior?"

"...I still wish to become a more accomplished summoner. But the way things are going, I fear I won't be of use to everyone."

"Is it that bad?"

"...My eyes couldn't even keep up with the Fallen that attacked us today."

“Their level was quite high...”

“...The truth is...” Rem hugged her shaking shoulders. “I noticed this a while ago. I’m... I’m weak.”

Diablo couldn’t find the words to reply to Rem’s somber whisper. She was a level 50 summoner, and while the equipment she received in the Treasure Vault made her considerably stronger, it still wasn’t enough.

Pausing for thought, Diablo then said, “To beat that Fallen, you would have to be at least level 100. That would mean breaking the limit of the races.”

“...The limit, huh.”

Diablo didn’t tell her he intended to raise his own skills as a warrior. He told Rose, but intended to keep it a secret from the others. Going away to train because the next opponent seemed difficult didn’t exactly fit a Demon Lord’s image. If anything, wasn’t waiting in the castle confidently while the hero toiled away to level up more fitting?

“Do not fret.” Diablo reached his hand out to Rem’s head. “Strive onward. Chase after your ideal, no matter how far it may be, and don’t turn back from the road ahead of you. If you do this, you won’t have any regrets.”

“...You’re right. I may have lost my sense of purpose now that Krebskulm’s soul has been extracted, and panicked when I saw how strong the Fallen can be.”

“Just get some rest for now. Think of what to do next tomorrow.”

“Yes.”

Just as she said that, the guest house’s front door came into view.

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As Greenwood didn’t have many visitors, its guest house wasn’t very large. After the entrance hall was a living room, with a table large enough for ten people.

Bidding Rem goodnight, the two parted ways. There were two inner rooms: Rem and Rafflesia slept in the left room, and Diablo slept in the right. Closing the door behind him, Diablo stood in blinding darkness. He’d left the glowing

branch in the living room, and while there were windows, the branches blocked out the moonlight.

Diablo fumbled for the bed, when...

Squish~

Just as he was about to slip under the covers, his hand settled on something soft.

“What...?”

He brushed his hand over it.

“Mmm...” A feminine moan filled his ears.

“Who is this?!” Diablo’s eyes widened.

His eyes gradually grew accustomed to the dark, and he realized someone was occupying the bed already. From what he was feeling, they were lying on their back. The bed’s occupant stirred, rising from their sleep.

“Huh...? Lord Diablo... Your Majesty?”

“That voice... Is that you, Rafflesia?”

“Ah, yes.” Diablo couldn’t discern her expression, but did see her head nod.

The one occupying the bed was the chief of the dark elves, Rafflesia. He may have been acting as a Demon Lord, but he still couldn’t get used to being called “Your Majesty” by the elves.

“Why are you sleeping in this room?”

“I heard you wouldn’t be usin’ it anymore...”

That did make sense, now that she mentioned it. The king of the land would usually sleep in the royal residence.

“...A bed of leaves does not agree with me.”

“Is that so... I beg your pardon for occupyin’ the room then.”

“Pay it no mind. You may stay as you are.”

Diablo turned his back, preparing to leave the bed. Owing to her dark elven night vision, Rafflesia saw him do so and reached a hand out to stop him,

resting it over Diablo's own. Perhaps because she'd slept until just now, but it was cold and pleasant to the touch.

"Wait, Your Majesty..."

"What is it?"

"You saved my life today. If my way of showin' gratitude for that would be to keep you from your bed, the anxiety wouldn't allow me to sleep."

Rafflesia had been manipulated by the Demon Lord Kardia, and almost killed in the end. If it weren't for Diablo's timely use of an Elixir, she wouldn't be among the living right now.

An Elixir was a healing salve that frequently appeared in fantasy stories, based on an alchemical legend. In *Cross Reverie*, it was a priceless potion that completely restored a player's HP, MP, and SP, as well as curing them of all status ailments. Even Diablo didn't have a limitless stock of them.

In the meantime, he'd thought he'd find a comfortable root to rest his head on and spend the night there, but...

Diablo nodded. "If you say so, I'll sleep here."

"Yes," Rafflesia said, approaching the edge of the bed.

So we'll be sleeping together...?

Diablo couldn't claim to *not* be interested in it. Rafflesia's breasts were shockingly large since the dark elves had the largest bust size among the races, going beyond huge and all the way to *giga boobs* status.

A normal guy would usually be pretty excited here, right...?

If it were just sleeping next to her there wouldn't be any problems. Diablo had a habit of assuming that a woman approaching him didn't have anything to do with him, no matter how attractive she may be. Just the idea of spending the first night with his bride was enough to render him a nervous wreck.

He did want to touch them a little but...it was just a thought. Or at least, so he believed...

"Your Majesty, what happened with Queen Shera?"

“H-How did you know?”

If anything, the problem was that *nothing* happened.

“If just a bed of leaves didn’t suit you, I assume you’d come here with Her Majesty.”

“...Shera fell asleep first.”

“Oh, my... Fallin’ asleep before the man does on her first night...”

“Hmph...” He didn’t mean to make it sound like Shera was at fault here, but he also refrained from saying it happened because he was indecisive. A Demon Lord who didn’t know how to handle a woman simply wouldn’t fly.

As he was about to suggest they go to sleep, a pair of cold hands pressed against his chest.

“Mm?”

“Your Majesty... If this is not too disrespectful... Would you allow me to quell your lust?”

Lust?! Diablo felt his brain white out.

Unable to gather his thoughts, the Demon Lord role play he’d accustomed himself to spoke in his stead.

“Do as you wish.”

†

“Heheh... Excuse me then.”

Rafflesia’s hands, which had been pressed against his chest so far, slid downward, touching him over his outfit. Diablo shrank back in surprise. He may have talked a big game, but his inner turmoil was driving him mad.

“Hmph... What do you think you’re doing?” He spoke condescendingly, but these meager words were the most he could muster.

“Any woman would find herself drawn to an attractive man,” Rafflesia answered as her fingers caressed him.

“Stop lying,” Diablo denied her words immediately.

Would it have been more Demon Lord-ly to agree to being called an attractive man? But while he may have been called frightening, scary, and abominable, he'd never once been called attractive before.

Rafflesia's hands slipped under his clothes, and Diablo found himself letting out a girlish shriek against his will.

"Oh my...?" Her fingers touched his flaccid skin. "Perhaps you don't find me attractive? Are dark elves not to your likin'?"

"Uu... That's...not it..."

"Are you nervous then?"

"C-Cease your blabbering. I am a Demon Lord. I'd never become nervous over this."

He was in a dark room, on top of a bed, with a woman handling him with experienced hands. In all honesty, he was shivering. It took all he had to stop that shivering from extending to his voice as he spoke.

"Answer my question."

"My, what a bother... I did not lie when I said I find you attractive, Your Majesty... And this is a thanks, of sorts, for savin' my life."

"With just this? Inconceivable."

"Does that not convince you? I didn't think you were one to pursue the reasonin' behind why someone would offer you kindness... I thought you would help yourself to the meal presented before you."

"Uuu..."

He was likely demanding an explanation due to his inexperience. A normie would probably stop minding the little things in this situation and just enjoy the act.

That's impossible for me though...

Her being attracted or grateful to him all struck him as lies, and without a convincing reason, he wouldn't be able to calm down.

Rafflesia used her fingertips to stimulate him, her gentle caress soothing his

stiff body in just the right ways.

“Heheheh... I see you’re beginnin’ to enjoy it a little?”

“Ah, no, hmm...”

“My feelin’s for you really are personal... But, yes. You were made king of Greenwood, Your Majesty. As the chief of the dark elves, I wish to form cordial relations with you.”

“Ah, I see...”

While Diablo couldn’t deny having two leaders of a group solidify their friendship like this struck him as a bit off, it was nonetheless a relatively convincing reason.

The moment the tension began leaving him, a tingle ran through his spine, as if electricity jolted his lower half.

“Ugh...”

“Oh my, oh my... So suddenly... Amazin’.”

“R-Really now?”

“I can see you’re not very experienced.”

She saw through me?!

It felt as if she’d tightly gripped his heart.

“Stop talking nonsense!” He raised his voice roughly. “Nng?!”

Rafflesia sealed his lips with her own, sliding her tongue into his mouth.

“Mwa...”

“Nng?!”

—She kissed him.

When he was first summoned to this world, Rem and Shera had kissed him, and he also kissed Klem when he placed the Enslavement Collar on her. Laminitus, Zircon Tower’s governor, kissed him as well, though more deeply than anyone else.

But not only was he taken by surprise, Rafflesia’s tonguework was wicked,

leaving Diablo frozen in place.

“Nnn... Mwa... Mmm... It’s been so long since I’ve done this with a man...”

“Huh? A man...?”

“Nnn muha! Heheh... Do you find it odd? Blackwood only has dark elven women.”

He really never did see male dark elves there, now that she mentioned it. They lived in a forest covered with poisonous plants, so the men all had to work away from their homes.

“Do you prefer women?”

“I like men too. I had a fiancé once after all.”

“Right...”

Diablo recalled her telling how he was killed when the king of Lyferia from three generations ago sent out a crusade against the dark elves.

So, they were in this sort of relationship... This meant Rafflesia was much older than Diablo.

“I have female lovers in the village... But right now, I yearn for you, Your Majesty.”

The movements of her hands turned rapid, the stimulation becoming stronger.

“Kuh...” A moan escaped Diablo’s lips.

“Heheh... You like this, no?” Rafflesia smiled happily.

“N-No, this is...”

“It is fine, Your Majesty. For just this little while...forget about everythin’, and enjoy yourself.”

Would it really be all right to forget everything? He had so much to think about, but each time she stimulated his lower half, his thoughts ground to a halt.

Crap, I feel like this is turning me into a moron...

Rafflesia used her fingers deftly, and even though she only touched a single part, it felt as if his entire body was being caressed.

The human body has a tendency to limit a sensation if it's aware stimulation is coming. Heat and pain can diminish if you know it's going to happen. Maybe that was why his lower half was so much more sensitive to the touch of someone else than when Diablo was the one touching it.

Rafflesia's lips left Diablo's, traveling down to the nape of his neck, then further down to his nipples.

A shiver ran through his back. Her tongue flicked against them, teasing them.

"Heheheh... You're sensitive here too."

"Ah..."

It was the first time he realized men were sensitive there as well. Diablo lost the ability to form words, with only broken "ooh"s and "aah"s escaping his lips.

He then realized Rafflesia had removed his clothes at some point. The deftness of her skill was astounding. Rafflesia took off her own clothes as well, with only a bit of light illuminating the outline of her naked body in the darkness.

A narrow waist with two large swellings floating above it, jiggling at having been freed from the confines of her clothes.

"Stay still, Your Majesty... I'll make you feel good all over..."

"Uh...?"

Diablo was initially rather flaccid, but thanks to her prolonged teasing, he was about eighty percent up.

Rafflesia sandwiched him between her enormous breasts. The pressure was unbelievable, making him feel as if his entire body was placed within her cleavage.

"Aaah..." Rafflesia sighed heavily. "This hardness... This heat... Men truly are wonderful... I've never seen one as splendid as you, Your Majesty."

I'm gonna melt here...

Both his mind and body felt like they were on the verge of turning into mush. It was like slipping into a warm bath during a cold, freezing day...

“Aaaah...” Diablo sighed heavily, releasing all the air in his lungs.

Rafflesia’s body bobbed up and down, forming a pleasant sensation throughout his body, as if he were being massaged while in that bath. He felt like gravity no longer constrained his body, and he’d lost all sensation in his body, save for a single spot.

Beads of sweat began forming on Rafflesia’s skin.

“Nnn... Nnn... Nnn... Nnn... How is it, Your Majesty?”

“Uuu...”

“Heheh... Judging by your expression, it seems you’re enjoyin’ yourself. I’ll make you feel even better.”

Rather than just bobbing her body up and down, Rafflesia used her hands to lift and lower her breasts. Those fairly weighty bosoms crashed against Diablo’s body, emitting the distinctive sound of flesh slapping against flesh. She rubbed against him more vigorously, making the sensation more acute; the sort of powerful stimulation only this type of humungous boobs could create.

The sensation felt like bathing in a hot spring at first, but was gradually becoming more and more suffocating. Diablo was gasping for air, as if he had just run a marathon.

“Uuu, guh!”

“Haa! Ah! Ah! Ah! The tips are...grinding against... Aaah! Ah! Nn! Haaa!”

“R-Rafflesia...”

“Nnn... You’re gettin’ even, harder...Your Majesty... Nn! An’ hotter too.. Aaah! It’s amazin’... You’re gettin’ more excited... Ah! Aaah! It’s like a rod of hot steel... Ah, nnn, aaaaaah!”

“Uuu... I can’t last much longer...”

“Aaah, please, do it! Give me, give me your... Your Majesty, please, on my body! Ah! Ah! You’re so, so hot, Your Majesty... Aaah! Nnn... Incredible... This is,

the first time... The first, I've seen something like this! Aaah! Aaaaaah! I-I'm, I'm burniiing!"

They could hear the sound of footsteps outside the room, when suddenly...

Thud! A loud sound shook the guest house.

The door to the room was...kicked open?!

Rafflesia ceased her movements, twitching nervously. Pulled out of his reverie, Diablo felt like he'd just been splashed with cold water. Snapping to full attention, he turned his gaze to the entrance, only to be met with a carnivorous, murderous glare of the intruder who was growling at them.

"...I am trying to sleep here."

It was Rem, her eyes glistening with gold, an aura of anger emanating from her body. It was like she herself was channeling a Demon Lord.

Rafflesia shook in fear, but Diablo maintained his Demon Lord-ly confidence even in these times!

"...Sorry about that."



Chapter 2: Charging into a Mansion

Two weeks later—

It was the beginning of the eleventh month. The wind had become stronger and more chilling, even in the warm regions.

“It’s Faltra!” Shera leaned her body out of the carriage.

“...Don’t fall,” Rem said from the driver’s seat, a wry smile on her lips.

Diablo nodded calmly. “We’re finally back.”

“...It’s a good thing we had enough rations. I was worried when that thunderstorm grounded us for three days.”

“Hmm, it did take a while.”

Diablo’s words had two meanings: After they left the Kingdom of Greenwood, they stopped by Blackwood to drop off Rafflesia. Only then did they begin their fourteen-day long trip back to Faltra. And now they were finally there. It was a long journey indeed.

However, Diablo didn’t mean just that. He also meant that Rem finally went back to speaking to him normally. She was always the type to silently seethe in her anger, but apparently Diablo giving into Rafflesia’s temptations left her more annoyed than he’d ever seen her. She gave him the cold shoulder for quite a long time.

But now, the prickly, stabbing glares she directed at him finally gave way to the friendly, intimate gazes she had before this debacle. Diablo sighed in relief internally.

I can’t let myself get carried away again...

So he swore solemnly to himself...

Their carriage arrived at Faltra’s eastern gate at noon. Rem pulled the reins, slowing the horses down to a walk, so as to not run into anyone in the crowd of people walking through the street. Stalls and peddlers filled the sides of the road, turning it into a small marketplace which in turn spurred the people

forward.

“...This town never changes. Though it’s not quite on par with the capital.”

“Hmm.” Diablo hated crowds, so he stayed in the carriage’s compartment. It wasn’t as bad when riding a carriage, but just looking at all these people made him feel queasy.

“There were even more people in the royal capital, right?” Shera spread out her arms to demonstrate.

“...And the roads were wider, so there were more carriages running there as well.”

“But aren’t there more people than the last time we were here?”

“...That may be true.”

“Is there some kinda festival?”

“...I don’t think there would be anything this time of year, but maybe something special has happened regardless.”

“My tummy is rumbling...” Shera changed the topic. “Is it lunchtime yet?”

“...With all this traffic, it will probably take us a few hours to reach the inn. Stopping to eat may be a good idea in the meantime.”

“I wanna see Klem as soon as possible, but she’s probably out now, right?”

“It seems she’s taken to touring the city’s restaurants lately.”

Klem had grown quite fond of the races’ cuisine, and always ate out for lunch and dinner. She’d go to different restaurants every day. She held food in such high regard that she once said, “Biscuits are tasty so I won’t destroy the races!”

Cross Reverie gave the different Demon Lords all sorts of ominous titles, like “The Mind” and “The Madness.” Klem would probably be the “Demon Lord of Appetite.” Klem’s Fallen underling, Edelgard, earned the funds needed to finance her restaurant-fairing lifestyle by working at Petre’s bakery.

“I just hope she doesn’t cause any trouble...”

Catching Diablo’s whisper, Shera turned around to face him.

“What do you mean?”

“Edelgard’s working at a bakery, is she not?”

“Yep, it’s the place that sells Klem’s favorite biscuits.”

“And she’s disguised, right?”

“Little Mei’s makeup is incredible, so I’m sure it’s fine.”

Klem had horns and a tail, while Edelgard had scales and reptilian eyes, characteristics that made it clear they were aligned with the Fallen. If anyone were to find out about them, it would be more than just a fuss. Diablo only had horns, and that alone landed him in trouble often...

“...Should we go check?” Rem asked him, still holding the reins.

“Let’s go!” Shera raised a hand up high.

They were currently in the eastern district, and Petre’s was in the southern district. The Peace of Mind Inn was in the western district. It would be a small detour, but with the main road being a bustling marketplace, the side roads might be emptier.

“I do not mind.”

And so it was decided.

†

They entrusted their carriage to a coach house. The southern district was the merchant’s town, so there were several coach houses about. They didn’t only offer safekeeping; they provided water and fodder to the horses and performed maintenance on the frame, which Diablo decided to pay, given how long their journey took.

The three of them then made their way to Petre’s, only to find a crowd of people around the entrance.

“...It looks quite packed.” Rem tilted her head quizzically.

“It’s a super good bakery during the lunch rush after all!”

While there was truth to Shera’s words, something still felt off. As Diablo gazed at the clients, he realized what was making him feel so anxious.

“Almost all the customers are men...”

“...That is odd, now that you mention it. I’d expect to see more women out shopping for bread.”

“It sure smells nice!”

The fragrance of freshly baked bread was irresistible no matter what world you were in. Add on to the fact that this world didn’t give many chances to eat in luxury, so the scent’s charm was twice as strong. Diablo never was all that occupied when it came to food, but even he didn’t feel inclined to leave when faced with this large queue.

“...Let’s go in then,” Rem said with the tone of one resolved to go into vicious battle. Shera followed after her.

Diablo had never seen anyone standing in a line in this town. If you simply stood politely and waited, people who came after you would definitely butt in and cut ahead of you. The inhabitants here didn’t seem to even be aware of the idea of “lining up in an orderly fashion,” and no one argued against the lack of manners either. Another world meant different customs. But even if they didn’t line up, the townspeople weren’t bandits or hoodlums. No one in sight employed violence to get their way. An amiable boy would make his way through the crowd, tapping on people’s shoulders and apologizing as he went ahead to buy bread... That was the sort of culture here.

I guess a Demon Lord lining up for a store is kind of an odd sight, too, so this works for me.

Diablo and his group entered the store. There was a counter set up at the front, enabling customers to buy bread and leave straight away if they didn’t wish to take a seat. Since glass was a rare, expensive material in this world, there was no display window. The products were set up behind the counter, and customers could pick by pointing at what they wanted or saying its name.

“Welcome to Petre’s,” a worker greeted them, a pantherian girl in a maid outfit.

Separately from the counter, there was an eat-in area customers could sit in. It had twenty-four seats, which was quite many given the corner’s size. They

may have added more due to how much traffic the store had been getting recently. They served freshly baked bread and coffee it seemed.

“...Diablo!” Rem pointed somewhere. “What’s that?”

“O-Oh...”

“Whoa?!” Shera squealed with her eyes wide.

Edelgard stood where Rem had pointed, clad in combat attire. She didn’t have any makeup on to hide her scales, and she did nothing to hide her reptilian eyes either. She was the very image of a Fallen...but with an apron.

Did they catch on to her?!

Her hand, which usually gripped a spear, was currently holding a tray packed with utensils, and she spoke to the men seated in the chairs.

“Welcome...home? My...Demon Lord? Demon Lord!”

The customers replied with, “We’re home, Edel!” with sloven expressions covering their faces.

Rem and Shera were clearly disturbed by seeing Edelgard in Fallen attire in broad daylight, but Diablo caught on to what was going on.

“So this is a...yeah, that...”

Isn’t this just like a maid café?



“...D-Do you have any idea what’s going on?”

“Is this really okay?!”

Diablo lowered his voice, whispering to them. “Observe them carefully. They don’t actually believe Edelgard is a Fallen.”

“...Now that you mention it...”

“They’re not scared of her at all.”

To begin with, the Fallen hunt the races down. If one were waiting on them in a café, it’d only be natural to think it was someone simply dressed up as a Fallen.

“Heheh... When word came out Edel put on makeup that made her look like a Fallen, the other waitresses started copying her,” a dwarf standing nearby began explaining, despite no one asking him to. “The regulars started calling it a ‘Fallen Café.’”

“Is she calling the customers ‘Demon Lord’?”

“Ain’t it just lovely? The Petres sure are clever, heh.”

The shop was run by three grasswalker brothers, each of them called Petre. Apparently, they’d heard the customers talk about how Edelgard looked like a Fallen and decided to bank on it.

After a short while, the three of them were taken to a seat, and Edelgard walked up to them.

“Ah...”

“I see you’re working hard.”

“Master Diablo... Welcome...home? Home!”

“Mmm.”

Edelgard was currently serving the Demon Lord Krebskulm—Klem. And since Klem was enslaved to Diablo, Edelgard recognized him as her superior.

Diablo didn’t know how much effect the Enslavement Collar would have on a true Demon Lord. Boss level monsters were immune to effects like instant

death, paralysis, and petrification after all.

Rem looked Edelgard up and down curiously.

“...Didn’t Mei from the inn put makeup on you?”

“Rain, washed it off~”

Apparently Edelgard had been doused by the rain, and her makeup ended up getting washed off. After traveling for a while, Diablo came to realize that Faltra, among other places, didn’t have that much rainfall. It was more rainy in the mountains, while the plains were mostly sunny. As such, raingear was very uncommon. The nobles had hats and coats, but the commoners didn’t wear anything to cover them up from the rain. Umbrellas didn’t even exist here, and since waterproof fabrics hadn’t been invented, they couldn’t be made either.

“...You could have taken the day off if it was raining,” Rem said with an exasperated expression.

“Suddenly, taking day off, bothers the store?”

“Ugh... You’re right, but...”

Rem probably didn’t imagine a Fallen would ever lecture her about work ethics and responsibility.

“Demon Lord Roll!” Shera suddenly called out.

Diablo felt his heart skip a beat. He was secretly acting as a Demon Lord in role play... In short, he was taking on a “Demon Lord role.” He’d tried to keep it a secret, but was he finally exposed for who he was?!

“One Demon Lord Roll, one.” Edelgard nodded at Shera’s words.

“Mmm?” Diablo’s eyes fell to the menu...

Hidden between such items as the Demon Lord Gelato, Demon Lord Pancake, and Demon Lord Pie was the Demon Lord Bread Roll. Diablo sighed in relief, wiping cold sweat from his forehead. It seemed like no one had figured him out after all...

“...Is everything all right? You’re very pale,” Rem asked.

“Ah, no... Forget it.”

“...I think I’ll have the Demon Lord Pie. How about you, Diablo?”

“I’ll have the cheese bread.”

The Fallen Café’s special menu looked good, but Petre’s cheese bread was a delicacy. Diablo planned to leave Faltra again soon, so he wanted to have some with him for the road.

“...Then we’ll have those, and coffee for three.”

“As you, wish!” Edelgard went to the back of the store to relay their order.

They observed her as she worked, and she did more than just wait on tables; she chatted with the customers too. Some customers talked about their lives, others shared their hobbies with her, and some were just drinking this early in the day. Some drunken customers were a bit loud, but owing to the store’s comfy atmosphere, there were no suspicious people about.

Rem looked around. “...This store is a bit odd, is it not?”

“Is something about it unusual?”

“...Yes. To begin with, cafés are a fairly recent idea.”

“Hmm.”

Cafés that were picking up popularity in the capital recently opened branches in the center of Faltra, but they were high-class places that commoners couldn’t afford to visit. However, shops that imitated the idea began cropping up. Diablo thought this place was one such example, but its atmosphere was considerably different.

Edelgard came back, carrying their bread and coffee, so Diablo decided to ask her, “Who thought of setting the place up like this?”

“Friend? Of Petre’s, saw it in the capital? Saw it!”

He couldn’t understand what she was saying.

“...A friend of the owners saw a similar store in the capital, and they imitated it?” Rem tried to interpret. “Not the café part, but having the waiters dress up like Fallen?”

“Not, Fallen! Magical beasts, there?”

“...Magical beasts?!”

“Monster?” Edelgard’s speech was as fragmented as ever, but Rem managed to make sense of it all for Diablo.

“...It seems there’s a monster girl café in the capital. The waitresses walk around in costumes, with fangs and horns.”

“Hmm.”

Well damn, now I *wanna check it out!*

It sounded fun. Had he known about it, he’d have gone while he was in the capital... But Diablo didn’t let that thought show on his face. A Demon Lord that went to a monster girl café was several types of odd piled together.

I’ll go there alone one day! So Diablo secretly resolved.

But the question still remained: Who thought of opening a monster girl café when normal cafés were a recent invention? Diablo was summoned from his own world and brought to this one, but he had the appearance and abilities of his in-game character, so he wasn’t transported to this world per say... Could someone else have been transferred here in the same way?

Those were the thoughts Diablo sank into as he gazed into the coffee in his cup.

†

When they went back to the coach house, they were told the rear axle was bent. The frame was still new, so it was due to either carrying very heavy luggage or had gone up considerable differences in elevation. Rose’s face flashed in Diablo’s mind. To fix the damage she sustained, she was currently resting in a maintenance dock on the lowest level of the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth. It had to have been her weight, along with them riding over unpaved roads, that caused this. Rem negotiated with the coach house, and managed to get them to fix it in three days, all within their budget.

Having left their carriage here for repairs, they had to get to the western district by foot.

Half past three o’clock—

The sun was beginning to move toward the horizon when they reached the Peace of Mind Inn. While it wasn't some home sweet home, it was still a relief to see the place.

"Whoa, welcome back☆" The inn's poster girl, Mei, greeted them with an enthusiastic wave of the hand. "Rem, Shera, Diablo, have mew been keeping safe?"

"...Yes."

"Ah, Klem!" Shera called out, running to her.

She had apparently just come back from a trip. Klem's eyes widened with surprise.

"Oh, you're back, I... Whoa?!" Shera clung to her in a hug.

"We're back!"

"I-I can see... Has something happened to you, Shera? Your aura feels completely different. I didn't recognize you at first."

"Huh? Did something about me change?" Klem's remark made Shera examine her arms and legs.

Shera could see the flow of magical energy in people, but this was apparently a different sort of change. Diablo didn't feel anything had changed about her either.

"...Maybe it's related to Shera being a queen?" Rem asked with a quizzical expression.

"Oh, so something like that happened to you, Shera."

"Yep! I married Diablo."

Her voice was loud enough so the whole dining area could hear it, and the people sitting there were surprised and rather riled up by her statement.

"That's great! Congratulations on your marriage☆" Mei clapped.

"Thanks, Mei!"

"But what did she mean by 'queen'?"

“Erm... The truth is, hmm, I was an elven princess. And that means I’m the queen now.”

“You’re a king nyow?” Mei’s gaze turned to Diablo.

“Hmph... They begged me to do it, so I merely obliged.”

Apparently, becoming queen of the elves changed something about Shera, though Diablo couldn’t tell what it was. But, come to think of it, when he introduced Lumachina to Klem, she had said something similar. Lumachina said she had “a black, ominous, demonic aura” to her, while Klem made a fuss about Lumachina “smelling like God.” It seemed real Demon Lords had a way of knowing. Diablo may have claimed to be a Demon Lord, but he was actually just a demon sorcerer.

“Well, so be it.” Klem crossed her arms. “I can’t say the scent of God getting stronger around you pleases this Demon Lord much, but that doesn’t change who you are, Shera. You’ve done well to return safely. This Demon Lord praises you!”

“Hehe, thanks!”

“...We visited Petre’s on the way here.” Rem rummaged through her bag. “We got you biscuits. Would you like some?”

“Oooh! As considerate as ever, Rem!”

“...Thank you.”

Taking the first biscuit out of the bag, Klem caught it with her mouth. Her speech and attitude were one thing, but in terms of action she was pretty much like a pacified puppy.

“Were there any problems?” Diablo asked Mei.

“Nyone at all♪ But Edelgard’s stopped putting on mewkeup lately, and people have started talking about it.”

“The way things are going, it shouldn’t be much of an issue.”

“Faltra’s governor is a pretty strict man, so you should be careful☆”

“I know.”

The citizens didn't know it, but Diablo had fought Faltra's governor, Galford, before. Diablo managed to win somehow and instilled the impression that fighting Diablo wasn't worth it. But he *was* a governor, and if he'd found out a Demon Lord and Fallen were walking around in his city, he wouldn't let it slide so easily. They'd still have to keep their identities secret.

"Let's go, Diablo!" Klem pointed at him sharply.

"Mmm?"

"Weren't you listening? Whenever everyone else is talking, you always act like it has nothing to do with you!"

"Hmph... Cease your babbling."

That's actually exactly what it is. It's scary how she hit the nail on the head!

"Klem invited us to visit a restaurant she recommends," Rem filled him in.

"Biscuits are still the greatest treat in the world, but some dishes are a better fit for dinner. Appreciate this Demon Lord for inviting you to a wonderful banquet!"

"Hmph... I suppose I'll see then."

Diablo didn't have many expectations to be honest. He'd eaten at many places, but they all just cooked meat and at most put oil and salt on it. While that had a certain rustic flavor to it, it wasn't much of a delicacy.

†

"What a delicacy! How did they make this?!"

"Heheheh." Klem grinned smugly.

Rem and Shera looked equally surprised. They were in a restaurant in the northern district called Appetissant. It was a high class eatery of sorts, but their prices were quite fair. Despite this, the flavor of their cooking was shockingly refined. The meat was soft and biting into it was easy. The sauce was salty sweet, and the whole meal was garnished with mashed potatoes and salad. As one would expect, the shop's interior was bustling with clients.

Holding a knife and fork, Klem ate her meal in a refined, dignified manner. She

used to eat from her hands, but she'd seemingly matured since then.

"Hmm, tasty... This is what they call cooking! The races' cooking is delicious. This is impressive!"

Rem and Shera praised the place as well.

"...This is a wonderful restaurant. I've never had meat cooked this softly before."

"The mashed potatoes and salad are great too. I think it's the first time I ever thought some place's vegetables were better than Greenwood's!"

Diablo looked at the meat on his plate. "It's hard to believe they're using the same meat as everyone else."

It wasn't the way they cooked or beat it; the meat itself was soft. Was the meat's quality just that different? Or maybe this flavor had reminded him of his old world? It had the sort of juiciness you wouldn't expect from a world that didn't have refrigerators.

Diablo was just about to eat while appreciating the flavor, when he suddenly heard a fuss coming from the store's entrance.

"What's going on?"

The sound of a man shouting made the customers turn their attention. The waitresses fidgeted restlessly. A group of men in light armor, adventurers by the looks of things, had walked in.

"What'cha just standin' there for?!" the man leading the group shouted. "Take us to our seats already!"

As nice as the prices were, it was still a restaurant in the northern district, where there were many cheap bars. These type of people weren't an unusual sight.

The person in charge walked out from the back of the store. "Pardon me, but you're troubling the other customers..."

"We're customers too, ya know!"

"But..."

“Ya makin’ fun of us?!”

With a blood vessel sticking out in his forehead, the adventurer unsheathed his sword, and his friends began kicking the furniture.

“H-How could you...” The man in charge took a step back.

A woman screamed in fright, making a waitress loudly drop a plate. Things were quickly spiraling out of control.

Diablo was about to sit up, but Klem jumped out before he could.

“You fools! What are you doing in this sacred site of dining? Have you no shame?!”

They glared at her angrily. These ruffians obviously had no idea what they were going up against.

“The hell are ya, brat? An elf? Ya smell like a stinkin’ demi to me!”

“You fools... You have earned this Demon Lord’s ire. You shall pay for your lack of intelligence and character with your lives!”

Klem stuck out her right hand. A small black sphere began forming in it.

“Huh? Elemental magic? Hahahaha!”

In this world, most adventurers thought elemental magic was weak. True enough, at low levels, its firepower would indeed be insufficient. It was a class lacking in stamina, defense, and evasion, so it was indeed weak in the early stages of the game. Beginner elemental sorcerers usually died quickly and were nothing more than a strain on their party.

But in the game, players leveled up more often in short periods of time. The first few days might be hard, but a sorcerer’s firepower would skyrocket as they leveled up, and they’d become capable of defeating the enemy before they were even attacked. By the end, they became the class with the highest damage output. It wasn’t a class to be trifled with.

But that was far from this group’s only mistake. Klem wasn’t an elemental sorcerer, but a Demon Lord.

“Don’t kill them!” Diablo shouted.

“I’ll crush you fools! Thanatos!”

Klem unleashed the black sphere, and it hit the ruffian’s sword. It turned into a blackish, purple vortex that began consuming the sword.

“Ah, haaa!”

“Let go of it!”

The ruffian let go of the sword, just as Diablo ordered him, pulling back his hand. The sword melted into the vortex, like a cube of sugar melting into a cup of coffee.

“Aaaaaah... M-My fingers...?!” Blood dripped to the floor. Having let go a moment too late, the spell apparently took a few of the man’s fingers with it. His friends raised their voices in panicked shouts.

Klem pinched her fingers over the metal collar around her neck in displeasure.

“My master ordered me not to kill you, so I’ll let you go with just the loss of your sword...cretins.”

Diablo stood up opposite her. “You can’t just go off, firing spells that surpass the limit of the races... You could have knocked them away with a swing of your arm.”

“You expect this Demon Lord to touch these foul simpletons? How disgusting.”

“You’re so troublesome...”

Diablo pulled a longsword from his pouch. Its blade shined faintly, and its guard was in the shape of three pairs of white, dove-like wings. It was the Seraphix Blade. Seeing the weapon, the ruffians took a step back.

“What is that divine-looking sword you have there?” Klem knitted her eyebrows. “It’s utterly vile.”

“Don’t say that. I took it out of my treasure vault for a specific reason.”

Diablo pointed the tip of his sword at the ruffians, who’d apparently realized just how dangerous the people they were facing off against were. They cowered away from his sword.

“You’re letting them get away?” Klem asked with evident displeasure.

“Hmph... Leave them be.” Diablo was of course indignant toward them as well, but murder was going too far. That said, handing them over to the regional knights would just make it known that Klem used an unknown, high-level spell. Diablo didn’t want the governor to put his eye on Klem, if possible.

Diablo sheathed his swords as Rem and Shera ran up to them.

“...You’re fine, I see. I was worried for a moment there.”

“You’re not hurt, are you, Klem?”

“Fools like them could never harm a Demon Lord such as myself.”

“What a relief...”

Rem sighed. “...If anything, I was worried you might be the one grievously hurting them.”

In Diablo’s old world, the injuries Klem inflicted on the ruffian would have been severe and irreversible, but this world had priests and healing potions. They could restore lost limbs, to say nothing of a few lost fingers.

With the men driven out of the store, the atmosphere gradually mellowed, returning to normal. The store’s staff went around, apologizing to the customers for the bother. Muttering to himself, Diablo returned to his seat, when a man in a business suit walked up to him. The man introduced himself as Appetissant’s owner.

“We apologize for the bother, sir.”

“...That was unfortunate.”

“Quite so. I was worried I would have to close up early for the day... But you should probably leave the northern district as fast as you can, sir.”

That was an odd thing to hear.

“...What do you mean?” Rem asked. “Weren’t those good-for-nothings just a bunch of drunks?”

“Y-Yes, well...” the owner said awkwardly. “The Mesamoth familia came to collect money from me. When I refused, at first they simply dropped garbage at

our footstep... But lately, they've begun sending thugs like them to storm the place. At this rate, I'm not sure the store will last..."

"The Mesamoth familia?" Shera echoed the name, and Rem began explaining.

"...Put simply, they're a crime syndicate. They shake businesses down for money, and also deal in theft and fraud."

"Those exist in Faltra?!"

"...The regional knights are always looking into them, but they're not the type to leave behind evidence."

"But those people just now!"

"...Even if you arrest them, they'll deny knowing anything about the Mesamoth familia. It won't make any difference."

"Can't we do something about this, Diablo?" Shera asked, her glance clinging to him.

While Diablo understood where Shera was coming from, these guys were like the yakuza or the mafia. They weren't a problem one could solve easily, and Diablo didn't want to tangle with them.

"Hmph... Those insignificant gnats should—"

"...Be wiped off the face of the world!" Klem raised her voice.

Diablo looked at her, puzzled, only to find anger burning in her eyes.

"You didn't mean to say we should leave them be, did you?! Those vermin are infesting our roost!"

"Y-Yeah...of course. We'll destroy them."

"Well said! Let's go then!"

"Hold on. Do you know where to find them?"

"Erm..."

"You don't, right? What a shame. If only we knew where the familia was, I'd go straight there and massacre them all. I guess we'll have to try another day..."

"Um..." The owner raised his hand timidly. "I just so happen to know where

the Mesamoth familia’s mansion is...”

“Show us the way!” Klem straightened up.

“O-Of course.” The owner nodded.

Things had gone way beyond the point where Diablo could say he didn’t want to get involved in this. Shera, and even the usually calm and collected Rem, had fighting spirit burning in their eyes.

Diablo recalled that Rem resolved to become an adventurer to deal with the Demon Lord sealed in her body. It was in her nature to assertively tackle any problems she came across.

Diablo sighed internally.

“Just try not to stand out too much, Klem...” He tried whispering into Klem’s ear, but it was dubious if she even heard him. The little Demon Lord’s red eyes simply gleamed dangerously.

†

The sun sank below the western walls, and darkness had fallen over the city. Diablo and his group were in a corner of the northern district that was seemingly undergoing redevelopment. The hour being as late as it was, there were few people walking around. Diablo noted there were quite a few buildings he wasn’t familiar with.

“...It’s like a brand new town.” It seemed the same thought was going through Rem’s mind as well.

“There was a large explosion here not too long ago that destroyed the nearby cemetery and some of the walls.”

“It’s that place!” Diablo clapped as it clicked together.

He always came here from another route and it was altogether changed, so he didn’t notice at first. This was where he fought Klem when she’d awakened as the Demon Lord Krebskulm. It was Diablo’s own Apocalypse Abyss spell that blew away the area.

“The land here used to belong to the city of Faltra, but since it was completely leveled, they sold it off to nobles and merchants and used those funds to

rebuild the walls," the owner of Appetissant continued his explanation.

"What about the graves?" Shera asked.

"Most of the remains and tombstones were sadly blown away... But I heard the graveyard was moved outside the walls, to the northwest."

"...But if you move the graveyard outside the walls, it could be ransacked by wild animals." Rem was the one to tilt her head this time. "I'm surprised the nobles agreed to it."

"It seems there are plans to build a third wall further beyond the town."

"So they sold the land here not only to rebuild the walls, but also to gather the funds needed to finance another one."

"So it seems... Ah, and that's the Mesamoth familia's mansion."

The owner pointed toward a building at the end of the road, a mansion larger than the buildings around it. Its still gate was bigger than the one at the governor's estate, as if to make it seem like they were the town's rulers in practice.

Rem and Shera, who had keen eyesight in the dark, gazed at the place.

"...There are two guards at the front gate, and probably a few more inside."

"There are people holding bows at the windows too."

"Thank you for showing us the way," Klem told the owner.

While the owner was concerned for them, his face was on the verge of tears as him staying in business hinged on their success here. Diablo wanted to do whatever was possible to help him.

The gatekeepers stood in their way with menacing glares.

"The hell're you? Don'tcha know where ya are?"

Diablo could imagine the rather vivid image of Klem stepping forward and leaving chaos in her wake, but at the same time couldn't let these thugs face Rem and Shera. Left with little choice, Diablo took the lead.

"Hmph... So this place is what the Mesamoth goons call home?"

“Goons?!” The guards were enraged. “The hell do ya think ya are?! I got no clue who sent ya, but the boss ain’t someone some small-fry adventurer can go up against! Mouth off one more time, and they’ll have to scrape what’s left of ya off the cobblestones, ya hear?!”

“Annihilation it is then!” Klem brandished one of her hands, magical energy running through her fingers.

“Wait, don’t!” Diablo stopped her in a hurry.

“Why not?!”

Diablo couldn’t tell her he didn’t want her to stand out. That would only make it look like he was afraid of the governor.

“W-Well, that’s... You see, these two-bit thugs are like the syndicate’s limbs. The one we should be teaching a lesson to here is its head.”

“I see.”

“And if their head isn’t here, we’d have done this for naught.”

“Yes, true. You’re a clever one, aren’t you!”

“Of course I am. I am the one true Demon Lord after all!”

“This Demon Lord is a Demon Lord as well! Hahahahaha!”

“Ahahahahahaha!”

Faced with two suspicious persons laughing with high-pitched voices, the guards were understandably stupefied.

“Wh-What do we do?”

“Should we call the regional knights?”

They may have been brigands, but on the surface they were still a legitimate trade group. They were perfectly able to call on the regional knights to settle any problems on their property.

But Diablo was opposed to getting the regional knights involved. That could make Galford aware of Klem’s existence.

“You there. Lead us to Mesamoth.”

“The hell’re you on about?! You can’t see him without an appointment!”

“I *do* have an appointment. Weren’t you informed?”

A bluff, but the guards looked at each other quizzically. One of them went into the mansion, saying he’d go check.

“Looks like he’s in the mansion. Let’s go pay him a visit then.”

“We’re going in?!”

“Yes. But being needlessly noisy about it does not suit me. See, like so...”

Diablo touched the iron gate, prompting the remaining guard to shout, “Get yer hands off that!” and draw his sword. But before anything else happened, Diablo recited a spell:

“Rot and crumble... Rust Burst!”

The surface of the giant iron gate dyed red with rust, crumbling under its own weight the following moment.

“Ah, wha...?!” The guard’s mouth fell open.

Diablo and his group walked onto the premises with an air of composure.

†

Adventurers and mercenaries poured out of the mansion. This was apparently Mesamoth’s private army. They had surprisingly high level weapons too. They were a step above the people gathered in the Adventurer’s Guild.

“You are fools to stand in my way, you weaklings.”

Diablo stuck out his right hand, firing a Lightning Arrow in their direction. When he first came to this world he didn’t feel confident using magic without a staff, but he’d gotten used to it now.

Arrows of light flew through the air, piercing the soldiers, who screamed in pain and fell silent.

Klem seemed surprised. “That’s some plain magic. I expected more out of you. Why aren’t you using the spell you cast on me?”

“Which one?”

“That Apocalypse Abyss spell.”

If I cast that here, I’ll level the whole area again!

“Hmph... I said being needlessly noisy does not suit me, did I not?”

“But you *did* cast it on me.”

“Because regular magic wouldn’t work on you. But that’s not the case with these fools.”

“Who’s to say? This man, Mesamoth, might be surprisingly strong. That would even be more interesting!”

“Don’t get your hopes up.”

But what would he do if Mesamoth *was* strong? Apocalypse Abyss was a forbidden spell meant for defeating massive magical beasts. There shouldn’t be anyone in the races that would require that type of magic to deal with...probably.

Besides, anyone that strong wouldn’t form a crime syndicate in such a provincial city. They’d be far more suited in becoming a powerful figure in the capital.

Diablo destroyed the front door and ordered Shera to keep an eye out from above. They’d need to be able to respond accordingly if the regional knights did show up, or if someone ran off from the mansion. It was at times like these that Shera’s summon, Turkey Shot, came in handy. This bird-like summon was capable of flight and sharing its vision with the summoner. In other words, it was like having another, naked version of Shera flying in the sky.

...No, the naked part wasn’t important.

It *wasn’t* important.

They made their way into the mansion. Every single door in sight slammed open, with more soldiers pouring out of them, clad in black, mafia-like light armor.

They were all unceremoniously blown away.

“Mmm?” Klem stopped her gait. Diablo noticed it at roughly the same time as

well.

A man walked slowly down the hallway in their direction. He seemed different from the rest. His muscles were packed and tight like armor, his expression severe and intimidating. The gaze in his eyes was sharp, and he had sword cut scars on his cheeks and forehead. Everyone else backed off, apparently deciding to let him take care of the situation. He must have been considerably skilled.

“Well, color me surprised. Someone’s actually dumb enough to storm into the Mesamoth familia’s mansion... Didn’t you hear that they hired *me*?”

“Whoa... Scarface actually came out,” one of the black-clothed ruffians, who hung back near the wall, whispered.

“Is he strong?” asked another one, standing next to him.

“Yeah, he’s a legendary guy... They say in the orc hunting mission three years ago, he faced off against the king of the pack, a grand orc, one-on-one, and beat it.”

“What?! He offed a grand orc?!”

“With his bare hands.”

“Yikes!”

Scarface clenched his fists and assumed a natural fighting pose, one that didn’t strain him in the slightest. Diablo wasn’t familiar with martial arts, but still felt the menacing aura emanating from this pose.

Looks like he’s a monk.

Monks were a class that didn’t use weapons or equipment, relying only on their limbs to defend themselves. It was a type of warrior class, and had high physical stats.

“I’m not one for beating women and children...but when it’s for business things are different. Don’t expect any mercy from me, and regret your mistakes in the afterlife.”

Klem tilted her head. “Are you Mesamoth?”

“...They said this man was hired by Mesamoth,” Rem answered in a small

voice.

“Then you’re not him! This Demon Lord is here to see Mesamoth, but everyone I see is the wrong person! Where is he?!”

“I’ll let you know if you can beat me.” Scarface smirked indomitably.

“Oh! I’ll take you up on that challenge then. Come at me.”

“Fighting a child... This is some dirty work.”

In the moment Diablo thought the opponent might take a step forward, Scarface had already closed the distance and unleashed his left fist.

A shrill *bang!* echoed through the room. Klem’s face—or rather, Diablo’s hand, which he’d stuck out before her face—caught Scarface’s fist.

“Hmph...” Diablo scoffed in a composed fashion, but it actually really hurt.

“You stopped...my fist?!” Scarface’s expression was filled with surprise.

“I suppose that’s all a normal attack will do. A monk isn’t worth much without his martial arts.”

“Tch... I never thought I’d have to use this against someone from the races! Claw Rash!”

Diablo used Omission to shorten his next spell’s casting time.

“Flare Burst!”

But before either of them could unleash their skills, the match was all but finished. Klem had kicked forward. That kick lacked the finesse of a martial arts move, and was just her extending her toes forward, but it was unbelievably fast, releasing an explosion the moment it made contact.

“Gaha?!” Scarface was blown back ridiculously despite guarding successfully, flying through the mansion’s stone walls and all the way out into the garden.

With its target lost, Diablo’s spell dissipated.

“Haha! How do you like that?!” Klem placed her hands on her waist, puffing out her chest.

“You went too far.”

“I did try *not* to kill him.”

“Wasn’t he going to tell us where Mesamoth is?”

“Aaah, darn it!”

Diablo shrugged. Rem and Shera had seemingly realized what levels of power were at play here. They may have been impressed with what just happened, but they weren’t surprised.

Mesamoth’s men, by contrast, were frozen and stiff with fright, speaking in trembling voices.

“I-Impossible! What sorta nightmare is this?!”

“Th-The legendary man...lost to a little girl...”

“Is this some kinda joke?!”

“I’ll ask you only the once, you cretins,” Diablo said, making his voice as menacing as possible. “If you value your lives, you *will* answer me.”

The underlings told them where Mesamoth was, so Diablo and his group made their way to the specified door.

†

At Mesamoth’s office—

An aging man sat on a leather-covered chair behind a large wooden desk. Standing in the room were also four brawny bodyguards. Four familiar men were also standing against the wall.

“It’s those men from Appetissant!”

“...There’s no mistaking them.”

“What?! It’s you guys again!” The ruffians flinched.

They apparently hadn’t gotten those lost fingers healed yet. Diablo ignored them and spoke to the man occupying the leather chair.

“Are you Mesamoth?”

“Unbelievable... You got this far in...” the aging man said with a bitter expression, wiping cold sweat from his forehead.

He was apparently aware his reliable underlings had been beaten already. Mesamoth himself was an old man, and Diablo couldn't detect any notable MP or SP coming from him. He wasn't much of a combatant.

I'll just threaten him so he stops his crimes.

"Heheheh... Mesamoth, you certainly made quite the mess around here. I'll have you know, I consider this town my base."

"We'll slaughter you!" Klem screamed.

Wait, back down!

That was a proclamation of murder, not a simple threat.

"Wh-Who are you...people?" Mesamoth asked with a nervous expression. "What group hired you? The Merchant's Association? The Adventurer's Guild? The governor?"

"I don't know about any group! This is revenge for your people interrupting our meal!"

Diablo thought they were doing this to help the restaurant out of trouble. The little Demon Lord's priorities didn't make much sense here.

"I-I'll pay you! I'll pay three times whatever they're offering you! Can't you spare me?!"

They'd already told him no one had hired them, but Mesamoth clearly wasn't thinking straight at this point.

"...Mesamoth, do you have any intention of ceasing your unlawful acts within this town?"

"Wh-What do you mean?"

"...Those men over there harassed the restaurant called Appetissant. There were many witnesses to that act."

"They did what?!" The old man cried out in feigned surprise. "Have you been up to no good?! I'll have to send the regional knights after you!"

"N-No, but..."

Mesamoth was dead set on making it seem like he wasn't guilty of anything.

“Hmph...” Diablo shrugged. “You thought your poor acting would fool me?”

“A-All right! I’ll leave Faltra! Will that be enough?!”

He’d just continue his villainy in some other town in that case. What a troublesome man... This was why Diablo didn’t want to deal with a crime syndicate. Diablo didn’t want to kill him, but was it all right to let him walk away...?

Klem kicked against the floor, closing in on Mesamoth before anyone could bat an eyelash. The bodyguards meant to protect him stood perfectly still, not budging to come to his aid. Their eyes probably couldn’t even keep up with her; even Diablo could only look on.

“W-Wait!” Mesamoth squealed.

Klem’s eyes shined bright red.

“I’ll slaughter you all, vile races!”

Mesamoth didn’t even have the time to resist as Klem’s hand swung horizontally at him like the reaper’s sickle. But the moment before the torrent of magical energy was about to scatter the man’s cranium, Shera screamed out Klem’s name, her voice echoing throughout the room. Klem changed her attack’s angle slightly, slashing the air over Mesamoth’s head.

“Gyah?!” The aging man was unceremoniously redesignated as the *bald* aging man.

His head was still on his shoulders, but all the hair on his head was gone. The chair’s backseat and all the items behind him were disintegrated, however, as if the fabric of reality was a painting and Klem’s fingers tore a hole through it all.

Diablo had to hide his surprise.

So fast! I’ve never even seen that attack before! Was that some spell with its incantation omitted? Or was it a special attack?

When Krebskulm was rampaging, it fought like a child throwing a tantrum. Its attacks packed great firepower, but its movements were simple and predictable. Diablo had no doubt about it: the way Klem was about to fight just now was stronger than anything that stampeding giant had done. If he had to

fight her now, he'd actually have to come up with a strategy to win. That was how strong she was.

The stone wall behind Mesamoth crumbled to dust with an exaggerated sound, and what it supported naturally fell from above. The building's roof wasn't supported by beams, but by its walls, making the ceiling slant as it gradually began falling inward.

One would usually run outside in this situation, but Mesamoth was frozen in place as Klem glared at him. His bodyguards were powerless before the menacing power before them. The four men from the restaurant fell on their backsides in terror, as Rem and Shera swallowed nervously. Diablo was so petrified, he didn't budge either.

Wait, if I just stay silent here, it'd look like I'm scared of Klem. That's not something a Demon Lord would do.

"Hmph," Diablo scoffed.

Klem, along with everyone else, turned her gaze toward him. They were all waiting to hear what he had to say.

Wait, this is bad. I didn't think of what to say!

"Heheh... Hahahahaha!" He gave a menacing laugh for starters.

"What's so funny, Diablo?" Klem asked with displeasure.

"'Slaughter,' you say? You're too easy on them! You're too kind to claim to be a Demon Lord, aren't you?"

"Oh? What do you suggest then?"

Diablo proclaimed his idea, one that shocked everyone in the room.

"Mesamoth, I forbid you from leaving this town."

"What?!" Klem raised her voice in surprise.

"Diablo, why?!" Shera asked him.

"Hmph... The fact I even have to explain it to you is deplorable."

I was just saying whatever came to mind, I don't have any more of an idea than you!

Rem was the only one to nod sagely at his declaration.

"...I see, so that's what you were thinking. Just the sort of forward thinking I'd expect out of you, Diablo. Your ideas never fail to surprise me."

"You claim to understand?"

Even as he spoke condescendingly, in his head he begged, *Get me out of this mess, Rem!*

"...If Mesamoth leaves Faltra, he'd just continue his crime spree in some other city," Rem explained. "So Diablo doesn't want him to leave town."

"But wouldn't he just continue doing bad things here then?" Shera asked.

Rem shook her head. "...Diablo is warning Mesamoth that if he ever dabbles in crime again, we'll punish him even more harshly than this."

"Oh, I get it now!"

"...In my opinion, he ought to apologize to all the people he's troubled in the past and turn over a new leaf as a proper businessman."

"Yeah, that sounds like a great idea!"

"...Whatever the case, though, if we ever hear of him committing any more crimes, losing his hair would be the least of his worries. Is that what you meant, Diablo?" Rem looked at him, as if waiting for him to grade her work.

Diablo nodded back. "I see you've properly understood my intentions."

"...I'm glad to hear I was right."

"Oh, impressive!" Klem brought her hands together in a loud clap. "Yes, I think that would be a good idea as well!" She then turned to the old man, patting his shoulder vigorously. "You heard what they said, right?!"

"Y-Yes!"

"So, like they said, do good things from now on!"

"Aaah! I-I'll change my ways! I'll apologize and only do good deeds!" Mesamoth fell from his chair and got on his hands and knees.

"Good. I'll believe your words, just this once." Klem nodded grandly. "If you

try to lie to this Demon Lord, I'll feed you to a hundred magical beasts. Don't forget that!"

Having magical beasts obey you must be a nice Demon Lord feature...

†

The next morning—

Diablo and his group were sitting around a table in the Peace of Mind Inn's dining hall, enjoying a late breakfast. The table had room for four on each side, with Rem sitting to Diablo's right and Shera to his left. Opposite them were Klem and Edelgard. They were arranged in a fashion where Klem was being tended to by both Edelgard and Shera.

It was the usual bread, sausages, and soup, but tasting the flavor of the inn's meals for the first time in a long while made the meal tastier than usual. It felt like he'd returned home.

Diablo suddenly heard the inn's poster girl, Mei, screech in surprise. Just outside the dining hall's entrance was the front desk, to which Diablo turned his gaze.

"Did a bug scare her or something?"

Rem cocked her head to the side. "...I don't think little Mei would be startled by something like a bug."

Incidentally, Rem's tone was always polite, but she often called people by their first names, and never by nicknames. For example, she called the Adventurer's Guild's guildmaster Sylvie, the Mage's Association's guildmaster Celestine, and the High Priest Lumachina...and of course, Diablo was Diablo. Perhaps it was a show of her self-dignity, a way of making it known she bowed to no one. But, oddly enough, Mei was the only one she friendly referred to as "little Mei."

Shera also looked at the dining hall's entrance. With an, "Ah?!" the wooden spoon fell from her hand as she shrieked with surprise, prompting Klem and Edelgard to also cast their gazes in the entrance's direction, wondering what the mess was all about.

A stern man, unbefitting the atmosphere of the dining hall, walked in. He was clad in full uniform, and had a single-edged sword on his waist. Seeing the man made Diablo rise from his seat unconsciously.

“Heheheh... Should you really be here?” Diablo said teasingly, trying to hide his panic behind flippant words. “If a public figure like you marches into a dining hall in full uniform, the citizens might complain.”

“Breakfast, this late in the day? You adventurers lead ever the depraved lifestyle.”

The one standing before them was the governor of the Citadel City of Faltra, Chester Ray Galford, with two regional knights accompanying him as guards. The other customers got up from their seats and began leaving. Galford was known for his severity, and Diablo wasn’t pleased to face off against him again. Simply put, Diablo didn’t want any trouble.

“What do you want?” Diablo asked.

“I didn’t come here for you today. There have been some rumors regarding this girl here.”

Galford fixed his gaze on Klem, who brushed her own hair in annoyance.

“Who are *you* supposed to be?”

“...This is Faltra’s governor, Klem,” Rem cut in before things started going south.

“Governor?”

“...It’s thanks to his work that the city is capable of developing. Your favorite bakeries and restaurants owe to that as well.”

“Oh, I see! That’s impressive! You have my praise.”

On the surface, she looked like nothing but a little girl, but there wasn’t a hint of amusement in Galford’s eyes as he gazed at her. Klem’s appearance meant his fervent gaze made him seem like a sexual deviant, but...Diablo kept those thoughts to himself.

“Erm...” Shera bent forward, as if trying to shield Klem. “Did Klem do something?”

“Acquaintances of mine in a certain organization have relayed rather interesting information to me. They say this girl, Klem, used unknown abilities and branded herself a ‘Demon Lord.’”

Apparently, some of Galford’s spies were among the Mesamoth’s familial goons. Were they the goons themselves, or possibly the guards?

I see you’re really passionate about doing your job, eh, Galford...

“Governor, Klem is just a child!” Rem objected.

“Calm yourself. I don’t assume the information to be true. I’ll merely have the mages inspect her. She will accompany me to a military facility.”

“Th-That’s...”

Bad. *Very* bad. If those capable of seeing the flow of magic in things were to inspect her, they’d probably notice that she wasn’t one of the races, even if they wouldn’t be able to tell if she were a Fallen or Demon Lord specifically. Klem wasn’t one for keeping secrets either...

“There’s no need for that! This Demon Lord is a Demon Lord! What do I have to hide?!”

Rem’s palm met her forehead in exasperation. Shera’s eyes were spinning with terror. Edelgard looked poised to fight, as if to buy Klem time to escape. And Galford, the man he was, had already seen through it all.

“We’ve deployed two layers of barriers around the inn’s vicinity. Should you resist, you will lose much. I suggest you be obedient.”

“Are you seeking a fight with me, Galford?” Diablo glared at him.

“I’d rather not, but I cannot turn a blind eye to this. On the off chance the Fallen may have infiltrated my city...”

The inn’s poster girl, Mei, cut between them, suppressing the imposing atmosphere with someone who looked like a customer at her back.

“Can I have a mewment?”

“I thought I ordered you not to let any more customers in,” Galford said, his gaze still fixed on Diablo.

“Nya~ This isn’t a customer. He said he wants to thank Klem☆”

“Hm?”

Mei stepped aside, and the person behind her stepped forward—Appetissant’s owner. Noticing the presence of the governor, he lowered his head a few times respectfully.

“My, I seem to have interrupted an important meeting... I beg your pardon. May I just say a thing or two?”

Galford nodded. “Go on.”

The owner bowed one more time, then lowered his head once again, this time toward Diablo.

“Thank you so much, all of you! The Mesamoth familia’s goons showed up afterward and promised not take any more money from me. They apologized for everything they’ve done so far!”

“Good, good.” Klem crossed her hands with a pleased expression.

“Thanks to you, I’ll be able to keep my business open,” the owner said through tears. “I thought if I had to pay them money for much longer, I’d have to close up the shop... R-Really...thank you ever so much!” It was probably hard on him, given how much he was crying.

“Nnn....” Shera was tearing up too. “That’s great! I’m so glad for you!”

“...Yes, I’m happy to hear things are looking up for you. But...I’m surprised you found us,” Rem said pensively.

“A young girl touring the town’s restaurants while giving expert critiques... I’d say little Klem here has become a celebrity among the city’s eateries,” the owner said, smiling brightly as he wiped tears from his eyes. “And, not to sound offensive, but you all have distinct appearances.”

Now that he mentioned it...they had a demon with horns on his head (though it only looked that way due to a piece of equipment’s effect), a black-haired pantherian (the majority of them had orange or red hair and tails), and a busty elf (while elves were mostly flat). Plus, Rem and Shera had Enslavement Collars around their necks, which were unusual to see people walking around in broad

daylight with.

Do we stand out more than we thought?!

With a bit of asking around, it probably wasn't hard to figure out that they were residing at this Peace of Mind Inn.

"This is such fine news you bring me!" Klem said, smiling at the owner who kept thanking them repeatedly. "But it was Diablo's idea to make Mesamoth do good! This Demon Lord simply wanted to massacre them! Diablo really is smart!"

Galford's eyebrow twitched upon hearing this as he stood a short distance from the table. Klem may have said too much...

Appetissant's owner walked away while other store owners walked in, as if taking his place. Apparently, they had all been extorted by Mesamoth as well, and Klem's actions saved them all from bankruptcy. They were coming in one after another, forming a line outside the inn...

By the time the tenth one walked in, Galford opened his mouth to speak. "Now it is time for me to take my leave."

Rem was about to protest, while Edelgard clenched her fists, but Galford silenced them both with a raised hand.

"There's no need for Miss Klem to accompany us any longer."

Shera, who hugged Klem to hide her from sight, uttered a peculiar, "Huh?!"

What's going on here...?

"...May I ask why you're letting her go?" Rem questioned.

"It's not possible for a Fallen to earn the gratitude of so many of my citizens. I'm a busy man, and haven't the time to dig into baseless rumors. That is all."

"...Y-Yes! Klem is a very good girl!"

"I'd be quite pleased to see to it that you're right." He suddenly stepped up to Klem, and placed his right hand over his sword. "Tell me, what would you do if a Demon Lord were to attack Faltra?"

"Anyone who interrupts this Demon Lord's meals will be met with

annihilation, whoever they may be.” Her response was immediate.

Galford’s lips slackened with an amused “hmph.” He pulled back, ordering his men to retreat. There were likely more people besides these two regional knights surrounding the inn. As Galford left the inn behind him, the oppressive atmosphere he’d brought with him receded as well.

†

The sun had set. It was nearly dinnertime. Diablo was alone in his room at this time, while Rem had gone to the Mage’s Association to inform Celes that she’d successfully removed the Demon Lord’s soul from her body. Edelgard was working in the bakery...possibly being the most commendable of them all.

Shera was with Klem in the adjacent room. The two were playing together, with Shera teaching Klem a song she’d made up and telling Klem of their adventures.

Being left alone to his devices for the first time in a while, Diablo prepared a large bucket in the middle of the room, in place of a tub. It wasn’t so much to wash off the tiredness of their long journey, as relaxing wasn’t entirely possible, but there was no telling when the next time he’d be able to do this would come around. He wanted to take any chances he had to wash his body.

Just as he took off his clothes, the door suddenly opened.

“Hm?”

“Oh, so this is where you were, Diablo!”

“What do you want?”

Klem had entered the room without knocking. She wore an exaggerated outfit that hid her Enslavement Collar, as well as the tail that stood as evidence of her demonic origins.

“Shera fell asleep.”

“In the middle of singing?”

“While she was telling me about her journeys. She falls asleep so easily, that one.”

“Perhaps her fatigue has caught up to her. Much has happened in her homeland.”

“Before she fell asleep, she told me something very thought provoking though.”

“Hm.”

Probably about the Demon Overlord...

They didn’t know how Klem would react upon learning of its existence. Diablo doubted she’d join forces and fight with them...but how would she see Diablo and his group fighting it without her?

“Getting married means a man and woman of the races come together, correct?” Klem asked.

“*That’s* what she told you?!”

“Is that wrong?”

“N-No... It’s not wrong. I became the king of Greenwood, and Shera is my queen.”

There was probably no need to discuss how their first night had ended in failure...

“So, the races do this ‘marriage’ thing...” Klem wore a dubious expression.

“And you don’t?”

“Aye! Neither do the Fallen. Ah, but Edelgard did say the Fallen give birth to offspring, so they seem to be the same as the races in that regard.”

“What?!”

That was a piece of lore that had never appeared in *Cross Reverie*. He couldn’t even imagine those misshapen abominations rearing children. But, that said, Edelgard was quite attractive, even from the perspective of the races. He had to wonder if a day would come when she, too, would bear Fallen children... That mental image was an odd one to say the least.

“What about Demon Lords...? I mean, when it comes to bearing children...”

“I don’t know. This Demon Lord has never married or given birth. I don’t know

about the other Demon Lords though.”

According to the myths, the current Demon Lords were fragments of the original Demon Lord after he’d been divided by God.

“So Demon Lords only resurrect...”

“Well, I’ve never tried bearing children. If I try, maybe I could. I just need to marry, right?”

“Huh?”

“Diablo, do you know how to make babies?”

“Uh... Aha, ahahahahahah! O-Of course I do!” He averted his gaze uncomfortably.

“Good! Share your secrets with this Demon Lord then!”

Wait. What?!

All of Diablo’s knowledge regarding procreation started and ended with what he’d seen in pornographic video games. He didn’t have any actual experience, or any confidence to teach anyone about the subject. Besides, Klem may be a Demon Lord, but she had the appearance of a little girl.

“It’s too soon for kids to hear about it.”

“What are you on about? This Demon Lord has lived for infinite aeons. Though I’ve spent most of that time sealed inside Rem...”

“Erm... You see, having babies is something only adults can do. Your age aside, you have the appearance of a child...”

“But I keep saying I’m *not* a child.” Klem pouted her lips diagonally. “I was treated as a proper lady when we went to the restaurant, was I not?! Ah, perhaps I should ask those people instead!”

“N-No, don’t!”

“I can’t? Then you teach me.”

“Ah, err... F-Fine... Some other time then. I’m busy right now.”

“Very well! It’s a promise!” She grinned at him brightly.

It felt like a kindergartner just made him promise to buy her a stuffed animal. Teaching a little girl, with that sort of expression on her face, was out of the question no matter what world he was in.

Klem then changed the subject, remembering something else on her mind.

“She also said something about someone proclaiming to be the Demon Overlord?”

So, Shera did tell her. Diablo thought this matter had much more gravity to it than asking about marriage... But this little Demon Lord’s order of priorities was beyond him.

“It’s the Demon Lord of Madness, Modinaram. It’s been absorbing the other Demon Lords.”

“Hmmhmm... This Demon Lord considered that method of getting stronger too.”

“You can do the same thing, Klem?!” It was one surprise after another...

“There’s nothing one Demon Lord can do that I cannot! But the more of the others you absorb, the fainter your own identity becomes.”

“So it’s not just your powers that mix together, your personalities meld as well?”

“I’ve never tried it, but that much I do know. I don’t want to stop being this Demon Lord.”

“Naturally.”

“But Madness wished for that, did he... How typical of him.”

“You know Modinaram?”

“We were one and the same once after all.”

That was true. Diablo took it as them being something akin to siblings. And if their abilities were similar, that meant...

“It seems Modinaram can sense where the other Demon Lords are located. He can likely trace them by their magical energy. What about you, Klem? Can you tell where he is, or where he’s headed?”

“Mmm...” Klem cocked her head, then pointed out the window. “He’s over there, but far away.”

“That’s good enough! If he starts moving closer, let me know. Right, and if I’m not around...I’ll prepare a way for you to contact me.”

The governor and the Mage’s Association would probably have someone around to tail her anyway. He’d just ask to have someone inform him while they were at it.

Klem nodded. “I’ll let you know if I notice.”

“The safety of this city depends on it. I’m counting on you.”

The Citadel City of Faltra was an important strategic point connecting the Demon Lord’s domain with the Kingdom of Lyferia. If this city were to fall, many of the races would be lost.

Diablo then inquired about a situation that had been bothering him for a while.

“The Fallen are strong, individually. Their tactics are different from the races’ army. They could easily ignore cities that have Fallen-repelling barriers like Faltra and attack other cities from the rear. Why do the Fallen always charge against the races head on?”

Both in the game and this world, the Demon Lord’s army’s strategy didn’t change.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Klem puffed up her chest. “Battle is only meaningful when you show the full extent of your power. What’s the point of war and strife if all you’re doing is sneaking around and attacking your enemy from the back?”

“Hm, I see...”

Spinning schemes like that wasn’t the Demon Lord way. It was only by attacking head on, winning and proving your strength that one became a symbol of terror.

“Have no fear, Diablo!” Klem beat her fist against her modest chest in a show of resolve. “This Demon Lord will keep this city safe in your absence!”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

Her system of values was completely different to his. But, while she often made him anxious, there was no doubting Klem's strength. She likely wouldn't lose even against a large army of Fallen, and the city had Galford as well.

"By the way..." She pointed to the large bucket on the floor. "What's that?"

†

"Very well, bathe me!" Klem said, excitedly taking off her clothes.

How did it come to this...? Diablo asked himself dryly.

"This is used to wash one's body," Diablo explained to Klem regarding the bucket.

"Oh...?" It seemed Klem didn't understand.

"Lyferia is a dry country, so sweat's smell doesn't waft much here, but I believe staying hygienic is still in good taste."

"Hmmhmm?"

"Do you Demon Lords even know what 'hygiene' and 'sanitation' are?"

"You know, every now and then you spout some meaningless words!"

Right, this world still has a Middle Ages culture sphere, and they don't have these concepts at all...

They hadn't discovered bacteria and viruses yet (if they even exist in this world at all), so the idea of sterilization didn't exist either. However, Lyferia did, fortunately enough, have toilets, and while baths were seldom used, nobles and high class inns did employ them. Underwear was utilized as well.

Wonderful!

Toilets and underwear weren't common In the Middle Ages of Diablo's old world. People had to relieve themselves using pans sitting in the corner of the room and throw their waste out the window... That sounded rough. Some stories had settings where someone actually got sent to the Middle Ages instead of another world, but..just imagine the cute heroine of your favorite story doing her business on the roadside. Plus, paper was a very rare commodity in this world, so toilet paper didn't exist either. Diablo also imagined

some commoners probably had to make due without underwear. That was harsh to be sure.

All that aside, teaching Klem the notion of hygiene was hard. Halfway through he got tired of trying to think of a good way to go about and decided to sum it up instead:

“Err... Put simply...you bathe because it feels good.”

“I see! So it feels good. That’s important!”

She didn’t understand it at all, but at least she seemed pleased with the answer. Diablo didn’t anticipate what she said next however...

“This Demon Lord wants to try it too!”

“Mm? That’s not a problem, but...”

“You bathe me then!”

No sooner than Klem had said it that she began undressing herself.

“Wh-Wha?!” Diablo panicked.

“What’s wrong? I thought I was supposed to take off my clothes to bathe.”

“That’s true, but...”

Klem knitted her eyebrows sadly. “Demon Lords can’t bathe?”

“No, it shouldn’t be a problem for a Demon Lord to bathe, but...”

There was another problem altogether. Diablo felt a cold sweat run down his back. Not letting Klem try after he piqued her interest would just leave her confused and saddened.

Wait, she’s just a kid. There shouldn’t be a problem with me washing her body, right?

Klem was a Demon Lord and didn’t have anyone to call a parent. There may be a being the Demon Lord had originated from, but just like the origin of God, the myths didn’t go that far back.

So right now, we’re her parents, and this is just child rearing, isn’t it?!

“So be it!” Diablo hardened his resolve. “There’s no problem at all!

Probably...”

“Very well, bathe me!” Klem said, excitedly taking off her clothes.

After a moment, she stood stark naked in front of him. Her smooth chest lacked any curvature, and the shape of her ribcage was visible under her skin. Her skin had a doll-like luster to it that seemed too lovely to be considered anything but art. Her lower half had a smoothness that was unlike that of an adult, but Diablo kept his gaze away from there.

She really is a kid...

Klem tilted her head. “What’s wrong, Diablo?”

“Ah... Nothing... It’s fine. There’s absolutely no problem whatsoever! Anyone who calls this indecent has an indecent mind! I’m merely just bathing a child. You can sit down in the bucket.”

“Hmmhmm.”

She squatted in the bucket, just as she was told. It was too small for Diablo to sit in, but for Klem it was like a tub. He placed a jar full of water near the bucket, and used it to soak a piece of cloth.

“It should feel a bit cold, so don’t be too surprised.

“As cold as ice magic?”

“Not *that* cold.”

Now that she mentioned it, even Absolute Zero, one of the strongest water element spells, capable of reducing all kinetic energy to nothing forever, wasn’t capable of affecting Klem. All it did was stop her in place for a moment.

Diablo pressed the wet cloth to Klem’s leg.

“Ah, cold!” Klem’s hips jolted.

“...What?”

“I-It’s cold!”

“O-Oh... I guess you’re weaker to cooling type attacks than I thought?”

“I can bear them just fine, but this is still cold!”

“I see.”

“All your magic did was make me lose an arm, but it still hurt.”

“...I have mixed feelings about you comparing an Apocalypse Abyss spell to a wet cloth...”

He’d never fought a fully powered Demon Lord in this world. They were either in a state of frenzy or half-sealed... He was anxious about the upcoming battle with the Demon Overlord Modinaram. But for now, he had to focus on the task ahead of him.

Diablo used the wet cloth to wash Klem’s leg. She’d gotten used to the cold, instead twisting and turning ticklishly.

“Heeheehee!”

“Hmm.”

Her white, ceramic-like skin was smooth and soft to the touch. It was just a little wet, but the fabric slid across it without resistance. Ever since he came to this world, many surprising things had happened, but he never even dreamed he’d end up bathing a Demon Lord. It was an odd feeling.

Finishing her legs, Diablo washed her arms next. She permitted him to wash her hair, so he washed off the sand and dust that clung to her, washing her horns in the process.

These are real...

Real horns stuck out of Klem’s scalp. In Diablo’s case, his horns were merely a cosmetic effect of the Distorted Crown. He ran his fingers over her horns, ascertaining their texture.

“Aaahn...” Klem’s body twitched suddenly.

“Hm. Does it tickle?”

“Aye, because others don’t touch them much.”

“So your sense of feeling extends to your horns...”

He poked them a few times with his fingers. Klem’s shoulders jolted.

“Aaah... S-Stop that, Diablo... They’re a bit sensitive.”

“I’ll just wash them off with water then.”

“Mmm~”

Diablo had no sensation in his horns because they were merely a decoration...but this was a good reference to take note of.

He then moved to washing Klem’s back. Her torso was thin, to the extent of the vertebrae of her back being visible. Her coccyx had a scaled tail, reminiscent of a dragon’s, that parted in two toward its end in a very distinctive fashion. It swung left and right, and Diablo grabbed it.

“Should I wash here too, Klem?”

“Nnn... Be gentle?”

“Y-Yeah...”

She probably wasn’t aware of it, but that line had a very suggestive ring to it. He doused her tail with water and wiped it with the cloth.

“Nnn... Kuh...” A shiver ran through Klem’s spine.

“What’s wrong?”

“N-Nothing... I just think I feel a bit cold. Can you finish this quickly?”

“You can withstand absolute zero temperatures, but this makes you cold?” Diablo asked with a crooked smile.

“That’s how it feels,” Klem said, her cheeks flushed red.

Child rearing, this is child rearing. Child rearing...

Diablo recited those words in his head repeatedly like a mantra.

“Nn!” When he wiped the root of her tail, Klem’s body jolted.

“Is it cold?”

“Nnn... It’s all right...”

“I see.”

He never imagined a Demon Lord could catch a cold, but decided to hasten things up.

“Nn... Ah...”

“Th-That bad?”

“A-A little... A little further.” Klem lifted her waist and opened her closed legs.

“Ah?!” That wasn’t the root of her tail, but the base of her legs.

Diablo stiffened. There wasn’t any odd meaning to it, but surprises could make people freeze up instantly. Turning her head to face Diablo, Klem directed a bewitching smile that seemed almost alien on the face of a girl.

“Heheh... You’re an odd one. You didn’t flinch while fighting this Demon Lord, but you’re shaking like a leaf right now.”

“I-I am not shaking! If anything, you’re the odd one here. You could withstand one of my ultimate spells, but a bit of water is making you writhe and moan.”

He flinched for a moment, but it was an important place to keep clean. He extended his hands between Klem’s legs from behind.

“Mere water does not phase this Demon Lo— Aaah?!”

“Does it now?”

“W-Wrong! That was because you pushed against me. Go on, try it again.”

“Like this?”

“Nn... Ugh... O-One more time.”

“This?”

“Aaah... It’s because you’re caressing me in such a place... Nnn...”

“A-All right, let’s wrap this up...”

“No.” Klem closed her legs, clasping them around Diablo’s hand and the cloth.

“Wh-What are you...”

“Aaah... Just a bit more... You have to make sure you wiped it well enough... Nnn...”

“I think it’s clean enough as it is...”

Klem’s eyes had an intoxicated, bewitched sheen to them. Diablo moved his

hand as requested, and she writhed against his touch.

“Nn... Aaah... Nnn... I see... This is quite... Haa... I think I...understand now.”

“Understand what?”

“Washing one’s body...really does feel good.”

“I-Isn’t it?! Washing off all the sweat and dirt feels great.”

“Nn... Yes... You are...right.... Haaa... Nnn... Nnn... Ah, it feels good, Diablo.”

“Hm.”

“Ah... Ah... Nn... Just a little more...”

“Y-Yeah...”

“Mm... Aaah... Nnn... Ah.” Klem arched her back.

Must be because the water’s so cold...

A shiver ran through her body, and then...a bubbling sound filled the room as a shade of yellow mixed into the bucket.

“Ah?!” Diablo stood up in surprise.

“Aaah... Nnn... Aah... I think it...leaked...”

“You ‘leaked,’ did you...”

“Haaa... Diablo. Bathing feels good...”

“Y-Yeah, I’m glad you understand...”

“Yes...” Klem nodded with an absentminded expression.

He later washed the bucket out quite thoroughly.

Interlude

By the time Rem returned to the inn after her visit to the Mage's Association, it was almost dinnertime. There was more to report than she originally intended, so it lasted longer than expected.

"Hm?"

Klem walked out of the room she was staying in, the large room she shared with Diablo and Shera.

"You're back, Rem."

"...Yes." Rem nodded back to Klem's carefree smile.

The Demon Lord Krebskulm. Its existence bound Rem's clan for so long, and she became an adventurer to defeat it. Now, that very Demon Lord has become as close to her as family.

But while she was capable of treating Klem normally when they were with everyone else, her old feelings crept up when it was just the two of them alone, and that made her uneasy.

There was another reason she was anxious though: the Divinity Crystal containing the vestiges of Krebskulm's soul was sitting in her pouch. Klem, standing before her, was in an incomplete state. But if Klem were to absorb the crystal, Klem could very well fully awaken. And when the image of Krebskulm resurrected floated around in Rem's memory, she froze. The terror she was trying to suppress clawed its way back up.

Right now, Klem is just a biscuit-loving little girl, Rem reminded herself.

"...Were you playing with Shera?" Rem asked, trying to distract herself from her anxieties.

"Shera fell asleep in my room."

"Huh... So you were playing with Diablo then?"

"He washed my body!"

Rem stiffened. Suddenly, all the anxiety and fear dancing in the back of her

mind didn't seem the least bit important in the face of another emotion brewing inside her.

"...I-I see... I see. Would you care to tell me what you were doing, in as much detail as you can?"

"Ooh, that's a nice expression you've got there."

Those words made Rem's hand fly to her face. She didn't quite know for sure, but she realized her expression right now most likely wasn't an amicable one.

"...Are you being sarcastic?"

"No? You tend to keep your emotions bottled up too much."

Someone else had told her something similar just a short while ago—a former paladin called Gewalt, who was now aligned with the Order of Palace Knights. He was a craven villain, willing to go after the life of the High Priest Lumachina for the sake of financial gain despite his status as a paladin. His skill as a summoner, however, was the real deal.

"...Being too emotional is proof one is immature. Acting irrationally can bring danger upon you."

"But trying to keep up a façade will prevent you from exhibiting your true power."

"...You may say that, but this is just my personality."

"Hmhm... In that case, have this."

Klem reached into her mouth and pulled something out with a popping sound. It was a white fang.

"Wh-What are you doing, Klem?!" Rem cried out, her face pale with concern.

"When you wish to no longer depend on Diablo, but on your own power, press this against your forehead. I imagine its effects may be a bit dire though..."

"You pulled out your tooth—for me?!"

"This much is nothing. You've been a great help to me, Rem."

"...Y-Yes, I suppose fate has bound us together, in a way..."

“You bought this Demon Lord biscuits the other day after all!”

“...Um...isn’t our relationship a bit more important than that? Like, between one who was sealed, and their vessel?”

“You weren’t the one who sealed this Demon Lord, right?” Klem asked, tilting her head quizzically.

“I suppose not, but...”

God was the one who sealed the Demon Lord in Rem’s clan, or so it was said. The soul had been passed down from mother to daughter since.

“I hear having carried the seal of this Demon Lord has put quite the strain on you. But that’s not my fault either.”

“...Yes.”

“This Demon Lord enjoys living in this city with you. That’s why I’m giving this to you, to keep you safe.”

Klem extended her hand, presenting Rem with the tooth. After a moment of hesitation, Rem accepted the Demon Lord’s fang. It was small, white, and very pretty.

Chapter 3: Meeting the Swordmaster

Three days later— Diablo got up earlier than usual and headed to the dining hall alone. Rem and Shera were still in bed, but they'd probably wake up in half an hour or so. Assuming they'd have breakfast together, he walked up to the counter to ask Mei for a cup of coffee.

He sat in his regular spot. Those preparing to set out had breakfast before sunrise so they had time to make preparations before they left. Those intending to lodge at the inn longer slept in a bit more.

But now was neither of those times, and owing to that, the dining hall was empty. Diablo had it all to himself. With no internet, TV, or games to pass the time, all he could do was absentmindedly sip his coffee. He hardly had times like these in his other world.

"Sure is peaceful..."

The Demon Overlord amassing his forces to the west, the palace's suspicious movements, the mysteries surrounding his own summoning... It all felt so far away.

Suddenly, the pattering of footsteps running along the staircase reached his ears, and someone barged into the dining hall.

"Diablo?!" Rem appeared, raising her voice while wearing her sleeping gown.

"Wh-What's wrong, Rem?!" He was startled by her unbecoming state of dress.

Her gaze falling on Diablo, Rem gave a long sigh of relief and leaned against the wall in exhaustion.

"It was still early, but when I woke up and you weren't in bed... I thought you'd gone off on your own."

"Me, alone?"

"...You did say you'd set out again after we return to Faltra."

He recalled their conversation in the elven country...

“Yes. For the time being, we’ll return,” Diablo told her of his plans.

“...After that, will we be heading somewhere else? Sylvie asked us to help defend Faltra, if you recall.”

“That is precisely why I must set out.”

Diablo planned to leave as early as today. His objective was to level himself up, but he didn’t know if he had to take Rem and Shera with him to do so. Going alone might help him focus and concentrate on training.

I suppose I could leave them behind...

That thought had crossed his mind, but thinking it over, Rem handled pretty much all their negotiations in regard to inns and stables. When they camped out, she was also the one who stoked the fires and cooked. Shera used any break they took to pick fruit and hunt, and was good at finding water sources too. Those weren’t factors in *Cross Reverie*, and Diablo didn’t have the skills to do any of those things.

Is traveling alone impossible for me?

“Hmph...” Diablo crossed his arms in a self-important manner as he leaned back against the chair’s backrest. “Going alone would speed things up. But right now I was in the mood to enjoy my morning coffee, so I took my time.”

“I’ll come with you!” Rem placed a hand over her chest, a resolved expression on her face.

That was quite fine, but...her current garments left Diablo to hold back a blush about to creep onto his cheeks. Despite him being used to seeing her like this when they went to sleep, her sleeping gown was so thin that under the dining hall’s lighting Diablo could see the contours of her body she probably would have preferred to have kept hidden from sight.

“F-Fine, I understand. Just go change out of that,” Diablo said, diverting his gaze. “What will you do if other guests show up?”

“Huh? Ah... Aaaah?!”

She was probably so surprised to find Diablo had left the bed that she rushed out forgetting how she was dressed. Her face turning red like a lobster, Rem

covered her body with both her arms and rushed out of the dining hall.

“P-Please wait for me! I’ll be ready in just a moment! Just a moment, all right?!” She left her words behind as she ran up the stairs.

Her usual outfit didn’t have much more in terms of fabric-to-skin ratio, but walking around in her sleeping gown in broad daylight was embarrassing, or so Diablo thought.

†

Everyone gathered and they all had breakfast. The regular course of bread, sausages, and soup was lined up on the table. Diablo, Rem, and Shera were seated, as were Klem and Edelgard.

I suppose there’s no problem with taking Rem and Shera along, but...how do I explain my objective?

Diablo was troubled. It may have seemed trivial at first sight, but this was a major issue for his Demon Lord role playing. A Demon Lord was a final boss, with his abilities perfected and flawless. He’d just sit in his castle, waiting for the hero to level up and challenge him.

But extending to a warrior class involved great effort and hardship. He couldn’t keep acting like he had up to this point. Worst of all, asking Swordmaster Graham to teach him went against his Demon Lord attitude.

But before he could gather his thoughts, Rem began speaking.

“...Diablo, isn’t it time you told us where we’re going, and for what purpose?”

“Omomomah, nomomah~” Shera said (or attempted to say), munching on her breakfast.

“...Don’t talk with your mouth full.”

“*Gulp!* I said, right, you didn’t tell us yet!”

Shera didn’t seem awfully concerned about it though. She was never the type to think too deeply about things, and thought it was natural for them to go together no matter where they were headed.

It’d look odd to keep it hidden any longer, so Diablo started with a certain

piece of information, to preserve his Demon Lord-ly dignity.

“Do you know of a swordmaster called Graham who lives on a mountain in the northern parts of the Demon Lord’s domain?”

“Swordmaster?” Shera cocked her head quizzically.

“I’ve heard of something to that effect.” Being a more proper adventurer, Rem seemed to have known about it. “Those who seek to master the path of the warrior go to a swordmaster to extend their limits.”

“Yes, the swordmaster does exist.”

“It’s not some sort of fairytale?”

“Emile seems to be under Graham’s tutelage.”

There was no guarantee it was the same as the game, but if Emile met the swordmaster, he had to have been at least level 80. He was roughly level 50 before, which meant he’d grown significantly in such a short period of time. A speed that approached the time it would take to level up that much in the game actually.

But the fact that the Swordmaster had given him the quest to “visit all the countries” meant he wasn’t ready to break the level cap. It seemed he wasn’t level 99 just yet.

Diablo intended to extend his own class to that of a warrior, and if he were to fight the Demon Overlord, he’d have to break the limit of the races and go over level 100.

Klem, who was eating in the adjacent table, widened her eyes with surprise. “Oh! So you wish to master the blade, Diablo?!”

“Ah, no...” Seeing her cut right to the point made him panic.

Grinding levels wasn’t Demon Lord-ly after all. But denying with words alone was meaningless. Pride aside, he’d have to grow stronger if he intended to beat Modinaram.

Diablo was at a loss for what to say, but Rem nodded, a convinced expression on her face.

“...Yes, I see. Your resourcefulness never fails to surprise to me. You’re already so strong, but you never neglect to aim higher.”

“Wha?!”

“Diablo, you can get even stronger?! That’s incredible!” Shera exclaimed, her eyes positively glittering.

“Demon Lords are already quite strong from the moment they’re born,” Klem said, visibly impressed. “But the idea of growing stronger would never cross our minds.”

“Erm... Y-Yes. I am a Demon Lord after all...”

Dammit, leveling up really isn’t *like a Demon Lord! What excuse do I make?! My whole image is gonna fall apart at this rate!*

As Diablo felt terror creep down his spine, Klem stood up on top of her chair.

“But now there’s someone like Madness, who absorbs the other Demon Lords!”

“R-Right.”

“So you’re a Demon Lord who grows stronger too!”

That’s it!

Diablo held back the joy from reaching his voice. Smiling a cool, knowing smile, he nodded with intensity.

“Hmph... I am the true Demon Lord, so my ambition is likewise as ultimate. Isn’t that obvious?”

Internally, he wiped his forehead of the bullets he’d been sweating. He was worried the others learning about his desire to level up as a warrior would ruin his Demon Lord persona, but he somehow managed to talk his way out of that. It was all thanks to the image he’d built up until now. Rem, Klem, and Shera’s sincerity helped out a great deal as well.

“Swordmaster is, from the races?” Edelgard snuck a gaze at him from the nearby table and mumbled an objection. “Demon Lord...wouldn’t rely on, races.”

An apt comment. But he did have an excuse for that at the ready.

“Hmph... That is why you lose.” Diablo curled his lips in a smirk.

“Huh?!”

“Be it the races or the Fallen, I’ll make use of whoever I need. If anyone stands in my path, I’ll destroy them. That’s all there is to it... Fussing over matters of blood is narrow-minded.”

“Hmmm.” Edelgard puffed up her cheeks grumpily.

“The Fallen grow stronger by receiving magical energy from the Demon Lord, but the races train to grow stronger. If you wish to be of use to Klem, don’t just earn money in the bakery, devote yourself to growing stronger.”

“I know!” Edelgard peevishly turned away. She was in a position to lead an army of Fallen, but was even more childish than Klem on some fronts.

I don’t know if I’ll be able to rely on the Swordmaster to level up efficiently though.

There were many differences between this world and *Cross Reverie*. What type of person was the swordmaster?

After breakfast, Diablo and his group took to their carriage and set out to the Demon Lord’s domain.

†

Finally going out on the journey, Diablo equipped an item he’d picked up when he escorted Rose to the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth. It was a suit of black armor with gold hemming that was even flashier than what he usually wore, as well as a cape and gauntlets with a similar appearance. This gear had the benefit of increasing the amount of experience points he’d receive. He didn’t know if they were effective in this world, but it was worth trying.

In *Cross Reverie*, he’d reached max level in the sorcerer class so he hadn’t equipped it in a long time, but during the early stages of the game he used it quite often. Putting it on in this world felt oddly nostalgic. Its defensive stats were a bit low, which was a little dangerous, but he had to prioritize increasing his level as a warrior for now.

He did keep the Distorted Crown equipped, though. If anyone found out the horns on his head were just for appearance, he'd have to bury himself from the shame.

The weapon he chose also had experience point gains in mind. The Seraphix Blade dangling from his waist was equipable by a level 70 warrior. Its offensive stats were questionable compared to other weapons of its level, but it made up for that with an effect that increased the experience points the wielder obtained.

Can I even use these here?

It was technically possible to equip them even in the game itself, but a sorcerer wouldn't be able to activate any of the equipment's effects. But in this world, it was possible to level up multiple classes, in which case even a sorcerer like him should be able to use these.

The Seraphix Blade required being level 70 or higher. Emile had once appraised Diablo as a warrior around level 40, and Diablo wondered if he might actually be a little higher. Even with wishful thinking, however, level 70 felt like a stretch. He'd have to level up some more to use the Seraphix Blade. As such, Diablo decided to challenge monsters—which he'd usually just blow away with magic—head on in melee combat.



“Raaah!” Diablo slashed with his sword, stabbing his blade into the neck of a gigantic Madara Snake that jumped out of a lake. Drops of blood stained the air.

Kuh! It didn’t cut him down!

In the game, a Madara Snake was a level 60 monster, but in this world, it came off as a little weaker than that. Diablo had beaten it this time, with some difficulty, with the help of Rem’s summons and Shera’s bow.

Fighting them one-on-one is kinda challenging... I suppose I’m somewhere around level 50 as a warrior then?

That was the impression he got after the battle ended. This was another world, but it was a reality. There was no music that played when you won battles, no fanfares blaring to celebrate level-ups or rare items drops. It was quite dull. Worst of all, he had no indication of how many experience points he’d obtained, or if he received any at all. The numbers didn’t show up anywhere. Reality was so bland... How many more monsters would he have to beat to get the experience he needed? How many more experience points would he need to level up? Was the gear even working...?

He had no way of telling.

“God, what a shitty game.”

“...Is something wrong Diablo?”

“It’s nothing.”

He couldn’t help but feel respect for Rem who’d managed to level up to a level 50 summoner with these depressing mechanics. For now, though, he just had to believe that he was gaining experience the same way he did in the game.

†

A week after they started heading to the north of the Demon Lord’s domain, Diablo and his group found themselves at the foot of a mountain called Mount Tenzan. Despite its name, it had no relation to a certain aircraft...

The village at the base of the mountain was as peaceful as any settlement of the races. Soldiers and adventurers stuck out more here than they did in Faltra, but it wasn’t as gloomy as you would expect from a place where recluses and

monks gathered. It was surrounded by walls, and both sides of the main street were lined with stalls and peddlers. Diablo and his group could even hear the shouts of an old man selling skewered meat from afar.

“Welcome, welcome! We got giant toad meat! It’s nice and soft!”

“...That sounds good, doesn’t it, Diablo?”

“Isn’t that a frog monster?”

“Look, Diablo, they’re selling all this fruit I’ve never seen before!”

“Are you sure they’re not poisonous?”

Rem and Shera seemed excited to be in a new, unknown town. Being adventurers, albeit each for their own reasons, meant they fundamentally enjoyed traveling. Diablo, on the other hand, was a shut-in, so his cautious nature took the driver’s seat.

Wasn’t this village just some unremarkable healing spot in the game...?

“You’re quite lively, aren’t you.”

“...We’re gathering intel, Diablo. I’ll ask the peddlers for information while I buy my skewers.”

“And I’m gonna buy some fruit!”

“Do what you wish.”

Diablo wasn’t any good when it came to talking to other people, so he left the information gathering to Rem and Shera.

A short while later— Rem had returned, nibbling on a skewer that had what looked like chicken meat on it.

“...They call this town Sormas. It was founded by people wishing to train under the swordmaster. It seems many went on to open their own dojos.”

“So this is a warrior town.”

“...Eventually, this town attracted skilled blacksmiths and apothecaries, so despite it being in the Demon Lord’s domain, monsters don’t dare approach this place.”

“Then that’s why it’s flourishing so.”

“...Adventurers and merchants need a place to rest at safely. I heard they have a large coach house as well.”

“Hmm. If the swordmaster’s dwelling is nearby, we may want to leave our carriage there.”

“Mm! Mm!” Shera raised her hand, her cheeks stuffed with fruit.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full.”

“Omnom! Nng! *Gulp!* Graham’s house is on the top of the mountain!” Shera pointed toward Mount Tenzan.

Diablo knitted his brows. “So we have to climb...”

The mountain’s slopes were rather gentle, but gradually changed their angle the higher up you went. The top of the mountain was also surrounded by clouds. Diablo hated walking, but with his level 150 body, climbing shouldn’t be impossible.

“Oh, and they were selling these too.” Shera held out her hand, presenting a round, brown...something.

“What’s this?”

“It’s a Swordmaster Bun!”

“...I’ve seen them selling replicas of the swordmaster’s wooden sword too.”

“Whoa, that sounds cool!”

What are these, hot spring souvenirs?!

While *Cross Reverie* was seemingly developed by taking inspiration from this world, its developers apparently had to consider all sorts of things to make it into a game. A player who played long enough to reach level 80 wasn’t a beginner anymore. It’d take them roughly two months of real time to do so. Expecting that sort of player to be impressed with a Swordmaster Bun was absurd. They’d expect something more dignified of their time spent to get here.

Whatever the case, if they were to climb up the mountain, the carriage wouldn’t be of any help. They decided to entrust it to the coach house.

At the coach house— It was a large storehouse near the city walls. It had a grassy field surrounded by high fences, allowing the horses to roam as they wished. The coach house's owner was a stout-faced dwarf, a race with dog ears and tails, who looked to be a former adventurer. Upon seeing Diablo's carriage, he narrowed his eyes.

"Nice carriage ya got there. Did ya buy it at the capital?"

"...Yes, we did. You can tell?"

They left the talking to Rem. Handling merchants was too difficult for Diablo, who hated talking to people, and Shera, who was a touch too airheaded.

The dwarf shopkeeper nodded. "It's a work of an acquaintance of mine actually. Glad to see he's in good health."

It was hard to tell from his expression with the beard covering his face, but his voice was thick with nostalgia.

"...We came here to meet the swordmaster, so we'd like to leave our carriage with you for a while. Would that be acceptable?"

"The swordmaster? Ya be climbing Mount Tenzan?"

"If we must."

The dwarf looked Rem over, then turned his gaze to Diablo and Shera.

"Ya people are strong, eh? Must be, if you rode through the Demon Lord's domain to get all the way out here."

"...We do have confidence in our skills."

"In that case, ya should turn back for now."

Something was off about what he just said...

"What do you mean?" Rem asked.

"Around six months back, some creature called the evil ape started appearing around these parts. We don't know if it's a Fallen or some weird beast, but it's extremely dangerous."

"...Some unknown monster then?"

“From what the people who fought it said, it’s covered in fur from head to toe. It don’t seem to understand language, but it wields a sword skillfully. And it seems to only go after skilled adventurers like yourselves.”

“Huh? It deliberately picks strong adventurers?”

“It apparently attacks ‘em out of nowhere after they beat some strong monster.”

“...Maybe it’s simply trying to take advantage of them being exhausted?”

“I don’t know what goes through a monster’s noggin. I’m just warning ya.”

“Yes, we appreciate the precaution.”

The dwarf motioned for them to bring the carriage deeper into the warehouse. “I’ll take care of your carriage. I’ll go write up a contract. Gotta handle those sorta matters formally.”

He looked bold and sketchy at first glance, but the shopkeeper was rather meticulous about his work.

“I’ll be going into the warehouse.” Rem moved the carriage per his instructions.

“Steady now... The horses look a touch skinny. Have ya been pushing ‘em pretty hard?”

“...They may be tired. It’s been a long journey.”

“I’ll give ‘em a potion then.”

“...What about the cost?”

Rem began pressing the shopkeeper on the terms. It was an impressive sight. Even if she were to quit being an adventurer, she could make for a fine businesswoman.

Diablo looked around. It was a fairly common coach house. Perhaps it was because the town was surrounded by walls, but it had a calm atmosphere that made Diablo forget they were in the Demon Lord’s domain.

“Hm?”

Suddenly, he noticed a cart sitting in the front of the warehouse. When he

noticed what was loaded onto it, he broke into a run to look closer.

“This is...?!”

It was loaded with what looked like golden apples, with their leaves in the shapes of stars. *Cross Reverie* had an item that looked very similar to this.

Are these all Golden Fruit?!

Consuming a Golden Fruit granted you experience points. In the game, it gave you an amount equal to several hours of level grinding. Of course, it wasn’t the type of item you’d usually find piled up by the dozens like this. It was an SSR rarity item you could only get as an award for special occasions like completing an event, defeating a boss, or conquering a dungeon. It was so sought after by all players that putting it up for trade could net you a fortune.

If these Golden Fruit granted experience points just like in the game, that’d be amazing. Several hours of grinding in the game equaled several days worth of training in this one. And there was a literal cartload of them sitting before his very eyes. They may have looked similar, but did their effect match too?

“Those fruit grow on trees on Mount Tenzan,” the dwarf shopkeeper spoke. “They got a nice color to ‘em, but they taste something awful. Golden Fruit, I think they call ‘em.”

So these are *Golden Fruit!*

“Really? But they look so tasty...” Shera picked one of the apples up and bit into it. Her expression darkened rapidly as she started spitting it out. “Ungh! Ptui! Ptui!”

“Gahahaha!” the shopkeeper laughed, holding his belly. “Even starved animals wouldn’t eat these, y’know? They’re so bitter even roasting or cooking ‘em doesn’t seem to help.”

“Wh-Why even pick these things then...?”

“They’re a type of medicinal plant. Ya can crush ‘em to make damn good manure that really helps with growing vegetables. Spreading them on the fields keeps insects away too.”

Bad taste, huh...

Taste wasn't relevant in the game, and no player would ever hesitate to consume a Golden Fruit.

"There's also this rumor that warriors of old liked eating Golden Fruit too..." The dwarf patted an old scar on his face. "Well, whatever the case, they ain't anything the races should be eating."

"My tongue stings..." Shera made a sour face as the shopkeeper offered her a glass of water.

"I've heard of rats that ate these things and died. They might be toxic. Should teach ya to not bite into food ya don't know, I s'pose."

"S-Say that sooner!"

Diablo turned a serious gaze toward the Golden Fruit.

Toxic?

Given how rare they were in *Cross Reverie*, there weren't any cases of players consuming large numbers of them. It might be worth considering if they were actually dangerous, and there was no telling if they actually granted experience points in this world.

Having returned from signing the contract for the carriage's safekeeping, Rem pointed out toward the street.

"...I'm sure there's more decent food we can find that isn't as suspicious. We should also gather tools for scaling the mountain while we're at it."

"Yep, yep, I wanna eat some tasty fruit!" Shera raised both hands to the air.

Diablo offered no objections.

†

The following day— It was clear out, perfect for hiking. Apparently, the mountain trail led all the way up to the swordmaster's retreat. There were stone stakes carved with waypoints on them along the road, making it truly look like a tourist attraction of sorts. It almost felt like a picnic. If only this weren't a mountain in the Demon Lord's domain...

Sure enough, magical beasts had appeared after a while. There was a Black

Fang (a large, black wolf) and a Giant Grizzly (a massive, gray bear). They were merely level 80 and shouldn't have been that big of a threat. Still, Diablo's lacking skills as a warrior weren't enough to match the monsters in the area. He had to resort to magic to deal with them.

It had been six hours since they left Sormas to climb up Mount Tenzan. The peak still seemed far away, but the slopes became steeper, to the extent where the mountain had essentially became a cliff.

"...Where did the road go?" Rem grimaced.

There was a stone stake driven into the cliff, with a way marker pointing up.

"So, they're telling us to climb up."

"...I suppose we have no choice."

"Do you think it'll be like tree climbing?" Shera placed her hands against the cliff face.

Given that it was considered part of the road, it probably wouldn't crumble easily. For the elves, who lived on treetops, these types of cliffs probably weren't too much of a challenge. Rem was climbing up easily as well. The pantherians' ancestors lived in the plains, but their feline natures made them adept at climbing trees. The two of them were scaling the cliff with ease. Diablo, on the other hand, placed his fingers against the rock face.

I could use magic to fly up the cliff, but that feels like it'd be cheating.

He was training as a warrior, but he still had the body of a level 150 sorcerer. *Climbing up a cliff shouldn't be too hard,* he thought as he looked up the cliff...

...Only for his eyes to get a clear, straight view of Rem's and Shera's bottoms.

"Bwa?!"

"Hm? What's wrong, Diablo?"

"...Did something happen?"

"I-It's nothing."

Diablo lowered his gaze and concentrated on climbing up the cliff.

It didn't take them too long to scale the cliff. They found themselves on a

wide, flat shoulder halfway up the mountain. The stone stake stuck in the road here didn't have arrows this time, but rather something written into it.

"...It says 'Goal,'" Rem read aloud.

Diablo turned around, looking down at the village of Sormas which now seemed like an ant's village.

"Pheeew, we finally climbed it." Shera laid down on the grassy field, her limbs sprawled out. Her plump chest moved up and down as she breathed heavily. Given their elevation, the air was colder than on the plains, but despite that, Shera's forehead still dripped with sweat.

"...The cliff wasn't *that* hard to climb," Rem said, cocking an eyebrow.

"Huh? No way, it was really tough..."

"...I suppose all that useless meat weighed you down."

"Oh, I get it! You could climb up easier because your chest wasn't getting in the way."

"Do you *want* to get pushed back down the cliff?!"

"No, don't, stooop!"

Leaving the two to frolic about behind him, Diablo looked around. The place looked flat, like it'd been plowed artificially, and there was a building in the center of it all. It didn't employ any roof tiles, and was built from wooden pillars with earthen walls. It looked similar to old, Japanese architecture.

There were also weapons thrust into the ground around the estate's entrance. A sword, spear, axe, scythe, sledgehammer... At a glance, they didn't seem to be valuable weapons, but they didn't look cheap either. They were all just haphazardly lodged into the ground.

"...If these are mere ornaments, I'd be doubting the owner's sense of aesthetics," Rem said, walking up beside Diablo. "But these look like the remains of battle."

"Then that's the swordmaster's retreat." Diablo nodded.

"...Most likely."

“Let’s go.”

They stepped forward.

Shera, who was still lying about, got to her feet in a hurry. “Ah, wait for meee~”

†

Diablo silently slid the front door open.

“...Have you been here before, Diablo?” Rem asked, her eyes round with surprise.

“No. Why would you think so?”

“...You knew how to open this door.”

“Sliding doors may not be common in Lyferia, but they are in other regions.”

“...So it seems,” she said, eyeing the door curiously.

“It’s a wooden house!” Shera, on the other hand, seemed more interested in the place’s interior.

The floor was made of flattened earth, and a wooden pillar extended upward from a flat stone surface. It was old, Japanese architecture, which was a rare sign in the Kingdom of Lyferia. The interior looked less like an entranceway and more like a warehouse, and had quite a bit of open space to it. To the right of the entrance was a wall, and to the left were six wooden doors. One of them was slightly ajar.

Is that...a dog?

Diablo spotted a pair of triangular dog ears between the gaps in the wooden door. The ears suddenly jolted, and a meek voice came from behind the door.

“U-Um... Are you...customers? Or are you...s-scary people?”

A girl’s voice. According to the game’s story, Swordmaster Graham was an old, sage-like man. He was a detached hermit who lived alone, so maybe in this other world he had a servant?

“I am a Demon Lord from—”

“We’re customers of course! We’re not scary at all!” Rem cut into Diablo’s words as he began speaking his usual self-introduction. She then whispered into his ear: “...The Swordmaster might turn you down if you call yourself a Demon Lord.”

“Really?”

Swordmaster Graham was human, but taught everyone equally without regard for their race. That said, the game never had a situation where a Fallen or a Demon Lord asked to be taught.

I’ll just leave negotiations to her then.

“R-Really?” the voice from behind the door asked again.

“...Yes, we bear no ill will.”

“Aaah, that’s good...”

The wooden door finally opened, and what appeared from behind it wasn’t a dog, but a dwarven girl. She had triangular dog ears and a tufty tail. She looked to be about seventeen years old.

Dwarven females were as short as children but had sizable breasts, and had characteristic dog ears and tails. She wore a Japanese-style outfit, the kind Diablo never saw in Lyferia.

She fidgeted, her gaze shifting between Diablo’s group and the ground.

“U-Um... Welcome.”

“...I am Rem Galleu, an adventurer.”

“Ah... I am Sasara.” The dwarf bowed deeply.

Bowing wasn’t customary in Lyferia either. Handshakes and nods were the extent of physical greetings. *Cross Reverie* did feature a country based on Japanese elements, and, according to the lore, it was a foreign country far beyond the eastern sea. Diablo didn’t know if this Asian country existed in this world though.

“...Is this Swordmaster Graham’s abode?” Rem asked.

“Um, I think it will take some time...”

“We can wait,” Rem replied immediately.

Given that they had to climb a mountain to get here, they were willing to stay the night if they had to.

The dwarven girl, Sasara, nodded. “Ah, thank you very much... There’s three of you then. Um... Could you wait inside?”

†

Sasara invited them inside. The floor inside was wooden, and there was a hearth in the center of the room with hemp cloths and rugs surrounding it. There were no tables or chairs to be seen. The room was built so a large pillar supported the wooden roof, and some of the white mud walls had a different color to them in some segments. It probably needed to be frequently maintained and mended.

Sasara retreated deeper inside, so only the three of them were left in the room.

“...It’s hard to get used to this.”

It wasn’t customary to sit on the floor in the Kingdom of Lyferia, so Rem fidgeted atop the hemp cloth she was sitting on.

“We’re used to sitting on the grass in Greenwood, so this isn’t too bad.” Shera sat while hugging her legs.

“Hm.” Diablo was sitting with his legs crossed.

After a short while, Sasara showed up, carrying a large tray.

“Th-Thank you for waiting.”

Wondering what she’d brought, Diablo was surprised to see it was three round plates filled with pasta and some sort of brown soup. She placed them in front of Diablo’s group.

“Umm... Help yourselves.”

Beside the dishes were pairs of chopsticks. It was the first time Diablo had seen them since coming to this world.



“...What are these?” Rem picked up her chopsticks.

“I-I’m sorry. You’re supposed to eat soba with chopsticks.”

Diablo looked at the pasta lying on his plate. True enough, it had a gray hue, and there wasn’t any sauce on it. The light brown liquid next to it, which he thought was soup, was actually soba broth.

“This is soba?!”

“Y-Yes. It’s Swordmaster Soba.”

“*Swordmaster* Soba?!”

Sasara nodded.

Rem had a dubious expression on her face, while Shera didn’t seem to mind and held a chopstick in each hand. They both seemed to be struggling in their attempts to scoop up the soba.

“Aaah, eee! Eating soba’s kinda hard~”

“You do it like this.” Diablo used his chopsticks normally, scooping up some of his soba.

“Whoa!” It was Sasara who raised her voice in surprise. “Amazing... So that’s how you use them... You’re so knowledgeable.”

“Wait... But you’re the one who served it.”

“U-Um... I only work based off what’s written in the founder’s book of secrets... I don’t really know much about soba myself.”

“The founder?”

“Umm... The first swordmaster.”

“I see.”

Using the way Diablo held the chopsticks as a reference, Rem was quickly learning how to use them properly. As prudent as ever. Shera wasn’t as wise, trying to eat the soba by pinching it up with her fingers, so Sasara had to bring her a fork. However, the Swordmaster Soba’s flavor was...

“It looks a little strange, and its flavor is a bit off.”

“Aaah... Is it no good?”

Diablo didn’t know where she got it from in this world, but it looked like she used buckwheat flour, or at least something similar. The way she prepared the dough wasn’t wrong, and it did look somewhat like soba noodles.

“The noodles aren’t smooth, probably because the fire was too low when you simmered it. And it’s too soft, so I assume you used too much water while kneading it.”

He remembered something like that from a manga. Online games involved repetitive work, so he often watched anime and read manga as he played.

“Hm hm... The fire and water...” Sasara’s expression went from bashful timidness to the very face of seriousness.

“For starters, you shouldn’t serve soba on a plate, but on a sieve. That should improve it quite a bit.”

“A...sieve?”

“Any container the water can drain into would work.”

“I’ll...try and make one.” Sasara nodded happily.

Shera devoured the soba on her plate quickly. The soba’s quality aside, they’d spent hours climbing a mountain, so almost anything would taste good to her. Rem finished shortly after.

“Thank you for the meal. But, Diablo, we’ve forgotten the most important part.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

“Of course.”

“The soba broth was too thin. You should have at least used some condiments to even it out.”

“...That’s not what I meant... We didn’t come here for Swordmaster Soba, but to be taught *by* the swordmaster, correct?”

“Ah, true.” He’d completely forgotten.

“Ah...” Sasara’s eyes widened. “So you aren’t customers, but adventurers...?!”

“...Yes.”

“But...you said you weren’t scary people earlier.”

“So that’s what you meant... My apologies, we came here to meet Swordmaster Graham, and train under him as warriors.”

“Oh...” Sasara’s expression filled with disappointment. “I thought someone finally came to eat my soba...”

“...So where is the swordmaster?”

Pausing for a moment at Rem’s question, Sasara then said, “They’re, um...over here.”

“...In this manor?”

“Yes. Right here.”

“...Can we meet with him?”

“You’re, um...already speaking to the swordmaster.”

Rem tilted her head quizzically.

Sasara raised her right hand’s index finger and pointed it toward her nose. “Right here.”

“...Pardon?”

“Th-That would be me. I am the thirteenth generation to the swordmaster title, Graham Sasara...”

†

“Huh?” Rem tilted her head even further, to the extent that it was horizontal against the floor.

“F-Forgive me...” Sasara hung her head. “I don’t look the part, do I...? I know I don’t, but...”

“It can’t be! You’re Swordmaster Graham?!” Rem called out in surprise, Sasara almost bolting out of the room in shock.

“Aaaaaah.... I’m sorry, someone like me isn’t worthy!”

“...I apologize, it’s just...you don’t have a sword on you...”

“That’s because I was making soba...”

“...That’s true.”

“Y-Yes. A swordmaster made it, so it’s Swordmaster Soba... Or, well, that’s the joke...”

Sasara hung her head, blushing and on the verge of tears. If it made her that embarrassed, she probably shouldn’t have said anything.

Diablo was surprised. The dwarves weren’t as long-lived as the elves, and their appearance wasn’t as unchanging as the grasswalkers’. Plus, Sasara only looked to be around seventeen years old. No matter how she tried to dress herself up, there was no way an “old master” would look that young, and she wasn’t a man either.

Diablo was a sorcerer, so he’d never met Graham in the game, but he did see the sprite on the internet. Graham was a white-haired, old, human male, carrying a Japanese katana with the symbol of the crescent moon etched on its pommel. Sasara didn’t look even remotely close to what Diablo knew of the swordmaster.

I guess she’s someone different from the swordmaster in Cross Reverie*...*

“Wow, so you were the swordmaster, Sasara?” Shera seemed to take Sasara’s words at face value.

“I’m sorry... I know I don’t look the part.”

“That doesn’t matter. I mean, I’m the elven queen, but I don’t really look like one, do I?”

“Huh?! Then that means you’re an incredibly important person! What brings you to the Demon Lord’s Domain?”

“I guess I followed my husband?” Shera pointed at Diablo.

Sasara’s eyes darted about nervously. “Th-The elven king...?”

“Hm.”

“But, you’re a demon?”

“That’s a long story...”

Sasara seemed very impressed, and heaved an oddly relieved sigh.

“It really takes all kinds to make a world, doesn’t it...”

When she put it like that, a girl who served soba turning out to be the swordmaster didn’t seem all that odd...

“...How long have you been the swordmaster?” Rem asked, not entirely convinced.

“Hmm...” Sasara began counting on her fingers. “About half a year, I think?”

“...That’s very recent. What happened to your predecessor?”

“Nn...” Sasara had answered Rem’s questions until now, however hesitantly, but covered her face when confronted with this one. She mumbled something in a low, barely audible voice, and Rem stiffened at what she heard. Pantherians had excellent hearing, after all, enough to pick up the footsteps of their prey on the plains.

“...He passed away?! I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to bring up any painful topics...”

“N-No. He lived for over a hundred years already.”

The average life expectancy for humans in this world was roughly fifty years, so if he lived to the age of one hundred, Graham had more than surpassed his lifespan. And Sasara was his heir, it seemed.

“We are adventurers, seeking the power to defeat the Demon Lord’s army,” Rem began explaining their situation to her. “We heard that if we came here we’d be able to train.”

“Huh?” Sasara looked back at Rem with a bewildered expression.

“...Was what we were told wrong?”

“All I know is how to use a sword... Miss Rem, you’re a sorcerer, aren’t you? And those people over there are a sorcerer and an archer, correct?”

“I’m a summoner!” Shera shook her head.

“I-Is that right?”

Shera may have denied it, but Sasara’s judgment wasn’t wrong. If anything,

the fact that she could see through Diablo's warrior gear and still discern he was a sorcerer stood as proof of her skill as a swordmaster.

"...Like you said, I am a summoner. But the way I am right now, I stand no chance against the Fallen. I wish to learn the ways of the warrior as well."

"Hmm... So you say building your body's strength will help you develop as a sorcerer too?"

"...Yes, but..."

Unable to keep silent, Diablo butted into the conversation, shaking his head.

"We came here because the enemy we're facing isn't that easy to beat. I need to be as strong as a high-level warrior."

"Enemy...?"

Sasara was gentle about it, but it seemed the prerequisites to train were as harsh as they were in the game. In *Cross Reverie*, those who didn't meet the requirements were turned away, regardless of what the Demon Lord's army was doing. Diablo may have maxed out his level as a sorcerer, but so long as he didn't fulfill the requirements of being a level 80 warrior, he wouldn't be trained.

But this was another world, and they were having a civil conversation with the swordmaster. If they just explained everything well enough, they might be able to convince her to train Diablo anyway. For the time being, they had to make it clear this was a crisis that applied to the races as a whole.

Diablo was rather nervous under the surface however.

Calm down. Just explain things to her normally...

If he didn't keep up his Demon Lord act, he wouldn't be able to utter a word, but being too coercive would be counterproductive. He'd have to be as friendly and kind as possible here...

"Heheheh... The Demon Lord has awakened," Diablo said with a smile. "The races stand on the brink of ruin."

"Eee?! What are you saying all of a sudden?!"

“...He’s trying to say that if we adventurers fail, a terrible fate will befall the races,” Rem cut back in, trying to salvage the conversation.

“The Demon Lord’s been revived?”

Sasara wasn’t aware. It seemed the information hadn’t yet reached her here, deep in the mountains.

“They’re called the Demon Lord of Madness, Modinaram. Have you heard of them?”

“I haven’t.”

“They’ve been absorbing the other Demon Lords. They also call themselves the Demon Overlord.”

“Demon Overlord...” Sasara’s response was surprisingly weak.

“I’ve never seen a Demon Lord before, so I don’t really understand...” she said apologetically.

“Hm.”

Since she didn’t understand the situation, the magnitude of the threat didn’t really register with Sasara. Rem and Shera tried explaining things to her more thoroughly, but it didn’t really seem to get the point across. Though she did more or less understand their plight.

“I see, so because of this Demon Overlord Modinaram, terrible things happened at Zircon Tower and the elven kingdom...”

“Do you understand now?” Diablo folded his arms in a self-important manner. He then asked her to teach him once more:

“Instruct me in swordplay, swordmaster! I’ll allow it!”

“No one’s been so overbearing before...”

“Does the choice of words really matter?!”

“Uuu... I didn’t mean that... It’s just that, if you don’t have some skill with the sword already I can’t teach you... Or rather, there’s no point in me teaching you...”

“How can you tell I’m not good enough without testing me?!”

Perhaps a Swordmaster just had a special way of knowing. Either way, Diablo was well aware his level as a warrior wasn't high enough realistically. But with the Demon Lord's army looming so close, an invasion could happen on any given day, so he couldn't back down from this easily.

"Waaah... A-All right... I'll test you then!"

"Terrific! My goodwill came through to you!"

"...It looked more like you threatened her into this..." Rem sighed.

Impossible. Diablo turned his gaze to Sasara, who looked to be moments away from bursting into tears. What was this odd feeling of guilt...?

†

They all went out to the yard, where the weapons were thrust into the ground, and Sasara pulled one—a single-edged longsword—out.

"I'll use this one."

Shera gave a large yawn, as she'd apparently nodded off a bit while Diablo and Rem handled negotiations.

So that's why she was so quiet...

"Hmm... Ah, right... Why are there so many weapons stuck in the ground here? Isn't this your yard?"

"...I admit I fail to see why as well," Rem said, her head cocked.

"R-Right..." Sasara said in a self-deprecating voice, her brows knitted. "It does look weird, doesn't it...? A-Ahaha... My predecessor believed all it takes to know someone's skill was a single swing."

Diablo suspected he figured out the trick here.

"It's because of their attributes, right? Each weapon has one of the elements of fire, water, earth, wind, light, and darkness. Swords, spears, and axes all have their own unique attributes on top of that. Most people tend to gravitate toward one weapon type, but some may use a different weapon to better match their opponent."

Most players in *Cross Reverie* were the latter, but some did concentrate on

mastering a single attribute to the extreme and used it to conquer every situation.

However, Diablo's pouch, capable of fitting countless weapons inside it, was a precious rarity, and his was the only one he'd seen so far. This naturally meant that warriors capable of carrying and making use of multiple weapons were incredibly rare.

Rem and Shera seemed impressed by Diablo's words. Sasara looked at him with surprise.

"Y-You're...the first person to understand that much." Her cheeks were, for some reason, flushed red, and she looked up at him with moist eyes.

"Hmph... That much is common sense." Diablo averted his gaze, embarrassed. "Those who visited you until now were probably too low leveled."

"Hehehe..." Sasara giggled, then said, "As an adventurer, you're probably much stronger than me. Should you use your magic, that is."

"Obviously."

"It's a pity... If you walked down the path of the blade, I could have passed everything onto you."

"Is this part of your test?"

"If you are able to block my attacks even once, you pass."

Sasara raised her sword, and a gust of wind kicked up around her.

A wind element sword?

The atmosphere around them changed at once. Rem and Shera swallowed nervously, goosebumps rising on their skin. Diablo could feel his own pulse accelerate as well.

She was like a totally different person. The bashful Sasara they'd seen earlier seemed like someone else altogether from the person standing before them with her sword held up. Before he even knew it, Diablo's palms began sweating.

This aura is ever scarier than Galford's or Battuta's!

The only thing that could possibly be compared was the awakened

Krebskulm's power. Diablo's gamer instincts were calling out in alarm: *This is bad.* But he couldn't run away now, so he drew the Seraphix Blade from his waist.

"All I need to do is block a single attack? I know the sword is your weapon of choice, but...do not underestimate me."

He'd faced many enemies, both in the game and in this world. He was confident he could evade and block the attacks of even specialized warrior types .

"You do not seem to understand...your own characteristics." Sasara advanced a single step forward.

"What?"

"When fighting powerful sorcerers, a warrior must always be prepared to close the distance. If he stays too far away, it becomes too hard to close in on the opponent. One must watch out for their spells as well. There are spells too powerful to be withstood by sheer fortitude after all."

"You know so much of elemental magic?"

"I am a swordmaster after all."

In this world, summoning magic was seen as the more useful type, while elemental magic was looked down upon. But it seemed someone who had broken the limit of the races properly understood the power of elemental magic.

Sasara closed the distance between them by yet another step. She was at a distance that put her at a disadvantage against a sorcerer, but Diablo specialized in close combat as well. He was in range of her sword, but he should be able to evade it. More importantly, though, Diablo's style was settling battles in short, decisive matches, using high firepower spells that required contact or to be fired off at low speeds. That was because Diablo had always fought alone, which made him susceptible to losing battles of attrition.

"This is the range of a warrior."

"You would do well to not consider me a normal sorcerer. Even at this

distance, I'm more than capable of keeping up with you."

"That's because the opponent is mindful of your spells."

"It's natural to be wary of your opponent's attacks."

"It's impossible to intercept spells with a sword after all... I will now unleash a fully-powered slash without being cautious of your spells. If you can block that, you pass, and I will teach you as a swordmaster."

"Very well."

The menacing aura suddenly disappeared from Sasara's body. The howling wind died down, leaving not so much as a breeze around them.

"...I will slash you." Her attack was like a bird soaring past the windless sky.

"Whoa?!"

Sasara's blade brushed against the nape of Diablo's neck. However, it didn't break the skin, nor did any blood gush out. She attacked with the back of her blade. That was why she used a single-edged sword.

I couldn't see her attack at all?!

"Normally, slashes are unleashed by stepping firmly against the ground..." Sasara said, her expression firm and without a smile, "but when facing a high-level sorcerer, one must prepare to move away even as they slash."

"Impossible... I've fought enemies where we were willing to attack each other simultaneously."

He didn't doubt the height of her skills. He decided to train as a warrior exactly because there was a chance the Demon Overlord Modinaram was as fast as she. With this, Diablo was confident his thinking was correct, and he was glad to have met the swordmaster.

But what Sasara just said didn't convince him. Her claim that anyone could unleash a strike that fast if they stopped being cautious of his magic didn't make sense to him.

"But..." Her expression suddenly turned curious. She lowered her hips and swung the sword again. This time, he could barely see the slash...but the blade

was too fast for him to block. Her sword gently touched his right shoulder.

“Kuh...”

“This was a little slower, wasn’t it?”

“Compared to earlier.”

“Then this one should be faster.”

She unleashed another high-speed slash, but before Diablo could even move his sword to intercept, Sasara’s tapped against his right leg. Diablo specialized in close combat, but she was on a whole different level. There was no time to even react.

Diablo clenched his teeth bitterly. “I didn’t think there would be that much of a gap... This is worse than I thought.”

Sasara lowered her blade, and the atmosphere settled down.

†

“M-My apologies...” Sasara bowed deeply. “I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“I’m surprised,” Diablo said, visibly disappointed. “I’ve never been overwhelmed like this before. I suppose that’s what facing a swordmaster is like... One cannot help but admire you.”

“N-No... The only thing I’m good at is waving a sword around...” She shrunk her already small body even further.

Diablo bit his lip. It felt like all the pride he built up until now was shattered. He’d boasted victory after victory under his belt in *Cross Reverie*, enough to be able to call himself a Demon Lord. He’d set countless records in events. His superhuman reaction speed and clear judgment allowed him to conquer many fearsome opponents. To top it all off, this world, for many reasons, was significantly lower-leveled than the game.

But here he was now, cut down before he could even process what was going on! He’d never lost so thoroughly before, even in the game.

What’s going on here?

He knew one had to be a level 80 warrior to be tutored by the swordmaster,

but would a warrior of that level really be able to block Sasara's slash? Diablo couldn't believe it. But he had no choice but to acknowledge it. Emile did say he was being trained by the swordmaster after all.

"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."

He definitely called the swordmaster his "master." Sasara took the mantle six months ago, so Emile likely didn't mean the predecessor.

Diablo could handle being told he was weaker than the Demon Overlord or the swordmaster when it came to close combat; he'd expected as much. That was why he decided to train as a warrior. But this was an entirely different story.

I'm inferior to a level 80 warrior...?

This didn't make sense.

"E-Erm..." Sasara peered at his face, concerned. "Are you all right? Are you sure you're not hurt...?"

"Yes, there's no cause for concern."

"That's good. Um... Well...about the training... Even if I agree to do it, I can't teach you if you can't keep up with my blade."

He knew his level wasn't enough, but he didn't imagine he'd be beaten down like this. Diablo was perplexed. It had happened before where he was so depressed his Demon Lord role play fell apart, but now...

I'm so pumped right now!

It was like the excitement he felt when he played *Cross Reverie* for the first time. He'd felt the same way when he first came to this world, but as he gauged his skills as a sorcerer, the relief they were intact had diminished his elation. But he can become even stronger!

"Heheh... Heheheheh..." Diablo's grip on his sword tightened.

"Do you understand now?"

“You have my thanks, Sasara.”

“Huh? Huh...?”

“I swear, I will block your sword.”

“Yes.” Sasara nodded. “I’m sure that given ten years of training, you will be able to.”

“Sorry, but...I don’t have that much time.”

“B-But, training is something you have to keep a steady pace at...”

“I’ve lost for now! But I’ll come again soon!” Diablo turned his back to her.

Rem and Shera were waiting for him. He’d thought their trust for him may have diminished after seeing him lose, but there wasn’t a trace of disappointment or scorn on their faces. If anything, their expressions were smiles of appreciation.

“...That looked quite hard. I think it’s the first time I’ve seen you lose.”

“Sasara is so strong! I couldn’t see her sword either!”

“...Just what you’d expect of a Swordmaster. She was even faster than Faltra’s governor and Paladin Saddler.”

“Yeah, and even faster than that man, Batutta.”

There was no mistaking that. But if a level 80 warrior could stop such a slash, then Diablo truly was too weak at the moment. He admitted his defeat, and descended from the mountain.

Chapter 4: Leveling Up

“Sell me all of those.”

The next morning, Diablo went to the coach house alone. But the dwarf shopkeeper merely looked at Diablo with sleepy eyes and cocked his head to the side.

“Ah? The Golden Fruit...? All they be good for is bein’ fodder... Or manure? Ya be startin’ a farm?”

“I’m going to eat them.”

“Ahaha... What, do these kindsa jokes pass as funny over at the capital?”

“I’m serious. Now answer me: Are you going to sell them to me or not?”

“What’ll ya do if I don’t?”

“Then I’ll have no choice. If they grow on the mountain, I’ll just climb it and pick some myself.”

He didn’t spot any trees that fit the bill near the mountain road, but given the strength of the magical beasts around there, he wasn’t very deep into the mountain. The trees he was looking for were probably far from the road.

“It really does sound a joke to me...” The shopkeeper shrugged. “But if ya insist, I’ll sell ‘em to ya. They ain’t worth much anyway.”

“Excellent!”

Diablo went on to buy the whole cart and carried it back to the inn. Rem and Shera were hanging around the entrance, waiting for him with concerned expressions.

“Diablo! What’s that...?”

“What, huh? Ugh?! That’s those yucky, bitter fruit!”

“Hmm.”

“...I was wondering why you took off alone so early in the morning... What do you intend to do with those? Are you going to make Shera eat them?”

“Eew, not in a million years!”

They were raising their voices in the middle of a crowd of people, which made passersby stare at them uncomfortably. They were sticking out enough because of their appearances already.

Diablo explained his idea to the two of them. They had seen him lose, and there wasn’t much he could do to change that. But despite that, their attitude toward him didn’t change one bit. Perhaps that influenced his mentality, because he no longer thought to hide the fact that he intended to train. His Demon Lord role play was still in effect, but the fact he wanted to train was true. He wasn’t ashamed of being desperate to level up.

“*I’ll* be the one eating the Golden Fruit.”

Rem and Shera stiffened, their expressions turning severe.

“Ah, erm...Diablo... You may have lost, but there’s no need to torment yourself over it like that...”

“That’s right! Everyone loses sometimes!”

“...Besides, Sasara said that if you were to use magic, you’d have come out on top.”

“You don’t have to kill yourself like this!”

“...Weren’t you going to participate in Faltra’s defense?”

“What about the elven kingdom?! I don’t wanna be a widow already!”

“H-Hold on,” Diablo reined the two of them in as they pressed on him. “You seem to be misunderstanding.”

“...The Golden Fruit are supposed to be toxic.”

“If you eat them, you’ll definitely die. That’s how nasty they were.”

“This is just a theory, but wasn’t there also information that said eating them can get one to level up?”

“...’Eating Golden Fruit makes you level up.’ That sounds like nothing more than occultic rubbish to me. It’s impossible,” Rem admonished him.

“Food that makes you level up makes no sense!” Shera desperately tried to

stop him too.

“I understand what you have said.” Diablo nodded.

“...So you won’t go through with it?”

“Yep, yep, let’s eat something normal that actually tastes good instead.”

Their expressions washed over with relief. *They* weren’t the ones to understand here.

“Bottoms up!” Diablo grabbed a golden apple and bit into it.



†

Diablo never was one to listen to what other people said. He tended to be obstinate about sticking to his decisions. Besides, if it were in his nature to obediently follow what other people said, he wouldn't be a shut-in NEET.

As socially inept as he was, he had a strong sense of independence, and, conversely, it could be said he critically lacked notions of cooperation. He stuck to his guns no matter what the people around him said, and held the opinion that there was no point to being an individual if all you did was get pushed around by other people's values and words.

The end result of that...was Diablo lying prostrate on the bed.

"Uuugh..."

"...This is quite the mess," Rem said with an exasperated expression.

"Are you all right? Get better soon." Shera rubbed his back.

His stomach...ached.

"I'm fine. Obviously." Diablo squeezed out that response, sweating profusely.

He reached into his pouch, producing a tube filled with a purple potion and gulped it down with shaking hands. The unpleasant, painful sensation, which felt like a poisonous snake was resting in his stomach, subsided somewhat.

That was a Detox potion. It was a rare commodity in this world, but in *Cross Reverie*, everyone could acquire it rather easily. And while he didn't quite anticipate this would happen, he did have quite a few handy.

"Phew.." Diablo sighed.

The Golden Fruit were nastier than he ever imagined. They didn't even remotely taste like food. The bitterness felt medicinal, and after swallowing them he began sweating, his body shivering. After consuming a third one, an acute stomachache overtook him. Were they really toxic after all?

Whatever the case, they weren't worthy of being eaten by the races, just like the owner of the coach house said. The cart full of Golden Fruit was sitting in the corner of the room.

A little angel appeared on his shoulder, admonishing him.

Stop this. There's no guarantee submitting yourself to this agony will even level you up. You're already strong enough as a sorcerer, so you just need to adopt a more flexible fighting style. Isn't that what you've done until now?

On the other shoulder, a small devil whispered in his ear.

Just give up. Just forget this fight and run off. Go live in some distant country. Let's take the slow life, bro!

They both seemed to be in agreement on the issue...but Diablo's gamer soul said otherwise.

If there's an efficient way to level up, take it even if it costs you your life!

"Obviously."

Dragging his heavy legs along the floor, he reached for the Golden Fruit with shaking fingers. Rem and Shera didn't bother stopping him anymore.

"...I do have faith in you. I've said this before, and that hasn't changed."

"If you think it's necessary, then it must be true."

"Hmph... Fret not. Something this trifling will never be able to claim my life."

Diablo bit into another Golden Fruit, watering it down with Detox and HP potions. He could instantly feel that venomous snake rattle his insides again. Pain ran through his body, and his expression contorted in agony as an audible rumbling that sounded alarmingly like a small earthquake came from his abdomen. As pangs of pain ran through his belly, he put strength into his stomach.

"I am the true Demon Lord, Diablo! I refuse to submit to such a blasted, trifling little thing!"

And so he ate on. He ate. He chewed. He swallowed. He munched, and stuffed his cheeks, and devoured. He gulped down, gorged on, ingested and guzzled. He wolfed down, gobbled up, and sank his teeth into.

He ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate,

and ate, and threw up, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate.

Then he ate, and ate. And ate and ate and ate it all.

Three days later, the cart stood empty, all its Golden Fruit consumed...

†

Diablo scaled Mount Tenzan again. He'd tried detoxing and healing himself, but a dull pain lingered in the pit of his stomach. For three days and evenings, the pain kept him from falling asleep, leaving his eyelids feeling terribly heavy.

Just walking was a challenge at this point. He had to have Rem and Shera handle the magical beasts that showed up along the way. He didn't have any vigor left in him to fight.

After climbing up the cliff on the way to the swordmaster's retreat, Diablo lay down on the field, struggling to catch his breath.

"Huh? A-Are you...?!"

Hearing Sasara's voice, Diablo sat up.

It was during dusk. It took them awhile to get there, due to a combination of leaving late, Diablo's sluggish body, and him having to leave the fighting to Rem and Shera. The setting sun washed the world with crimson light. Countless weapons were lodged into the ground: it was the Swordmaster's retreat. Probably having been caught in the middle of training, Sasara was standing there with spear in hand.

"You've come again... What happened?" She seemed surprised at the visit.

"I told him to rest a little longer first, but...Diablo insisted," Rem said bitterly.

"We're sorry, Sasara. He said he wants you to test him again," Shera added.

"Eh?" Sasara tilted her head. "B-But, it hasn't even been a week since the last time."

She predicted it would take him ten years. But here he was, rising to his feet, his hands still shaking. He wasn't sure resting would cure him of any of these peculiar chills running through his body or the venomous, snake-like pain ravaging his insides. Detox and HP potions did nothing to improve his situation.

But that didn't matter. He forced himself to eat the Golden Fruit, hoping they'd increase his level like they did in the game. And the result?

I have no freaking clue...

Was he able to see Sasara's slash now? Not even feeling inclined to reach into his pouch, Diablo grabbed the sword stuck into the ground in front of him and pulled it out.

"Let me use this for a bit."

It was a rusted longsword. He could feel traces of magical energy running through it, but any effects it had probably weren't impressive.

"E-Erm..." Sasara looked at him with perplexed eyes. "You look very pale..."

"Pay it no heed."

"But, you look like you could fall over any second..."

"That's because you had to build your house on top of a damn mountain! I felt much better back when we left the inn."

"I-I'm sorry..."

"If you really feel bad about it, test me one more time. And if you insist on not doing it, I'll just rush you instead."

"Uuu... F-Fine..." Sasara looked to be on the verge of tears again, but Diablo didn't have the composure to notice the pangs of guilt he was feeling. Like she said, Diablo could fall over at any second.

Sasara took position with her spear, and, once again, the atmosphere around her changed. This time, Diablo could feel her menacing pressure sizzle against his skin like fire. It was different from last time. Flames were enveloping the tip of the spear.

Her attack changes this much just based off of the weapon she's equipping,

huh...

“Let me warn you,” Sasara said, glaring at him with the eyes of a starved wolf. “I won’t listen to any complaints if this ends up killing you.”

“Just what I’d wish for. If you dare hold back on me, I will reduce you to dust with my magic.”

“Hmph...” She advanced a single step toward him again.

Usually, when a spear user faces a sorcerer, they use the martial art Lance Charge to close the distance offensively. As she gradually closed the distance, her oppressive pressure became more vividly menacing.

Don’t panic.

He wasn’t sure what the Golden Fruit’s effects were in this world, but if he ate this many of them in *Cross Reverie*, he’d surely have leveled up significantly.

But did I really? The game is...well, just a game, and this world is reality. Is it really possible to level up just by eating a fruit?

His thoughts kept spiraling in his head.

“You’re in my thrusting range.” Sasara went into position.

“Wai...” He blurted out inadvertently.

Given her kind nature, she’d likely oblige. The spear, aimed at Diablo’s shoulder, slowed down a moment before making contact. He just barely avoided it.

“Phew... Ah... My apologies. Hmm... I was about to sneeze.”

He couldn’t tell her he got cold feet in the middle of the test...

Sasara’s expression turned severe. She was timid, but serious when it came to her work. He may have offended her with this.

“One more time then... You better block it this time.”

“Yes, that is what this test is about.”

He took a deep breath, emptying his mind of needless thoughts. He had to stay focused. But the Golden Fruit were so disgusting he felt like he was

teetering on the edge of life and death. If he couldn't block Sasara's attack, all that effort would have been for naught.

His heart felt on the verge of breaking. His shut-in anxieties kicked in. Only now did the common sense in his mind remember to admonish him for not challenging her when he was in top form.

"M-Maybe we should do this anoth..."

"Here I come!"

Did what he'd said earlier anger her? Sasara raised her voice with more vigor than ever before, and thrust her spear forward. Diablo's eyes then widened.

"Get away, Sasara!"

All his thoughts of the exam were blown away, and he didn't hesitate. He stuck his blade out, and fired off a Flare Burst spell.

†

"Ah?!" Sasara tumbled to the ground. At that same moment, an explosion burst near her. A black shadow leapt out from within the flames and smoke of the blast, and Diablo clicked his tongue internally.

"It fired off too slow?!"

Perhaps owing to his poor physical condition, there was a small bit of lag between his chanting the Flare Burst spell and its effect manifesting.

"Wh-Wh-What's happening...?!" Shocked by how everything happened so suddenly, Sasara's eyes darted about.

"That's my question! Is that thing really a monster?!"

The black shadow standing a few steps away from him was a massive ape densely covered in fur. It was a bit higher than Diablo was, and gripped a Japanese katana with the symbol of the crescent moon etched into its pommel.

"Grrr...." It gave a low, menacing growl.

"Diablo!" Rem cried out. "Isn't that the evil ape?!"

"Right... We did hear about that, didn't we." He recalled the words of the dwarf from the coach house.

“Wh-Why...?” Sasara said, her breath catching in her throat.

“It apparently attacks whenever it sees strong adventurers. Looks like it’s after you, Sasara.”

Just as she was about to thrust forward with her spear, Diablo noticed the monster rush in behind her with frightening speed.

“No... No...” Sasara shook her head. “It’s not... It’s not after me...”

She held none of the valiant air she had about her when brandishing a blade, her expression back to how timid it usually was. She still had the spear in hand, but couldn’t get up.

Is she the type to get cold feet in real combat? Or maybe...

Whatever the case, this thing was harming adventurers.

“We didn’t accept a quest for it, so do we hunt it down?” Diablo prepared his next spell, when the large, hairy monkey—the evil ape—hopped away.

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” It let out a peculiar roar before fleeing into the trees.

Diablo chose not to pursue it any further. Honestly, he was in no condition to face off against such a menacing foe.

“What a mess.”

“Uuu...”

“...Diablo, are you all right?” Rem and Shera rushed to their side.

“That was so weird. It didn’t act like a normal animal or magical beast...”

Yes, it didn’t feel like either of those.

“Sasara, I ask again.” Diablo stuck his sword back into the ground. “Is that evil ape really a monster?”

“Th-That’s...”

“I’ve seen the old swordmaster once, by way of some unique circumstances.”

“Huh?!” Sasara swallowed nervously.

“Why is a monster called the evil ape, that attacks adventurers, holding the

swordmaster's blade?"

Rem seemed surprised, while Shera simply looked quizzical. Sasara hung her head silently.

"Earlier, you claimed it wasn't after you. But you know something. What are you hiding?"

Sasara clenched her teeth. Was it something she couldn't talk about, no matter the cost?

"...Sasara, it would be wise to just tell him now." Rem squatted near her. "Diablo is the type of person capable of doing incredibly scary things. If you insist on hiding things from him, he may just inflict the sort of shame you'd never be able to live down."

"Eek?!"

It seemed Rem still resented how Diablo had rubbed her cat ears to get her to spill her secret during his first night in this world.

"It's all right!" Shera placed a hand on Sasara's back with a smile. "Diablo may look mean and say terrible things, but he's a good guy who saves everyone!"

"B-But..."

"You have some sort of problem, right?"

"Erm..." Sasara nodded. "P-Please...keep this a secret from the people in town..."

"We will!"

"...You have my word."

Diablo nodded as well. He had no interest in exposing other people's secrets.

Sasara sighed and, apparently having resigned herself to telling them, got to her feet.

"As you've...probably assumed already...the evil ape...is the previous swordmaster. My...stepfather."

"...How did such a thing happen to him..."

“Th-That’s...” Sasara still hesitated, but Shera held her hand tightly.

“You can tell us, Sasara. Aren’t we friends?”

“F-Friends...?”

“Yeah!”

“W-We are...?”

“Of course!”

“Friend... That’s the first time someone has called me that...”

Diablo cocked his head. Was he considered one of these friends of hers? It was hard to keep up with Shera’s outgoing method of closing distance between people. But as Sasara looked at her hand, gripped tight in Shera’s, with a blush on her cheeks, Sasara seemed happy.

†

Diablo and the others moved inside the estate, sitting around the hearth where they’d eaten soba previously.

Ten years ago, Sasara came to Sormas with her father, a merchant. Shortly after, her father was done in by a magical beast while climbing Mount Tenzan. Just as she was about to be eaten, too, Swordmaster Graham had appeared and came to her rescue.

He was an old teacher, wielding a katana with a symbol of the crescent moon on its pommel. He pitied Sasara, who was left without any relatives, and taught her how to wield the blade as a means of defending herself. But, as it turned out, Sasara was blessed with rare and unmatched talent.

“I think it was around five years ago...” she said bitterly, “when I outmatched Father in strength.”

It was a terrifying prospect. Graham had always proudly stated that he wished for her to take the mantle of swordmaster after him, but...

Half a year ago, Graham began suspecting his daughter may have been holding back on him. So he attacked her with the intent to kill, with a real sword —not a wooden one—in hand.

He charged at her. Sasara had dodged his move, but now, she couldn't tell if that was a good or bad reaction. Talent favored her too much, enough to drive her beloved teacher to madness...and leading him to stumble into darkness.

"It's possible to cast aside one's shell as a human, as a member of the races, to become something that exists only to wield the blade."

"...Is that some sort of martial art?"

Sasara shook her head at Rem's question. "That goes beyond any sort of fencing technique. According to the words left behind by our ancestors, that is an 'Oni.'"

"...Oni..."

"It's a forbidden art, but...because of me, Father used it..." Her voice cracked, choking with tears.

"That's so sad..." Shera hugged Sasara around her shoulders.

"Y-Yes... Yes, it is..." Sasara's tears flowed down her cheeks, unhindered, as she wailed in agony.

Waiting for her to calm down, Rem asked her, "Judging by your story, doesn't it seem like the evil ape would only target you?"

"Having become an Oni, Father no longer remembers anything. He doesn't recognize me."

"...How terribly meaningless."

A person disappeared, and an Oni appeared shortly after. That was all there was to it.

"The way Father is now... Whenever he sees a strong person, he attempts to cut them down... But I refuse to fight him any longer..."

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"Um... Father will not fight any opponents who lack fighting spirit or some sort of killing intent. And he only goes after warriors."

"...So he only attacks the more powerful warrior types?"

"Yes."

“...And he doesn’t regard you as a target, since you have no wish to fight the previous swordmaster.”

“That’s probably it, yes.”

Rem’s eyes narrowed. “...I do not mean to say anything that may offend you, but are you sure that’s correct?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re unwilling to engage the Swordmaster since you feel indebted to him, yes?”

“O-Of course.”

“...But the previous swordmaster was so fixated on beating you it led him to fall into becoming an Oni, didn’t he?”

Sasara went pale and looked at her own hands.

“I... I’ve never considered it like that. I’ve always thought I angered him so much that he...”

“...I cannot tell what went on in his heart,” Rem spoke slowly. “Sometimes even the person in question can misunderstand their own feelings. But there are so many ways to kill someone. There must have been meaning in him choosing to become an Oni that’s only capable of wielding a blade over any other method. Don’t you think so?”

“Uuu...”

“I’ve never met the previous swordmaster. But you, who were closest to him, might know something.”

“Yes.”

“So please, consider carefully what it is you should do.”

Sasara fell silent and nodded.

“If the decision you come to is to not fight him...” Rem said in a business-like tone, “I will act as an adventurer. We cannot leave a monster as strong as a swordmaster on the loose.”

For the time being, that was the decision they agreed upon regarding the evil

ape.

†

“Let’s go back then.” Diablo rose to his feet. It was impossible to concentrate after that, and his body was in terrible condition as it was. He’d go back to the inn, rest for a few more days, and challenge Sasara again.

“Um... Please wait. Uh...about the test...”

“Hm?”

She wasn’t going to say there was a limited number of times she would test him, was she? If she did, what happened today shouldn’t count, given all the accidents involved.

“Erm... You saw it, didn’t you?” Sasara fixed her posture. “My thrust.”

“Weren’t you interrupted in the middle of it?”

“No...that was the second thrust. I meant the first one.”

Diablo had thought that, since he asked her to wait, she slowed down the attack.

She could disqualify me for that and I wouldn’t have anything to say in my defense. In real combat, no enemy would wait just because I ask them to. That was a pretty pathetic thing to say, wasn’t it...

“Ah...” He tried thinking of an excuse. “You see, I actually already noticed the evil ape at that point, and...”

Feeling cold sweat run down his forehead, he tried bringing up some random excuse...but to his surprise, Sasara looked at him with glittering eyes.

“I-It’s the first time someone evaded one of my thrusts!”

“Huh?”

“You could have probably deflected my sword back then!”

“Well, obviously. You slowed down your attack.”

“Huh? Um...I didn’t slow it down.”

Rem and Shera looked at each other in agreement as well.

“...It was so fast I couldn’t see it. Just like it was last time.”

“Yep, yep. It was as fast as when she slashed with the blade.”

“How odd. Didn’t the thrust become more sluggish in that moment?”

“Sluggish?!” Sasara exclaimed, unable to hide her excitement. “That’s the first time someone’s called my thrusts sluggish!”

“Th-That can’t be...”

“I am a swordmaster. I would never launch a half-hearted attack. I may not aim at my opponent’s vitals, but I always put my whole into every attack. And you evaded it!”

“Fo...” He was about to exclaim, “For real?!” Joy bubbled within him.

“You pass!” Sasara declared. “Diablo, I invite you to train under me. You will be my...my first pupil.”

First pupil?

“What...?” Her words prompted not just Diablo, but Rem and Shera to tilt their heads.

“Heheheh...” Sasara scratched her head, her tufty dog tail wagging bashfully. “I was actually getting a bit nervous because of how no one’s managed to block my sword. It’s finally happened...”

“You say you’ve been the swordmaster for the last six months, right?”

“Ah, yes. I’ve been visited by several strong-looking people since but...no one’s really made the cut.”

“Have you met a man named Emile?”

“Ah, I’m sorry. I’m bad at remembering people’s names...”

“He’s an annoying guy who presents himself as an ‘ally to all women.’ He’s got a long last name, Bichelsomething or other.”

“Ah, yes, he did come here...” Sasara said, frowning unpleasantly. “He said he blocked one of the governor of Faltra’s attacks, so I thought he might be talented... I tested him, but when I thought of him staying here if he became my student, I got a little scared.”

“What happened?”

“I slashed at him about a hundred times, but he couldn’t block a single one. That was a big relief. I sent him back, saying he should take a tour through the surrounding countries and try again...”

“You idiot, what kinda shitty game is this?!” Diablo shouted angrily at her.

“Ah, aaah...” Sasara stiffened with surprise.” D-Did I do something wrong?”

“Don’t you know only warriors of level 80 or over can accept the swordmaster’s training?!”

“Huh? Level? What’s that?”

“Didn’t your predecessor teach you about those?!”

“Ah... Erm...” Sasara was struggling to remember. “Come to think of it, when people came to train under Father...he would test them.”

“Right.”

“And he would attack three times slower than usual. If they blocked it, they passed,” she said, her eyes filled with nostalgia.

“Then that’s the right difficulty level, you moroooooon!”

“Eeek?! I-I-I-I-I’m sorryyyyyyyyy!!”

“Did you test me at three times the speed you were supposed to?!”

“Aaaaaah... You’re saying I shouldn’t have slashed at my full speed?!”

“What did the former swordmaster do?!”

“Aaaaaah, he always held back... I keep forgetting about that...”

Sasara backed up all the way against the wall, hugging her tail and shivering like a leaf with her triangular ears flattened against her head. Diablo stood before her imposingly. All his tiredness was blown away.

“Don’t you know what levels are?!”

“Ah... Uuu... Father did mention them...once...”

“And what did he say?”

“He said, ‘Once you beat me, I will acknowledge you as level 200’...”

“Two hundred?!”

Diablo’s head was spinning. It felt like the ground suddenly became slanted. It was no wonder Diablo couldn’t even follow her slashes with his eyes before—her level was beyond anything he knew!

Cross Reverie‘s max level was set to 150, and Sasara was far higher than that. She’d achieved that peak with only a few years of training. She was a genius.

I think I’m beginning to understand why the previous swordmaster was jealous enough to become an Oni...

It may have been hard to imagine when she was shivering like a frightened puppy, but this dwarven girl was a higher level than anyone Diablo had ever faced.



“...Diablo, everyone makes mistakes sometimes,” Rem tried pacifying him.

His anger had already subsided, but his Demon Lord act demanded he stick to his overbearing attitude.

“Don’t *ever* let this happen again.”

Sasara nodded over and over again.

“You said I’m your first pupil...but you do know how to teach, right?”

“Th-That should be fine... Father always said, ‘The path of the swordmaster is not for the sake of fighting, but to raise and instruct others.’”

“What will we be doing tomorrow? If you tell me to clean your house or work the fields, I’ll be turning around and leaving.”

He understood that mastering the basics and mental training had their importance, but there was no telling when the Demon Lord’s army would march on Faltra. If the idea was for him to settle down here for a long time, Diablo intended to leave and come back another time.

“Oh, um...” Sasara’s expression was full of suspense. “How does sparring with me using wooden swords sound then...?”

“Hm.” Diablo was frankly anxious. It felt like a blow from a level 200 warrior, even if it were from a wooden sword, would result in nothing but instant death...

“I-I’ll hold back this time!”“

Diablo was inclined to screech out, “Eeeh? Will you now?” but given her words, decided to take her word for it.

Rem sat in front of Sasara. “Would you mind if I asked two things of you, as the Swordmaster?”

“Aaah...if I can be of help.”

Being naturally bashful, Diablo’s anger made her confidence shrivel up to downright servile levels.

“You’re the only one who *can* help me with this. Could you test me, too, this time with the correct measure of strictness? If you slow it down somewhat, I

may be able to keep up.”

“B-But, aren’t you a summoner...?”

“...I’ve already said this, but we need to become stronger if we’re to face the Demon Lord’s army.”

“Uuu, I understand.”

It seemed Rem was going to take the exam as well.

“Then I’ll take it too!” Shera raised both hands into the air. “Waiting all alone is boring.”

“...But you’re an archer.”

“I’m a summoner!”

“Aaah... You do know I teach swordplay, right...?”

After some quarreling, it was decided Shera would take the test as well. Rem then brought up her second request.

“...This is the more important request.”

“Wh-What is it?”

“I would like for you to come with us to Faltra and help us in fighting off the Demon Lord’s army.”

“Huh...?”

“I realize Sormas can only flourish at the bottom of the mountain due to your presence here. But if Faltra were to fall, Sormas will be cut off from the rest of the races.”

“Yes.”

“...I’m not exaggerating when I say the fate of the races hinges on whether we can defend Faltra. Please, lend us your strength.”

“Good going, Rem!” Shera brought her hands together. “I’d be happy if you could do that! I’m asking too, Sasara. Please help us!”

“H-Hmm...” Sasara turned pensive at their request. “You are my friends, and I would like to help you, but...there’s still the matter with Father.”

“Oh, you’re right! Then you can join us once that’s resolved!”

Rem didn’t raise any objection to Shera’s words.

†

The following day—

Sasara gave a large yawn, her eyes red. Diablo stood opposite her, gripping a wooden sword.

“Are you all right?”

“Ah... Y-Yes, I’m sorry... I stayed up all night reading through the book of secret arts the founder left behind...”

“Reading up on soba...?”

“Ah... N-Not that. It said a great deal about how to test others, and about levels. I had read it a long time ago, but...”

“You forgot.”

“Uuu... I’m sorry.”

“You novice swordmaster... And? We’ll be sparring together, right?”

Sasara wasn’t holding a wooden sword.

“Ah... The book of secret arts said that even if I hold back I could end up killing you... So I’ll be avoiding your blows. If you hit me, you pass.”

Diablo was thankful from the bottom of his heart for the book of secret arts’ existence.

Thank you, wise founder!

“So I should just slash at you with my full strength?”

“It’ll be fine. My body is built so I don’t take damage from an attack once a day.”

“What?!”

“I’m somewhat sturdy, you see.”

That went beyond ‘somewhat sturdy’; it felt like straight-up cheating.

“Next time something happens, I’m using you as a shield.”

“Wha?!”

Diablo focused on his sword. Thanks to Sasara mistaking the test’s difficulty setting and the effect of the Golden Fruit, his level as a warrior had increased significantly. After a good night of sleep, he felt much better than yesterday. His stomach still ached, but the chills and spasms were all gone.

I wonder how much power my attacks have right now?

“Rah!” He slashed with all his strength, sweeping from the side.

“E-Erm... You shouldn’t be looking in the direction you’ll be cutting before you attack. Your eyes give it away.”

“Tch.”

He swung another time, cutting through air again.

“The movement of your muscles gives it away too.”

“Nng.”

“You need to move faster. I think you need to not move any muscles that aren’t necessary when slashing...”

“The races’ bodies don’t work like that!”

“Aaah... How do I explain it... Have you ever seen a weaver? You need to move like that, without any needless movements.”

Sasara’s words made Diablo look at his own hands. He’d been in that state of mind before.

I think...I remember...

It was like how a normal person’s eyes couldn’t keep up with the maneuvering of a skilled player. It was like the flawless movements of a machine in a factory. He’d once stood on the side of those who proclaimed, “If you wish to win, give up on being human!”

When he swung his sword, he moved his body with the movements he was used to, but if he was to be a high level warrior, he couldn’t treat his body the same way he did in the other world. It was just like when casting magic in this

one.

He held the image of the normal physical attack animation from *Cross Reverie* in his mind.

Get your target in range, and click the attack button.

When he came to in the next moment, he'd already launched his attack. The sound of the blade cutting through the air felt different this time.

"Oooh?!" He couldn't hold back his surprise at himself.

"Hiya?!" The change was so sudden, Sasara wasn't able to evade as usual. The attack skimmed over her pointed ears.

"Was that a hit?" Diablo asked with a smile.

"Th-That...was just a hair... It doesn't count."

"I don't mind, but you do realize that the next time I hit you, you *will* take damage."

"Aaah... I'll, umm, endure it..."

Hitting Sasara when she was focused on dodging was difficult. Compared to the feel of using magic, which was ingrained into Diablo's mind by now, his sword swipes weren't as smooth as he wished they'd be.

It took him three days to land a hit. At that same time, Rem and Shera took the test repeatedly, eventually passing, and going on to become Sasara's second and third pupils.

Chapter 5: Facing a Trial

One month later— The twelfth month was approaching its end, and owing to them being on top of a mountain, it was becoming gradually colder. However, the changing of the seasons was still more mild compared to Japan, so there was no need to change into winter clothing.

After breakfast that day, Diablo began talking.

“Sasara, how much longer do you think this training will take?”

“Huh? Well, we keep training until the day we die...”

“No...I didn’t mean in the sense of an ideal. I meant how long until the trial for my breaking the level limit to go beyond level 99?”

“Ah...y-yes...” She hung her head. “Of course you would want to know that...”

His body had already recovered from the effects of the Golden Fruit, and he’d been training in the way of the sword for quite a while now. He’d felt the time was right to test his abilities.

“Breaking the level limit is one of my goals, but we cannot be absent from Faltra for too long. If you say it’s too soon for the trial, I will have to leave and return to train again at a later time.”

“Yes, I understand... Please, let me think on this for a bit...” So she said, falling silent.

“What about you two?” Diablo turned his eyes to Rem and Shera.

“...I would like to continue training for as long as you remain here.”

“You aren’t taking the trial?”

“...I do not like giving up before trying...but I doubt I am even at the limit of the races right now.”

“Hm.”

True enough, Diablo had never lost to Rem or Shera while training.

“I’ll take the trial!” Shera raised a hand.

“Wha...?! Shera, you can’t even beat me!”

“But doesn’t it sound like fun?”

“...Failing the Swordmaster’s trial costs you your life, from what I hear.”

“I don’t like pain...”

Rem had trained to the best of her ability to catch up to Diablo, and in that regard, her growth was the fastest. Shera only participated in the training because she didn’t like being left out and bored. There wasn’t a shred of motivation in her... But from Sasara’s estimates, Shera was blessed with more talent than Rem. Diablo was once again reminded that this girl was, in fact, a genius.

As a child she was already a level 40 archer, and despite not having that much experience, she’d reached level 80 by now. Shera aspired to be a summoner but had godsent talent as an archer, and apparently had latent aptitude to be a warrior as well.

After that conversation, Sasara retreated to the back of her manor for a long time.

†

That evening, they were served soba, this time on wooden sieves as Diablo had instructed Sasara. She wasn’t able to get any bamboo (whether bamboo even existed in this world was questionable), but she whittled down pieces of firewood into poles and overlapped them.

While picking up the soba, they made sure not to cut them and kept their chins up while slurping them. That was how you ate soba. In addition, Sasara experimented with the strength of the fire while boiling the soba as well as the amount of water while kneading it.

“It’s so tasty!” Shera cheered happily.

“...I personally prefer meat, but there’s no doubting that this is quite good.” Rem’s impression seemed favorable as well.

“Hm.” Diablo nodded sagely.

While it wasn’t quite the flavor of some famous store in the mountains, it was

definitely soba.

“Thank you very much, Diablo...” Sasara lowered her head. “I only managed to make them so well because of you.”

“Hmph... I merely gave my impression of the flavor.”

The one who’d put in all the effort was her.

“When Father raised me, he often let me eat this soba.”

“I see.”

It seemed to be a flavor that carried its share of memories. This was probably why Sasara, who didn’t show any interest in much else besides the sword, was so passionate about making it.

“That said, Father’s soba was always bumpy and flabby, and I had to eat it with a spoon...” Sasara laughed wryly.

Diablo shook his head. “He probably made it soft enough for a child to eat.”

“Ah...”

“Well, I suppose he may have failed at making it too.”

“I should have asked him... There’s so much...I should have said to Father, not just about swordplay...”

“That’s just how people are. Once they get old, men stop talking about themselves, and children have no interest in anyone but themselves. One only begins thinking about their parents when they become parents.”

Sometimes, that only came once one’s parents were gone.

“That’s...very sad...” Sasara wiped her eyes.

“Becoming a parent makes you understand how your parents felt.”

“Hm... Is that how it works?”

“We’ll have to learn for ourselves.”

Diablo was nowhere near old enough to talk about old age, nor had he raised any children.

“I want to know more... More about Father, and my real father. I guess I have

to live long to do so.”

“Coincidentally, Graham was a hundred years old, right?”

“Yes.”

There had to have been meaning to the previous swordmaster’s actions. They’d only come to think and correlate the facts this morning. But Sasara said nothing about the topic. Instead, as if changing the subject...

“Diablo, tomorrow morning, we climb the mountain. For the Swordmaster’s trial.”

“Understood.” He nodded back.

“I-It’s dangerous, and you may lose your life in the process.”

“I’d expect no less.”

“Also, if you use magic, you will immediately fail... Be careful.”

“Oh?”

Cross Reverie had something called a magic warrior. Like the grappler sorcerer, it was a class that mixed both swordplay and magic. However, grappler sorcerers were unpopular and considered a jack of all trades but master of none, while magic warriors were considered a standard class. At first, players focused on their skills as a warrior, and halfway through their build unlocked high firepower spells.

“Well...” Sasara said with a complicated expression. “True, some warriors do employ magic, but...um...in your case, if you use magic, it wouldn’t be a trial at all.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

There would be no point to defeating an enemy meant to challenge a level 99 warrior with a level 150 sorcerer’s spell.

†

Diablo climbed up the mountain. The surroundings of the estate were like a forest, but as he approached the summit, the trees taller than a person gradually diminished. Trees could go grow in cold terrain and great heights, but

anywhere higher than the nearby mountains the wind blew too strongly. The wind either knocked down the saplings before they could extend their roots, or dispersed the leaves away, making the young trees wither.

“Ugh, I’m tiiiiiired!” Shera whined, Rem engaging with her.

“I told you to wait at the estate. You can still go back now if you want.”

“I don’t wanna wait alone, and I don’t wanna go back alone even more.”

“L-Let’s keep going, everyone...” Sasara spoke up. “We’re almost there.”

Geez.

Diablo turned to face them. “I don’t understand what you came with me for. Didn’t the rule state that only one person could take the trial at a time?”

“I-I am here to keep watch that you do not use magic.”

“I don’t mind that.”

“...Training by seeing,” Rem answered.

“And I’m here to cheer for you!” Shera waved her hands. “Do your best, Diablo♥”

Is a trial to pass the limit of the races supposed to feel like a sports meetup? Because this certainly feels like one...

They’d finally reached flat ground. It was an infertile place filled with only sand and rocks. From the other side of the rocks, a rumbling in the ground approached them.

It’s coming.

Diablo pulled out the longsword at his waist, the Seraphix Blade.

“Be careful!” Rem yelled, but Sasara raised a hand to silence her.

“Stay back! From here on out, giving him advice is forbidden.”

“...U-Understood.”

“Mmph.” Shera covered her mouth with both hands, and the three of them stepped back.

Diablo was a sorcerer in *Cross Reverie*, so he never cleared the warrior trial,

but he was aware of its content from a walkthrough site. He'd have to beat a magical beast called the great master in a solo battle. Sasara hadn't told him what was coming, but Diablo was aware nonetheless.

"Ooooooooooooooh!" A massive form burst from the shade of the rocks. It had a skull for a head, and its body was only made of bones. A crimson crystal shined inside its ribcage. In terms of appearance, it was similar to a low level skeleton monster, except it was huge in size and gripped a stone greatsword in its hands.

Diablo brandished his left hand at his enemy— "Whoops..."

He naturally prepared to cast a spell. A large monster only capable of hand-to-hand combat made for an easy target.

Diablo changed his stance. The stone greatsword had a far greater reach than his Seraphix Blade.

Should I charge him from a distance?

It was a common method, but it wasn't to Diablo's liking. Charging attacks weren't as quick as those using them thought. If they had the speed of a magi gunner's bullet it may have been different...but the enemy being attacked was capable of reacting too calmly. Any technique could be a foolish one if used recklessly.

The distance between them gradually shrank. Diablo enjoyed this. It was the opposite of a sorcerer's fighting style. He'd always come up with solutions while fighting from afar, but now he was the one assertively advancing on his foe.

"Heh... Heheheh..." Laughter spilled from his lips naturally.

"Shaaaaaaaaa!" The great master swung its stone sword.

I can dodge this, easy.

It was ridiculously quick for how large its body was, but it was nothing compared to Sasara's attacks.

Diablo shifted his weight from his left leg to his right, then pulled his left back. He changed his stance, not shifting his body's axis from his spine. If he fought like before, he'd be hopping around and dodging like a grasshopper, or maybe

counterattacking with magic... If he didn't keep his legs hard on the ground, he wouldn't be able to make use of his sword.

Diablo unleashed his skill.

"Sword Smite III!"

It was a charge-type martial art that allowed its user to break into the enemy's range, avoid their attacks, and grant a chance to hit. This was the correct timing to use this attack.

The great master stiffened. Sword Smite III was a series of maneuvers that consisted of charging at the enemy's flank and slashing them, though it was possible to cancel it after the charge and switch to another attack. But Diablo vividly remembered what he'd once read on a post on the message boards: "Only air players cancel Sword Smite halfway through."

Air players meant people who didn't play the game, but pretended to be experts by watching game footage and reading up strategy sites.

Diablo didn't cancel his attack; he didn't need to. The great master was still stiff, so his attack would connect. Once it hit, he'd be able to follow up with a combo.

"Haaaaaaaaa!"

Heat Sonic—a martial art learned at level 80. His sword shone red with heat, and he released a powerful attack consisting of eight consecutive slashes. The great master's right arm was crushed, and its stone longsword fell to the ground.

"Ooooooooooooooooooooh!" His roar echoed like a tremor.

"One more!" Diablo attacked his enemy once it was cornered, unleashing another Heat Sonic on it. The attack crushed its ribcage and shattered the scarlet crystal it contained. It was an obvious weak point. The great master roared in agony.

Did I do it?! No...not yet!

Defeated magical beasts were supposed to disperse into particles of light. Instead, the great master's crushed crystal crumbled to the earth, with the

ground where its shards made contact suddenly beginning to swell.

“What?!”

Several Great Masters rose from the ground, crushing rocks as they ascended. They were equal to the number of shards, totaling six.

“Heheheh...” Diablo’s lips curved into a smile. “Any less would be boring... Even as a warrior, I shall transcend the limits of the races!”

He unleashed martial arts into yet another great master.

“Guaaaaaah?!”

Suddenly, its abdomen was pierced from the back by another stone longsword.

They’re stabbing each other?!

With the stiffness of his own martial art working against him, Diablo took a direct hit.

“Gah?!” He was blown away and knocked down against the ground.

Diablo’s flank was cut open and bleeding. He nearly lost consciousness for a second there. The moment he considered the magnitude of the damage he’d taken, he instinctively reached out to take a potion. His habits from the game went on to save him even in this world. He consumed the HP potion before he even knew it.

“Kuh!” Rising to his feet, he promptly jumped aside. Another great master’s attack had come his way.

“Shaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

They didn’t spare him even a moment to breathe. Diablo considered how all his training was one-on-one; he wasn’t used to fighting solo against this many...

Wait, no! I don’t need training for this!

He’d experienced it time after time as a sorcerer. Diablo’s battles were almost always one against many, but he used his movements to lure monsters into brief one-on-one confrontations. When a distant enemy attacked him, he’d take cover behind a nearby one. This situation was no different.

Even if my weapon is a sword now, my experience is still valid!

“Ha! I am the Demon Lord Diablo! A flock of measly level 99 monsters are no match for me!”

Diablo went on to defeat the six great masters.

†

Sasara felt some heat flare up in her chest. It was hard to say she raised Diablo into this. If anything, it felt more like he grew up on his own. But she still felt joy at seeing someone she’d watched mature and improve in a tangible and visible way.

But at the same time, a feeling of suspense became stronger in her heart. She clenched her fist silently.

“He did it!” Shera jumped for joy.

Rem nodded serenely. “I’d expect no less of you.”

“Sasara, Diablo passed, right?!”

“...Surely he has. After seeing that fight, I don’t think there’s any doubt that he’s passed the limit of the races as a warrior.”

In contrast to the two girls’ festive moods, Sasara’s expression was grave.

“Th-That can wait for later... You two stay here. Do not go outside, no matter what.”

She signaled for them to stay behind the rocks. Shera tilted her head curiously, but Rem...

“No!” Rem realized first.

“I... I have to settle this score.” Sasara jumped back from behind the rocks. “Diablo, get back!”

“You’re going to fight it, aren’t you?!” he responded, seemingly realizing what was going on.

“O-Of course.” Sasara nodded.

It always attacked wherever strong adventurers were around. If one defeated

a powerful monster and made a show of their power, it would appear from somewhere.

The six great masters Diablo defeated had broken apart into particles of light and vanished, a giant, hairy monkey appearing nearby.

The evil ape.

Former Swordmaster Graham. Sasara's stepfather. The man who saved her life, raised her, and taught her how to wield the blade. A katana with the symbol of the crescent moon etched onto its pommel sat in its hands.

"Ooooooooh..."

"I will face you...Father. I've decided I must do this."

Diablo's words had made her reconsider things. She still didn't know what her father's intentions were. Did he become an Oni because he sought to duel her? If he didn't do it out of hatred or envy, but simply wanted to master the blade so much he was even willing to cast his sentience aside, then it would be very much like her father to do so.

Sasara held up her sword, but that alone didn't illicit a reaction from the evil ape.

"Father...I will slay you." Her murderous intent surged out.

"Ooh, ooooooooh..." He raised his blade as well.

The same stance as me.

The distance between them was twenty steps. Diablo stepped back, realizing Sasara's feelings and leaving the battle to her.

I must be the one to beat him! I must respond to Father's feelings!

"Yaaaaaah!" Sasara swung her blade, unleashing a martial art. Ignoring the distance of twenty steps, the slash reached her opponent.

The martial art, Boundless.

But it knew her abilities, so the attack didn't connect. It evaded it, unleashing a counter attack—the martial art, Collapse.

The long range attack shattered the rocks beneath her feet. Sasara leaned

horizontally to evade, but the time spent on that allowed her father to cover that distance in the space of single breath.

The martial art, Flash Thrust.

The two glared at each from a short distance.

“Father!”

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

They slashed at one another.

There wasn’t so much of a hint of his past self in that form. All she saw was an evil ape.

The moment before his slash reached Sasara—she jumped up and unleashed a slash of her own.

It was an attack known as Garden Stone, where the user slashed through space and the attack itself manifested a moment later. She exploited her father’s aggressiveness and used herself as bait to unleash this attack on the brink of crisis.

“She’s so calm...”

The memory of the day she spent with her father brought Sasara to the verge of tears. It was a mixture of both the fact that she didn’t want to see her father having changed so much, spurred by the desire to cross swords with her even a moment longer, and the awareness that she couldn’t truly remain calm in this situation. Should this battle drag out much longer, she would leave an opening.

“Yah!” Sasara charged aggressively.

“Oh!” He deflected her slash with his sword.

He was strong. In terms of sheer strength, he certainly outmatched her real father. He was also quite fast, with his slashes becoming gradually swifter. He was accurate, with his techniques increasing with precision.

But Sasara was stronger, swifter, and more skilled. After an exchange of twenty slashes, she began cornering her opponent. The katana etched with the marking of the crescent moon was knocked back.

“Haaah!”

“Gah?!”

The opponent’s side was exposed. She needed only to slash him across the abdomen to end this. That would kill the evil ape and conclude the battle.

“Tch... Father!”

Her hands shook. She choked on her breath. Her tears overflowed...

Sasara did not slash.

†

Diablo called out her name. This battle between level 200 warriors was so fierce, there was no way to hold back one’s surprise. It was an exchange of techniques Diablo couldn’t fathom how to handle, each looking like an unfair form of cheating.

Sasara once said that, as an adventurer, Diablo was probably much stronger than she was, but would he be able to beat her if they were to truly fight? If he’d challenged her before leveling up as a warrior, he’d have been cut by that first martial art that ignored distance. Not to mention that the evil ape was as strong as one would expect of a demonized form of former Swordmaster Graham.

Despite this, Sasara outmatched him. She dominated the exchange of blades and broke her opponent’s stance. Diablo was confident her final slash would decide the match.

But at the final moment...she stopped being a swordmaster, and went back to being a girl who adored her father.

“Sasaraaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

But Diablo’s cry didn’t reach her. The evil ape didn’t miss the opening exposed before it, driving its blade forward.

“Ah!”

Sasara fell to the ground. Red blood pooled over the rocks. She’d been slashed diagonally from the shoulder. The cut probably reached her heart and

caused instant death.

Diablo's hands shook. He pulled his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur, from out of his pouch, along with a boosting potion. He was up against a level 200 warrior—even if he put his all into this battle, it wouldn't be enough.

"Flare Burst!"

Last time, the evil ape avoided this spell. But trying to dodge it meant it wasn't able to withstand such a blast. As Diablo expected, it jumped away before the smoke could spread. Using the small of time afforded to him, Diablo changed the Tonnerre Empereur into its Libre form, a magic sword made of purple lightning. This made his attacks multiply in number, but also greatly increased his MP consumption.

"Lightning Arrow!"

Enough arrows of light to blot out the sun appeared around them, flying toward the evil ape in all directions. There was no avoiding them.

"Graaah!"

To Diablo's surprise, the evil ape cut down the approaching arrows in a flurry of attacks. It was like a barrier of slashes. It appeared he'd need a spell with higher firepower to affect it.

"In that case, Lightning Bullet!"

This time he fired bullets of light, their power higher by several orders of magnitude. It was originally a spell that fired one bullet a time, but the Libre's effects multiplied it into a series of shots. Yet the evil ape managed to avoid them.

"Kuh..."

It was too fast. Fast as it may be, it was hard to believe the spell that defeated Galford had no effect.

"Ooooooooooooooh!"

The evil ape swung down its blade. Diablo dodged to the side, but the attack severed through space. It was a martial art that completely ignored distance. Had Diablo not seen Sasara use it in the previous battle, he'd have surely been

cut down.

What I need is a high firepower, unavoidable, area of effect attack!

"...Cross Blizzard!"

Countless whirlwinds appeared around them. Whatever came in contact with them would freeze and shatter by the force of the gales. The evil ape kicked the ground and jumped into the air, attempting to shrink the distance between them with one bound. It knew that killing the caster would disrupt the spell.

"Ooooooooooooooooooooh!" The former swordmaster's slash swung down on him.

Diablo blocked the attack with the Libre. "Gah?!" He could feel his bones crack.

He was almost blown away by the recoil, but managed to stand his ground. Sinking his feet firmly, he put all the force his body could muster into the blade and pushed back. If he were to lose against that pressure, his stance would break and he'd be left open to the next attack.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

This battle was going the same way the evil ape's battle with Sasara had gone. They stood within arm's reach of each other, exchanging slash after slash. The only difference was that Diablo's skill with the blade wasn't good enough to match the evil ape. It was a one-sided defensive battle for Diablo, and just staying on the defense was difficult. But Diablo's lips curled upward in a smirk at this.

"Heh... Stupid monkey... Aren't you forgetting something?"

"Gah?!"

"Dark Press!"

The spell was cast from close range, and it was one that didn't require contact to be made. It was a spell with an area of effect, albeit a small one. It doubled the target's weight several times over and sealed their movements. On an enemy at the ape's level it would only give a limited debilitating effect...but it still noticeably slowed down the monster's slashes.

Diablo had also stuck out his left hand as he blocked the ape's blade with his magic sword.

"Freeze! Absolute Zero!"

But to Diablo's surprise, his extended left hand was cut off, and fresh blood spurted out into the air.

"Wha?!"

"Gaaah!"

All of this was just him trying to lure me in?!

The evil ape held a dagger in its left hand. Where did it hide it until now? It saw through Diablo's appearance and equipment, and surmised his fighting style despite that. Meanwhile, the ape's equipment should have only been the katana...

"Diablo?!" he heard Shera screech from behind the rocks.

He grit his teeth; he couldn't afford to let them see him so weak and beaten.

Don't think you've won when all you took was my left hand!

Diablo tried headbutting the ape, who in turn tried to dodge. The blow instead impacted its left shoulder.

"Uah?!"

"I just needed contact!"

There was no rule saying it had to specifically be with a *hand*.

The Absolute Zero spell triggered, freezing the evil ape from its shoulder. If it worked, the spell would spread to the rest of its body—but things weren't going to end so simply.

Judging the situation quickly, the ape slashed at its own body. Blood spilled onto the ground, and its left arm splashed down into the red puddle, frozen solid. The hand shattered, and the dagger tumbled to the ground. The dagger seemed to dissipate as it contacted the ground, but was rendered visible by both Diablo's and the evil ape's blood.

An invisible dagger?!

It seemed a level 200's arsenal contained not just unknown techniques, but weapons the likes of which Diablo hadn't seen.

They were both missing their left hand, but their positions were far from equal. Diablo had lost the freedom to use potions. He couldn't just let go of the weapon in his right hand to use them.

Cross Reverie never featured anything resembling disabilities, and no matter how severe the damage one received, they could still consume items with no handicap. But this world was different. Diablo's body was nowhere near as durable as a level 200 warrior, and he couldn't let this battle drag on any longer while he was bleeding out like this.

The next blow will have to decide this!

"Grrrrrr..." The evil ape's gaze was directed away from Diablo.

"Wha?! Where are you going?!"

The evil ape kicked the ground, rushing in an unexpected direction: toward the girls looking in from the rocks.

What had set him off? The evil ape's attention shifted from Diablo, who was standing right in front of him, to Shera. Was it because she screamed earlier? Diablo felt his pulse accelerate even faster.

"I won't let you! Lightning Meteor!"

Countless lightning bolts dropped down on the evil ape who gouged the ground with its sword, crushing rocks and kicking up clouds of dust and sediment. The moment before the bolts of lightning made contact with their target, they struck against the shards and grains of sand and earth, instead being directing down into the ground.

It slashed the ground to create a lightning rod effect?!

The spell didn't even serve to delay it, and before Diablo could react, the ape closed in on the girls.

"Ooooooooooooooh!"

"Eek?!"

Shera was a talented archer, but was weak when caught off guard. She froze, her body stiff with horror.

“Asulau!”

Rem had intercepted the monster’s blow with a summon crystal. But with a single slash of the ape’s sword, the summon turned back into a black crystal. No matter how strengthened it was by Rem’s equipment, a level 40 summon couldn’t even serve as a shield. The evil ape was upon Shera, preparing to run its sword through her. Diablo prepared to unleash all the magic he could—
“Wha?!”

—when someone deflected the evil ape’s blade.

Standing in front of Shera with sword in hand was none other than Sasara, blood trickling down her forehead.

“F-Father... Stop it... Shera...is my student... M-My friend.”

Shera called out Sasara’s name, and Rem’s eyes widened in shock.

“Sasara, you’re alive?!”

“M-My body...doesn’t take damage...from a hit once a day.”

“But, the blood...”

“The slash didn’t hurt me... But I banged my head hard against a rock beneath my feet... I cut my forehead open...”

Judging from how badly she was bleeding, it made sense she’d get knocked out for a few minutes.

“I ask you once again, Sasara!” Diablo called out to her. “Can you fight it?!”

“Y-Yes... I will fight.”

“Can you truly cut it down?!”

“Nng... If that is...Father’s wish!”

She deflected the blade that had crossed against her own. The evil ape stepped back, and Sasara held up her sword vertically. Her sword was enveloped with light. She looked defenseless, but the evil ape didn’t recklessly attack her. It knew better than to rush her.

“Father...” Sasara parted her lips to speak, with a cold but resolute voice. “This is the final technique you taught me. Please watch me as I perform it!”

“Grrrrrr... Ooooooooooooooh!” The evil ape roared and swung its blade up.

“Teiyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Sasara met his roar with a cry of her own coming from the very depths of her lungs.

The light emanating from her sword enveloped her, eventually covering her whole body in a torrent of light. Diablo thought it was similar to teleportation, a type of magic that enveloped one’s body in light and transferred them to another place altogether. It was the fastest method of transportation in this world.

It only took a moment. No—did time even pass? As soon as the light flashed, it was already over. Before Diablo even knew it, Sasara was already standing behind the evil ape, her sword swung down. The evil ape had also swung its sword.

“Kah...”

The two stood back-to-back...with Sasara the first to crumble to her feet.

Did she lose?!

“Hey!” Diablo rushed over and picked her up. What he found were tears running down her face.

Sasara was crying.

“I... I did it...”

“What?”

Diablo turned to look at the evil ape. It lowered its sword and turned to face them, revealing a slash extending from its left shoulder down to its right flank. Blood spurted from the wound, and its fur rapidly receded from its body. It was turning back from a fuzzy ape to the Swordmaster’s original, human form.

“...Magnificent.”

The man who was the evil ape—former Swordmaster Graham—crumbled to the ground.

“Ah?!” Sasara hurried to his side. “F-Father?!”

“Heh... Heheh... Even after becoming an Oni...I couldn’t match you...”

“Father! I... I...” Sasara clung to Graham, crying all the while. Her shoulders shivered as she sobbed.

“Y-Your blade... It has reached the domain...envisioned by the founder... As a teacher, nothing could make me...prouder...”

“N-No... I’m not, I’m nowhere near!”

“Yet...I longed for...a chance to cross blades...with a master fencer. E-Even if...I would have to shed my humanity...to do it...”

As Diablo thought, all Graham wanted was a chance to duel Sasara. Not as a parent or teacher, but as a single warrior, he sought to face her in one, decisive match.

Graham choked loudly, then coughed up blood.

“Father!”

“Weep not...for I am...pleased. I got to fight you...to fight you truly and seriously...in the greatest match of my life... Guh... I can only regret...the inadequacy of my own skill...”

“I only acted on your teachings, Father...”

“My teachings...”

“‘The path of the Swordmaster is not for the sake of fighting, but to raise and instruct others’—that is what I’ve heard,” Diablo said, standing next to them. “In which case, you can take pride, swordmaster. Your daughter is the greatest warrior.”

Graham couldn’t even move anymore. He simply turned his gaze to Diablo.

“...Ye mighty adventurer...”

“I am but your pupil’s pupil.”

“T-Take...” His voice grew fainter and fainter. “T-Take care of...my...daughter...”

“You can leave her to me.”

“Sa...sara...” With shaking hands, he presented the girl with his katana.

“Father!”

Graham’s final words were no longer audible. But the gaze in his eyes was that of a father beaming at their child. The former Swordmaster breathed his last, and his eyes would open no longer.

Sasara fell over his chest.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaah, Faaaaaaaaatheeeeeeeeer!”

Diablo could only watch over her. He had no words to console her with. It was because Graham wished for this that the Swordmaster sought this conclusion with Sasara, and why what transpired here was meaningful for them both. But that may have in fact been a mistake. In so doing, this girl was forced to slay her beloved father with her own two hands.

Was this the right thing to do?

This question would weigh down Diablo’s heart for as long as he lived.

Interlude

It was now snack time in the city of Faltra. Klem sat at Petre's, eating away at biscuits.

"Omom... Petre's biscuits are truly the best! When you say Petre's, biscuits are the one thing that comes to mind!"

"Ahaha... We are a bakery though..." Having gone out to wait on tables due to a lack of manpower, the third Petre (the youngest brother) smiled wryly. He was a grasswalker baker clad in a red apron, his long rabbit ears and large tail his trademark.

"This Demon Lord loves biscuits."

"Well, as glad as I am to hear it, I'd love it if you ordered bread sometimes too..."

"Oppose, Demon Lord?" Edelgard stood behind Petre. "Oppose? Punish?"

Her murderous intent was palpable. Petre Number Three's rabbit ears shivered in fright.

"A-Ahh... W-Welcome to Petre's biscuit store! Hooray to biscuits!"

"Ahahaha..." Klem laughed, holding her stomach. "Wasn't this a Fallen café?!"

"If you understand this much, could you at least order something to drink, Miss Demon Lord?!"

"Water."

"Come on..." Petre's rabbit ears positively withered.

Edelgard held the round tray in her hands like some sort of speaker, poking the tip of Petre's nose with it. Even though there was no logical way a tray could poke into something, he felt it poke against him anyway.

"Demon Lord...asked water. Go bring? Go bring!"

"Me? But, you're the waiter and I'm the manager... A-Ah, yes! Water, coming right up! I'll go get it!"

Petre rushed behind the counter and immediately brought over a cup of water.

“Here you are, Miss Demon Lord!”

Suddenly, Klem slammed her hands against the table and cried out as biscuit crumbs took to the air:

“They moved!”

“Huh? Th-The biscuits...?”

“Modinaram!”

“Huh?”

Petre failed to follow what was going on, but Diablo had arranged things ahead of time. A person who should have been a customer rushed over to Klem, kneeling beside her.

“Could you explain that in further detail?!”

“Who are you?”

“I am under the governor’s command.”

Looking around, Petre noticed men in adventurer’s clothes, sorcerer’s robes, and clerical clothes, all turning serious gazes toward Klem.

Huh? What? Are all these people associates of little Klem? No wonder the store’s so full this late in the afternoon!

The governor, Galford, the Adventurer’s Guild’s guildmaster, Sylvie, the Mage’s Association’s overseer, Celestine, and the high priest, Lumachina, all designated Klem as a target of close observation. Each organization deployed several of their subordinates to keep an eye on her, which led to this somewhat odd situation.

“Hmph...” Klem crossed her arms. “I don’t much appreciate being followed by the likes of you fools... But I will tell you, since my master ordered me to.” She pointed to the west. “Modinaram has moved. They’re heading this way.”

“Ah! H-How long will it take them to reach this city?!”

“How should know! But at this rate...maybe nine days or so. They’re going

slow, so they've probably got the rest of the Fallen with them."

"Thank you very much!" A man dressed like a civilian gave her a straight salute and left the store in a hurry. The others soon followed suit.

"They're finally coming!" "It's gonna start soon!" "The war! The war! The waaarrr!"

"Hmph." Klem sat back down on her seat. "It's finally settled down around here. Well, for the time being..."

"Demon Overlord, Modinaram...is?"

"What will you do, Edelgard? Modinaram is probably closer to being the Demon Lord you Fallen wish for than this Demon Lord is, aren't they? They intend to fight the races."

"Nn... Edelgard swore, loyalty to Krebskulm? Swore it! So no. No changing!"

"I see."

"If Petre's disappears, problem? Work disappear, problem. Can't buy biscuits for Demon Lord? Problem!"

"Heh... So you understand, I see. I shall grant you a biscuit for that."

Klem handed Edelgard a biscuit, which she proceeded to munch into with an "Om!" After chewing on it, she licked at Klem's fingers with an ecstatic expression.

Petre Number Three's eyes widened in shock.

"Wait, all those people... They ate without paying?!"



Epilogue

The Demon Lord's army was on the march. News of this had not only reached Faltra, but spread out to the nearby towns. Rather than the inner parts of the Kingdom of Lyferia, it was the regions near the Demon Lord's domain that prepared most in earnest for the upcoming battle. Four colored beacons were lit in town squares—which any member of the races would recognize—to inform the races of what was happening.

And so, the news soon reached the Swordmaster's retreat. After the battle with the evil ape concluded, Diablo and his group returned to the estate. Sasara was in the inner room. The last martial art she used, Daybreak, had drained so much of her strength, which, coupled with the emotional strain of what happened, made her develop a fever. She was now recovering in bed.

Shera was nursing Sasara. Diablo was sitting near the hearth, trying to come up with a means of treating her condition. It was then that Rem ran into the estate from the yard.

"The Demon Lord's army!"

"What?!"

"...Four colored smoke beacons are lit to inform of a Fallen invasion. But I don't know how long until the fighting begins!"

It would take four days to reach Faltra from Sormas by horse, no matter how fast they were.

"The fighting may have already started..."

"...Or it may have already ended..."

Diablo shook his head. Klem said she would give warning ahead of time if the Demon Overlord were to move. Galford and the adventurers were also still stationed there. They wouldn't lose that easily.

"We must hurry." That was all Diablo said.

"I'll go tell Shera." Rem nodded. "But...what about Sasara?"

“We can’t bring someone not fit to fight with us.”

“...Of course.”

At that moment, the sliding door leading to the inner room slid open. Sasara stepped out, dressed in her sleeping gown, followed by Shera, who wore a concerned expression.

“D-Diablo... Y-You’re planning on leaving me behind?!”

“Sasara, you can’t force your body like this!”

“Shera, thank you... Thank you for the concern. But I will do what I can.”

The Swordmaster gripped a katana with the mark of the crescent moon etched onto its pommel.

“Can you fight?” Diablo questioned.

“...I hear the survival of the races depends on this battle. And that the Demon Lord’s army is strong.”

“Hm.”

“I cannot simply stay in bed while my pupils... While my friends march to such a battle.”

“In that case, prepare for battle! We’ll be setting out soon!”

Lyferian calendar, year 164, 12th month, 24th day—

The Demon Overlord’s expedition, led by the Demon Overlord Modinaram, had invaded the races’ territories, appearing before the citadel city of Faltra...

Afterword

Thank you very much for reading volume eight of *How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord*. I apologize for the long wait. This is the author, Yukiya Murasaki.

This volume featured Klem and Edelgard taking center stage after a long while, and I plan for them to have plenty of time in the limelight in the next volume as well. Look forward to it.

Also, I was finally able to introduce the Swordmaster, who's been part of the lore for quite a while now. While not an outsider, she's been given quite a few unusual abilities. She'll be acting as a vanguard alongside Rose in the next volume. Just how compatible will the the two of them be...?! Do look forward to that, alongside Diablo's new leveled up fighting spirit.

Unfortunately, the number of pages didn't quite allow for a short story, so I figured I had to make it a collection of shorter stories instead... I'll do my finest though.

Volume nine is the climax of the Demon Overlord arc! Expect its release within a year (or so it's planned).

Some thanks—

To Tsurusaki Takahiro. You were so excited to draw Klem's scene at the cast party, but I feel like that scene ended up becoming all sorts of crazy! Thank you very much for your lovely illustrations.

To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow, thank you very much this time as well.

To my editor, Shouji, your birthday event the other day was a great success. Once again, a happy birthday to you!

To Kodansha's light novel editorial department, and all the people involved, to the family and friends that support me, and to all of you who read this book, I offer a thank you of the highest level possible! Thank you very much!

Yukiya Murasaki

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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 8

by Yukiya Murasaki

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Edited by Kris Swanson

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VOLUME 8



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