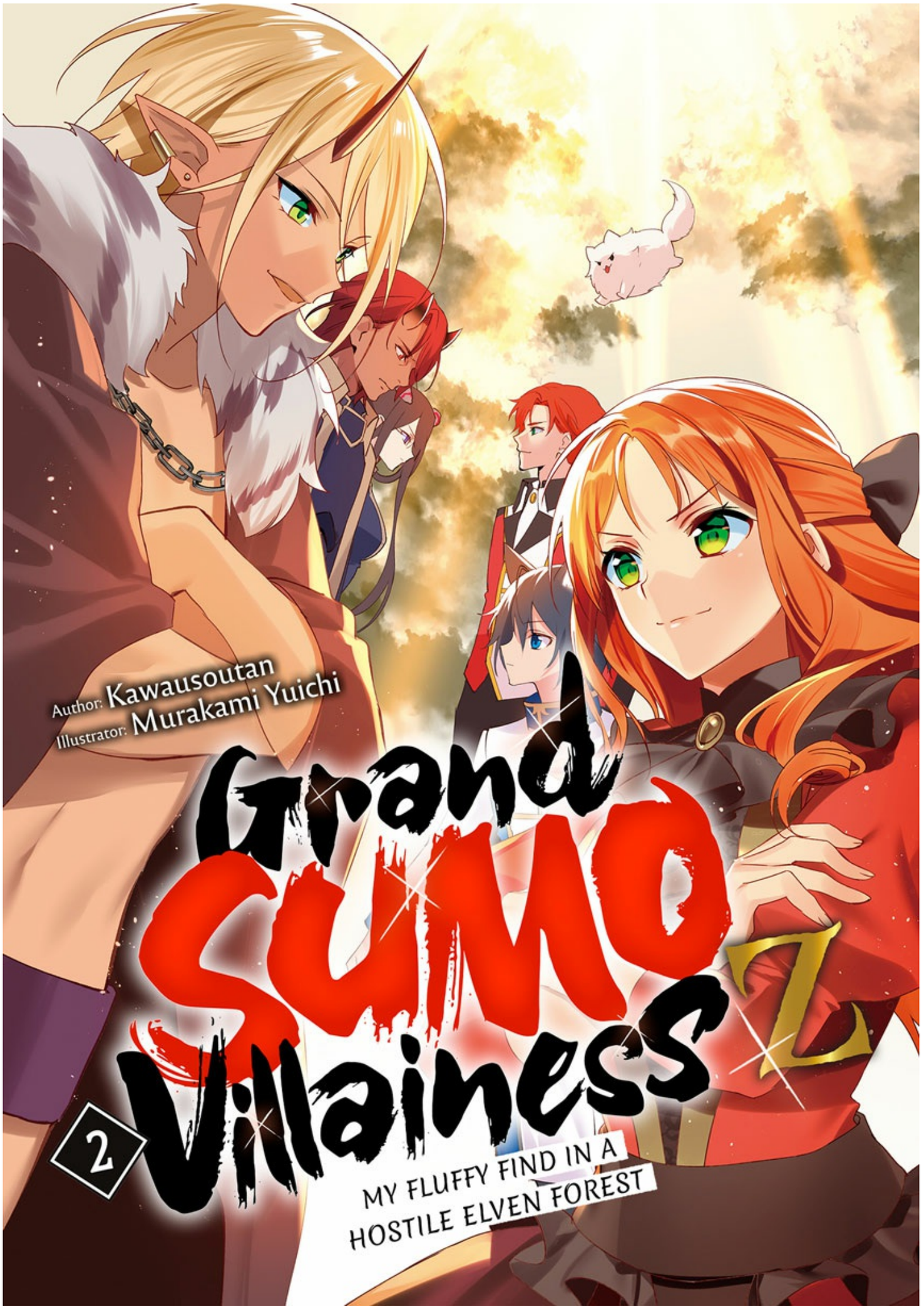
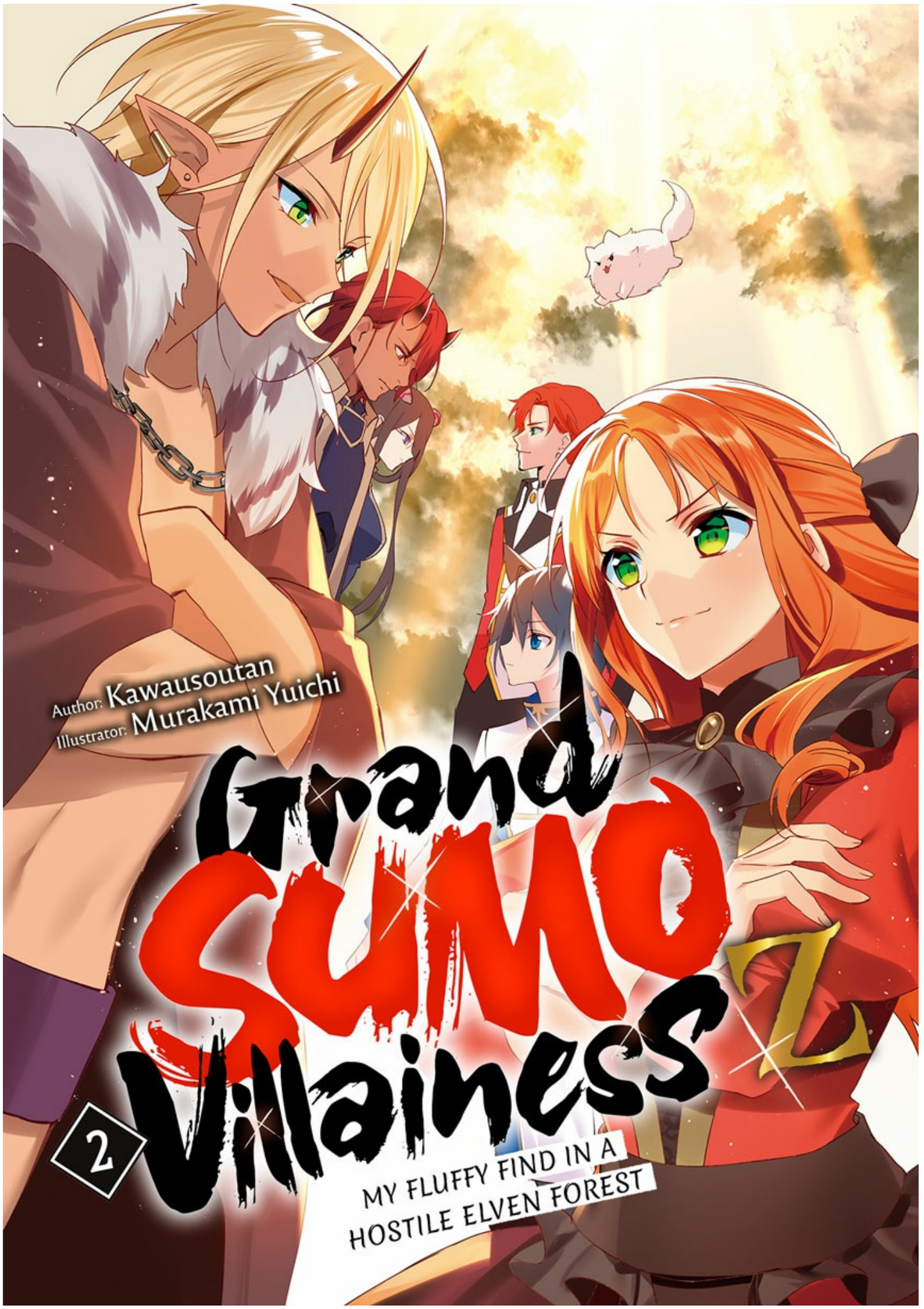

Author: Kawausoutan
Illustrator: Murakami Yuichi
Grand Sumo Villainess
2
MY FLUFFY FIND IN A HOSTILE ELVEN FOREST


Author: Kawausoutan
Illustrator: Murakami Yuichi
Grand Sumo Villainess
2
MY FLUFFY FIND IN A HOSTILE ELVEN FOREST

Grand Sumo Villainess Z [Complete]

1. Part 1
2. Part 2
3. Part 3
4. Part 4
5. Part 5
6. Part 6
7. Part 7
8. Part 8
9. Part 9
10. Part 10
11. Part 11
12. Part 12


Author: Kawausoutan
Illustrator: Murakami Yuichi
Grand Sumo Villainess
2
MY FLUFFY FIND IN A HOSTILE ELVEN FOREST

Chapter 1: Sumo at the Town of Yggdrasil

“I hereby abolish the friendship pact between the Elven Forest Republic and the Kingdom of Aryaka!”

During the (all-vegetable) dinner party, Chancellor Mickaël of the Elven Forest Republic went up on a platform and made such a proclamation. Gulping down my vegetable stew, I exchanged glances with Crown Prince Richie. To think the Elven Forest Republic, a nation that has long been on good terms with the Kingdom of Aryaka, would abolish their pact of friendship with us on the last day of our goodwill visit to their country...

It reminded me of that day two years ago. No longer was I that same weak Floortje, however. I stood up—now a yokozuna, holder of the top rank in Aryakan Sumo.

“Explain yourself, Chancellor Mickaël. Did the fairy king approve of this outrage?!”

The chancellor walked towards us, grinning as he stepped down from his platform.

“The fairy king is bedridden with a terrible illness. In his absence, I have the final say in all decisions pertaining to the Elven Forest Republic! Is that clear to you, Crown Princess Candidate Floortje, Crown Prince Richie?!”

Oh, it very much is. This fop of an elf had placed the fairy king under house arrest and seized power in the Elven Forest Republic. A coup was underway.

“The pact between Aryaka and the Elven Forest Republic was made by my father King Arvi and the Fairy King Ulupano to celebrate the long friendship between our nations! What gives you, a deputy, the right to abolish it?” spoke Prince Richie, dignity in his voice.

He had grown much since the events of two years ago. Yet he still occasionally acted spoiled with me, which was so cute of him it never failed to excite me. *Dosukoi dosukoi!* Not that this was the time for excitement.

“We are going to put you two in custody and hand you over to our new allies.

Don’t worry, you’ll live so long as we have use for you. After all, you are the future king and queen of Aryaka.”

“And who would be these ‘new allies’ of yours, chancellor?!” continued the prince.

“Heh heh... Why, it’s the Demon Lord’s army. In exchange for our support, they will be assisting us in our military endeavors. We shall seize the caves of those accursed dwarves, and I’m thinking of taking Aryaka for ourselves too.”

“Are you out of your mind?! You intend to become the Demon Lord’s puppet?! How foolish of you, chancellor!”

“Say what you want, pitiful prince. Your lives are in our hands.”

Chancellor Mickaël flashed a vulgar smile and raised his hand. A moment later, the door leading out of the main hall we were in opened and elven soldiers came in.

“Your Highness!”

“Got it, Floortje!”

I stood in front of the prince and lowered my center of mass.

“Hah hah hah! I know, Crown Princess Candidate Floortje, I know you’re the champion of some ‘sumo’ wrestling that’s all the rage in Aryaka these days. If you think that puny martial art of yours will do anything against my elite troops, you’re welcome to try.”

The chancellor’s ridicule made me smile.

“You don’t know a thing about sumo, do you?”

“Agh! Teach this silly woman a lesson! But do not kill her!”

As the soldiers descended upon me and the prince, I analyzed the situation. It would be easy to summon a dohyō and bring down Chancellor Mickaël here and now through sumo. But I didn’t know where the fairy king was being held, or how many forces the demons had planted in the state guest house. It seemed wiser to run.

I used a Tornado Beltless Arm Throw on an approaching soldier and threw

him at a group of his friends. The ensuing tornado swept up the soldiers and sent them crashing onto a table full of vegetable dishes.

“Wh-What?! What was that skill?!”

“These elven weaklings don’t even serve as an appetizer! Treat me to someone stronger, would you?!”

“They really were too weak, Floortje,” added the prince.

Prince Richie had reached the rank of *maegashira 5* in the last tournament after scoring more wins than losses. Young as he was, he was more than skilled enough to deal with elven soldiers. He took them down without any trouble using harite and his favorite pulling underarm throw.

Apart from me and the prince, our retinue was present too, with over half of them being sumo wrestlers. They took down one elven soldier after another.

“What in the—?! There’s no way a martial art could be this ridiculous! Casters! Concentrated Sleep Cloud, now!”

“Yes, sir!” replied the spellcasters as one.

When it came to warfare, the two things elves were good at were archery and magic. In particular, elven spirit magic was more powerful and dangerous than the kind of magic humans could wield. Glowing fairies rapidly orbited the elven spellcasters before us, while countless magic circles appeared at the elves’ feet.

“Your Highness!”

“Let’s do it, Floortje!”

The prince and I both raised a foot high in the air. Not a pose a lady and a crown prince should assume in the state guest house of a friendly nation, but we were past that. For we were a pair of sumo wrestlers.

STOMP! Our shiko literally shook the state guest house. The sacred sound of it sent holy ripples coursing through the ground. The ripples resonated with each other before purging the spells prepared by the casters.

“What, how?! Th-That’s impossible, I’ve never heard of such an anti-magic skill!”

“It’s called ‘shiko.’”

“That’s right,” added the prince.

“Shit! Shit! Archers, archers!!!”

Behind the chancellor, a group of archers came running. Not a moment later, the door behind him burst open, and in rushed General Maurilio with his troops.

“Your Highness! Lady Floortje! The town is on fire! It appears numerous soldiers have joined the rebellion! You’d best get out of here for the moment and leave this to me!”

“Very well, General, I’m counting on you!” replied the prince.

“I won’t let you down!”

“Y-You think I’ll just let you get away?! Archers! Shoot to kill! Don’t let those two leave this room! Fire!!!”

As a low sound resembling that of a string instrument reverberated through the room, countless arrows came flying our way. I performed a beltless arm throw without a target. *Whoosh!* Prince Richie did the same. *Whooosh!* Two tornadoes spawned and raged in the central hall, forcing the arrows off target and scattering them across the floor. I controlled my tornado with my mind and jumped aboard together with the prince.

“Time to go, Your Highness!”

“Okay!”

We rode the tornado to the stained glass on the side of the building, smashing right through. As the colorful glass shattered and its shards rained down upon the ground, the burning Town of Yggdrasil came into view.

“Look what they’ve done to this historic town!”

“And the Demon Lord’s army is here!”

Stern-looking monsters clad in black armor were running amok around town.

“Milady! Your Highness!”

Hearing an exhausted voice from below, I looked down to see my ditzy maid

Adela in the driver's seat of a coach, speeding through town. I moved our tornado towards her, then brought it downwards so the prince and I could step off.

"It's terrible, it's terrible! The town is under attack by the Demon Lord's army! Its defenses aren't functioning, so someone on the inside must have sabotaged them. I was sure you two would need a coach so I made my way to the state guest house! Let's run, let's run, dépêchez-vous!"

This ditz was as talkative as ever.

"Let's get out of town for now," suggested the prince.

"I think that's the best course of action, Your Highness," approved Adela.

"You know, this is just like..." Something about all this made me smile.

"Is this really a good time to be reminiscing, milady?!"

"I was just amused by how similar all this is to that day two years ago."

"And pray tell, milady, why that puts the ferocious smile of an unmatched warrior on your face?!"

"I am but a robust sumo wrestler."

"Jeez, milady!"

Complain as she might, Adela drove the coach to the town gates. I was certain we wouldn't be able to leave so easily. But it was all right, for my sumo would bring down anyone and anything in my way, just like it had two years ago.

Adela skillfully wove her way around the soldiers and evacuating elves on the road, heading straight for the western town gate as fast as she could. The town was in a terrible state. Various places were on fire, and elven commoners were running every which way, trying to escape. Chasing them about were elven soldiers, as well as monsters. Orcs and ogres in black armor were on a total rampage.

I could hardly believe it. No enemies had managed to set foot in the Town of Yggdrasil for the past five thousand years. The walls around it were imbued with special protective magic, preventing anyone bearing ill will from entering. *Curse you, Chancellor Mickaël! This town is an important cultural asset. How*

could you let demons and monsters in?

We had entered an area without buildings. There stood a massive tree which seemed to reach high into the sky. This was the world tree, Yggdrasil, the symbol of this town. Were it to burn down, this town—and probably the whole Elven Forest Republic—would surely be history. The numerous elven tribes were held together by the just rule of the Fairy King Ulupano, and by the spiritual support of this tree. I wanted to do something to avert such a negative outcome, but with pursuers on my tail, I couldn't think of how to help.

"What a terrible fate has befallen this town, Floortje," spoke the prince.

"Yes. If only there was something I could do..."

"What you *can* and *should* do, milady, is get to Aryaka as quickly and safely as possible, together with the prince! That is your win condition here! Don't let your sympathy for this town and its people cost you time!"

I knew Adela was correct. Half of our retinue here were rikishi. I could see us saving this town if we fought our hardest. But this wasn't our fatherland of Aryaka. And even were we to win today, it surely wouldn't last. After all, we had no supply routes. How could we keep a hold on another nation's town without food and other supplies coming in?

Still, I had to wonder if I could just leave things like this. Was I not meant to save at least those few I could with the power of sumo dwelling in these hands of mine? As I pondered the subject, Prince Richie held my hand.

"Now isn't a good time, Floortje. We should escape."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Now sixteen, the prince had grown not only physically, but emotionally too. No longer was he the little prince who would hide behind me. The man at my side was Crown Prince Richie—a proper member of royalty. *Come to think of it, n-now that he's sixteen, perhaps once this goodwill visit is over, he'll p-propose to me...you know, maybe.*

"♪ Haa... Auspicious young pine... ♪"

Oh dear, I couldn't keep from singing a jinku normally sung at wedding

reception banquets. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

“Heh heh. You never change, Floortje. Always with the beautiful songs.”

The prince smiled gently. I felt embarrassed.

“You’re red as a tomato, milady.”

Silence, before I bring you down with a minor inner footsweep.

Anyway, I wanted to at least put out the fires. The Elven Forest Republic would collapse at this rate.

The town gate came into view at the end of the road.

“There it is, milady, Your Highness! The gate!”

I set my thoughts aside. No doubt there would be demons or monsters guarding the way out.

“Two enemies ahead! A big one and a small one!” shouted Adela.

Two monsters stood in our path, blocking the road.

“Stop! This west gate is closed! No one is allowed through!” announced a huge red-skinned monster in front of the coach.

The big monster was an ugly red giant, while the small one was a beast-man with the body of a green frog. Adela stopped the coach. The three of us sat at the front of the coach, so the monsters could no doubt see me and the prince too.

“You must be from the Demon Lord’s army. This coach bears members of the Aryakan royalty. Aryaka is not at war with the demonic realm; thus, we have nothing to do with what is happening here. We ask you to let us through.”

Adela attempted to negotiate with these standard lines, but I didn’t expect this to work, since those monsters surely had their sights set on us. The monsters laughed loudly.

“Well, aren’t we lucky, Givun?”

“We sure are, Aikio. It’s only our third gate duty and we’ve already won the lottery.”

The red giant, who was apparently named “Aikio,” shook with laughter. What looked like sparks flew from his body with every shake.

“These two might be trouble, milady. This red one is a hellfire troll—a troll capable of combustion. It must’ve been him or one of his kind who set fire to this town.” Adela sure knew a lot of things. “That green one is known as a poisonous frogman. He can cover his skin in poison. Both of them would be difficult to defeat in sumo.”

Fire and poison... These certainly weren’t the easiest monsters to fight.

“Mwa ha ha! So you want to leave this town, Aryakan yokozuna Floortje? Well then, why don’t we have a bout in sumo?!” Aikio, the hellfire troll, raised his large hand. “Come forth, black dohyō!”

From the ground between me and Aikio rose a pitch-black dohyō. *Wow, monsters can summon these too?! I thought sumo is supposed to be sacred...* But I quickly shook off that thought.

Though sumo is a sacred ritual, it also involves putting one’s *Ara-Mitama*—your rough and violent side—on display. Even in Shinto in Japan, not all gods are sacred. Many of them are malevolent—with Susanoo topping that list. A being can be wicked and evil, but so long as it is a strong warrior, it qualifies to participate in sumo.

This was exciting to me. I felt a smile creep onto my face.

“I accept your challenge.”

My opponents smiled at my words. Despite their fiendish appearances, smiling made them look kind of cute.

“Mighty generous of you to accept fighting on a black dohyō without any resistance. Guess they don’t call you the Aryakan yokozuna for nothing,” spoke Aikio.

“Same thoughts, ribbit. Wrestler Floortje, this will be a team competition, ribbit. On this side it’s me, Givun, and my pal Aikio. What about your team?”

I looked at Prince Richie. He nodded with a smile.

“Very well. I, Floortje Hobbema, and Crown Prince of the Aryakan Kingdom

Richie, shall be your opponents. Do you find that satisfactory?”

“No backing out of this, you two. We finally have a shot at glory,” said the troll.

“If either team wins both bouts then that settles it, but what if the score ends up being 1-1?” I asked.

“Then each side picks the wrestler it wants for the decisive bout.”

So it was to be like the team competitions in sumo at the National Sports Festival of Japan. Personally, I wouldn’t have minded facing the two of them on my own, but such were the rules.

“Now wait just a moment, please! How can we be certain you’ll let us pass if we win?!” asked Adela in a sharp voice.

“Well, maid, you’ll just have to trust us on that one.”

“That’s right, ribbit. I know we’re baddy monsters and all, but we wouldn’t break our promise when it comes to sumo, ribbit.”

“Reeeaaallyyy?” pursued Adela.

“It’s a rule in Dark Sumo. Break a promise and you’re branded a failure of a rikishi, unable to ever receive sumo buffs again.”

“The demonic realm is seeing an unprecedented sumo craze, ribbit. Those who don’t do sumo aren’t popular with the ladies and don’t get any respect, ribbit.”

I was surprised to hear the sumo buff was a thing even in Dark Sumo. It meant I had to be cautious in the upcoming bout.

I approached the black dohyō. It seemed it was still made out of Arakida soil as it should be, being merely different in color. Touching its surface made me feel like my sumo powers were being drained.

“Heh heh heh... That’s a black dohyō for you. It sucks out light sumo powers and grants dark ones. How do you like it?”

“This isn’t fair! It’s not fair at all!!!” protested Adela.

“Well, maid, if we fight on an Aryakan dohyō, it will be us drained of power

and your side getting stronger instead. Gotta be one or the other.”

I raised my hand.

“Come forth, dohyō!”

I felt the usual dohyō surfacing. The white and black dohyō mixed together, ending up in the form of the yin-yang symbol—one side white...and the other, black.

“Whoa! I had no idea it would end up like this if you mixed the holy and the wicked!” exclaimed Aikio.

“Good, good, ribbit! This makes it more of a game, letting you pull opponents into your territory or dodge so they enter it themselves, ribbit!” added Givun.

“Well done, wrestler Floortje! I should’ve expected no less.”

“Now the bouts will be fair,” I said.

“All right, glad to have that out of the way. Now let’s do sumo! Being able to face off an Aryakan yokozuna... It’s like a dream.”

“You really like sumo, eh, pal? Ribbit.”

Aikio entered the black side of the ring and performed shiko. It was a pretty impressive one. I looked forward to my first match against demonic sumo, which monsters also appeared to be capable of. As we prepared for the bout, a group of elven soldiers showed up.

“Commander Aikio! I see you’ve captured the Aryakan Crown Prince and Crown Princess Candidate! We would like you to hand them over to us!”

“Forget it.”

“Wh-What?!”

“I’m going to fight these two in sumo. If I win, I detain them. If I lose, they have permission to go through that gate.”

“What?! Is this really the time to be playing such stupid games?! The elven revolution is at stake!”

“Shut your mouth! You better stay quiet and watch. Intervene and I’ll burn you to a crisp!”

Aikio waved his hand, and a flame shot out with a roar before burning the ground beneath the elven commander's feet. *Wow, he can even shoot fire?!* This troll was clearly a formidable opponent.

"All right—decide who you'll be fielding, and when. On our side, I'm going first, and Givun goes second!"

"Hmm..." I pondered.

If I were to bring down Aikio and Prince Richie brought down Givun, it would mean a clean sweep. The frogman had a small stature so I was sure the prince wouldn't have trouble with him.

"Let's talk strategy, milady."

"Huh? But Adela..."

"Let's talk strategy!"

"Okay."

What's with the pressure? Was this really Adela? The prince and I went behind the coach to hear what she had to say.

"His Highness should go first."

"Me? Can I win...?"

"His Highness is at a disadvantage against Aikio. He has a better chance of winning against Givun, does he not?" I argued.

Adela extended her index finger and waved it left and right while tutting.

"Your Highness, win if you can, but get out of the ring if you're at risk of being burned."

"Are you asking me to lose, Adela?"

"Yes. This is a team competition. It's the team's victory that matters at the end."

I could see her point.

"His Highness should not fight the frogman because that monster uses poison," continued Adela. "We don't currently have anyone around who can

magically purge poison, nor do we have antidote potions.”

“Oh,” simultaneously reacted the prince and I.

It was something I had failed to consider. Had we won the bouts but succumbed to the poison afterwards, it would’ve all been for nothing.

“You have your ranged skills, milady—namely the Harite Catapult and the Tornado Beltless Arm Throw. His Highness can use them too, but they aren’t as powerful in his execution as they are in yours.”

“Good point. Wow, Adela,” I said, surprised.

“Even should His Highness lose, you can just take down that hellfire troll yourself in the decisive bout and that’ll be that.”

“Impressive, Adela. How are you so good with tactics?” asked the prince.

“Th-That’s a secret.” Flustered, Adela put her index finger to her lips. “The important thing is to win this series, all while avoiding injury. Because too much damage, or poison, would spell the end of our escape. So please don’t get hurt.”

“Okay, Adela. Thanks,” I replied.

“All right, let’s go with that, Floortje.”

“Gladly, Your Highness.”

I loved seeing the prince act so sober and dignified. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

As I wondered who would be the referee for the upcoming bouts, a black ghost of a referee appeared on the black side of the ring. At the same time, a regular translucent referee appeared on the white side of it. And as I wondered what they were going to do, the two of them looked at each other in surprise before deeply bowing to each other and fusing into one referee clad in a gray suit. After a few moments of confusion, I decided not to think too hard about it. Sumo was a ritual, after all—such things were surely par for the course.

“Team sumo is about to take place. Similarly to grand sumo, competitors must synchronize their breathing before the start of the bout.”

In amateur sumo, the bout normally starts when the referee shouts

“Hakkeyoi!” while in grand sumo, wrestlers must synchronize their breathing for the bout to begin. Apparently the bouts in this team competition were going to start in accordance with the ruleset of the latter.

Since Dark Sumo and Aryakan Sumo—two different organizations—are going against each other, the gray referee was created to ensure impartiality. But overall, it’s still basically grand sumo.

Adela climbed the dohyō and opened her white fan. Despite her status as a ditzy maid, she was an official yobidashi of the Floortje Stable, so there shouldn’t be any problems with her doing this.

“On the east, Richie Aryaka, Richie Aryaka... On the west, Aikio, Aikio...”

In one motion, the prince took off his evening dress, revealing his slim and muscular body with his favorite mawashi around his loins. Then again, just like me, he was a major character in an otome game, so he couldn’t really gain much muscle or weight. This applied to Lord Clifton and General Maurilio too, as they were potential love interests in the game. Yustin, on the other hand, was a background character, so he could get as obese as he wanted to. It felt quite unfair.

Phalaris, being a dragon, apparently couldn’t gain weight for a different reason. As he was twenty-five meters in height in his dragon form, no amount of human-made chanko seemed to be able to make a difference. If we *did* make enough to fatten him up, the Floortje Stable would be in deep financial trouble.

“I should be going. I’ll win if I can.”

“Do your best, Your Highness.”

The prince nodded with a smile. *Ah, how dignified!* He had grown into a splendid young man. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

Prince Richie and Aikio entered the ring. Since this was team sumo, it didn’t look like there would be any sponsor banners. I missed them just a little.

“Face each other.”

The gray referee didn’t carry a war-fan, so instead he used knife hand gestures to perform his duties. It occurred to me that Dark Sumo had proper

referees too. Did the Sumo Valhalla assist demons and monsters like they assisted us humans? And I hoped they didn't call the dark referee something like "the 100058-year-old Demon Kakka."

The prince and Aikio's breathing synchronized. The two rikishi got up at the same time before loudly crashing into each other. It is said the head-on collision of two enormous rikishi is equivalent to the force of a small truck crashing into something. The prince smoothly deflected that force and grabbed the right side of his opponent's mawashi. *All right!*

"You're a pretty good wrestler for royalty." A smug grin appeared on Aikio's face.

The prince let go of Aikio's mawashi and made a retreat. To my surprise, the troll's body glowed red and spewed flames. The heat of it was startling.

"Kgh!" winced the prince.

"Mwah hah hah! This skill put me on a massive winstreak. Now come!" shouted Aikio, flame roaring across his body.

"Harite Catapult!"

Prince Richie's right hand broke the sound barrier, sending a shock wave at his opponent. However, said shock wave fizzled out upon reaching Aikio. *Oh no!* And his other ranged move, the Tornado Beltless Arm Throw, wasn't very strong either when you couldn't grapple with your target. The prince ended up being chased towards the edge of the ring.

"Watch out, Your Highness! You're on the black dohyō!"

The prince looked down, startled.

"Nothing you can do about it!" spoke Aikio with a ferocious smile on his face as he charged at the prince, flames still coating his body.

Prince Richie clenched his teeth and prepared to try and stop his opponent.

"Don't even bother! Living things instinctively fear fire! Think you can stop me with that nervous stance of yours?!"

Crash! As Aikio, empowered by the black dohyō underfoot to run even faster, rammed directly into the prince, the latter tumbled off the ring.

“Winner, Aikio.”

The referee raised his hand towards the Dark Sumo part of the ring.

“Your Highness!” shouted Adela and I both.

As we ran up to him, we noticed him holding his burnt upper arm.

“I lost. Aikio was a strong opponent. But it’s still frustrating to lose,” spoke the prince.

“Leave it to me. I promise to avenge you,” I replied.

“That flame of his makes facing him difficult. It’s not just the heat, but the pain it brings. There’s that black dohyō too. It drains you of your strength.”

“Thank you, Your Highness. I’ll make sure your defeat wasn’t in vain.”

“Good luck, Floortje.”

Adela took an ointment out of her apron pocket and applied it to the prince’s arm. This girl sure had all sorts of things in her pockets.

At any rate, I had to admit I hadn’t been taking Dark Sumo very seriously. I had thought I’d be able to overpower these monsters using raw strength, but their individual traits made that difficult.

“It is time for the second bout,” announced the referee.

Adela hurried to climb the dohyō and spread her white fan.

“On the east, Floortje, Floortje... On the west, Givun, Givun...”

“Be careful, Floortje. He may be small, but you should stick with ranged attacks for this one.”

“I understand, Your Highness.”

It was my turn to enter the ring. I transported myself to the usual dressing room to put a mawashi on over my dress. *Let’s do this!*

I went up the yin-yang-shaped dohyō. Its form was a truly strange sight to behold. The border between white and black ran between the two starting lines in the ground, and both Givun and I had a tail of the opposing side of the dohyō behind us. I would have to mind my positioning in order to win. But standing

around in one's own territory and waiting for the opponent went against the whole idea of sumo. And those dots of the opposite color within one's territory were like small dohyō of their own. It added tactical depth to the bout.

My opponent Givun had a red back and blue limbs. There was no mistaking the fact that he was a poisonous frog. I wondered how strong that poison was. The poison of the Japanese toad, for example, wasn't very strong. As far as I remembered, it only made you a little numb.

"Ribbit, ribbit!"

Givun expanded his throat and vocalized. For a moment I even thought of him as colorful and pretty.

"Face each other."

Givun and I assumed menacing stances. Was it a good idea to go for a thrust at the start? My dress gave me an advantage over men against such an opponent, as I was much less exposed to poison. Were Prince Richie in my place, he would definitely get poisoned.

My opponent and I touched the ground with our hands at the same time and charged at each other. I was about to go for a thrust before sensing danger and dodging to the side. A long tongue shot out from Givun's mouth, stabbing at the place where I had stood a moment ago, then returning to its owner. The mucus that dripped from said tongue onto the ring emitted white smoke and an awful stench. *Whoa!*

"Heh heh! What's the matter, ribbit? Are you just going to run, yokozuna Floortje, ribbit?"

What a powerful adversary!

It was like he'd shot out poisonous harite from his mouth. I was in a pinch. *Heh heh heh.* I felt the corners of my mouth rise in a smile. *Now we're talking. I wouldn't have this any other way.*

"Harite Catapult!"

Boom! My hand broke the sound barrier and launched a palm-shaped shock wave at Givun. *Memetaa!* As Givun curled up, the shock wave bounced off his

back.

“Heh heh heh! My back deflects ranged attacks and magic alike! You can’t beat me, ribbit!”

As my opponent prematurely enjoyed his triumph, I shuffled my feet along the ground, crashing into him and grabbing the front of his mawashi.

“What? You’re actually grappling with me, ribbit?!”

“You can’t do sumo any other way, Givun!”

“Heh heh heh!”

After a joyful laugh, Givun thrust out his tongue at my face with incredible speed once more. I lowered my stance to dodge this and continued to push.

“Ribbit! Should you really be pushing? We’re in my territory now, ribbit!”

“You think I would do sumo if I was scared of some black dohyō?!”

“Ribbit!”

As I held Givun in a deep underarm grip, he grabbed my mawashi in an overarm grip in return. I used my head to block Givun’s mouth and pushed on. If he couldn’t point his mouth at me, he couldn’t shoot out that poisonous tongue harite of his either!

“Nice one, Floortje!” shouted the prince.

“Show him, milady!”

I pushed. I pushed. I pushed.

“Heh heh heh...” laughed Givun, enjoying himself.

Ngh! The black dohyō was sucking my strength away. On top of that, my arms felt numb from the poison coating Givun’s skin. As he forcefully grabbed my mawashi in a right-handed outside grip, we became locked up.

“You’re strong, ribbit! Your sumo is straight and honest, ribbit! But you’re getting weaker and weaker from my poison, ribbit!”

“My sumo wouldn’t lose to poison!”

Thunk! I hallucinated the sight of gears with “Sumo” written on them in large

letters. As they gradually began to turn, I felt the power of sumo coursing through me, circulating through my veins. *All right!* The strength bestowed by my spirit of sumo was greater than the strength being drained by the black dohyō.

“N-No way! Wh-Where did you get such strength, ribbit?!”

“This is...my...sumo power!!!”

Still locked in a right-handed outside grip, I pulled on Givun’s left arm as it was gripping my belt, before twisting it as his body was lifted upwards.

“Pulling Body Death Sl—”

As I was about to perform a skill with a new magical effect, I hastily stopped once I realized what said effect would be. No matter how good “Pulling Body Death Slam” is as a skill name, sumo shouldn’t have lethal skills.

“Wh-What...?”

Givun appeared to have sensed the potential of that technique too, as he was visibly stricken with fear. I went for a beltless arm throw instead, forcing my opponent onto the ground. *Smash!* He bounced off the ground twice after rolling off the dohyō.

“Winner, Floortje.” The gray referee raised his hand my way.

Phew. What a formidable opponent that was.

“Ribbit, ribbit.” Givun raised his head from below the dohyō.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Why did you stop performing that scary technique earlier?”

He shook the sand off his body as he climbed back up the dohyō. It seemed he had a lot of trouble with the sand since his body was covered in mucus.

“Sorry. It was the first time I’d used that skill, so I wasn’t able to remove its magical effect.”

“That effect... What was it?”

“I didn’t want to use an effect that could kill my opponent. Don’t let it bother you, Givun.”

“You’re so nice... Ribbit.”

Givun shed a tear. *Come on, it’s nothing for you to concern yourself with.* As I was thinking that, he stuck out his tongue and licked my hands.

“What are you doing to Floortje?!” shouted the prince.

“That’s sexual harassment! Referee!” added Adela.

“The bout is over,” spoke the gray referee, stopping my angered companions who were about to climb the dohyō.

The numbness in my hands disappeared without a trace.

“An antidote?” I said. “You didn’t have to.”

“I want you to fight Aikio on fair terms, ribbit.”

“Mwah hah hah!” Aikio laughed merrily. “Fine by me, Givun. I wanted to fight the Aryakan yokozuna on equal footing too.”

“Thanks. That helps.”

“Yokozuna really are amazing, ribbit. I’m looking forward to your bout with Aikio, ribbit,” said Givun and left the dohyō.

“All right, it’s my turn. You’re the one facing me in the decisive bout, right, yokozuna?” asked Aikio.

“Are you okay with that, Your Highness?”

“I don’t mind, Floortje. Good luck.”

“Do something about that heat of his with your sumo powers, milady!”

Adela, the power of sumo isn’t some omnipotent magic. I-It was kind of omnipotent until now, I suppose, but this time it might not go so well.

His arms pumping noisily, Aikio climbed the dohyō.

“Mwah hah hah! As I thought, you’re a good wrestler, yokozuna Floortje! Honored to fight you.”

“Thank you, Aikio. You and Givun are good wrestlers too.”

“Thanks.”

Aikio did his signature laugh again. Despite his scary face, he seemed like a good troll at heart. Trolls were giants that lived in the demonic realm. Though the adorable Moomins I’d seen in anime in my past life were also trolls, Aikio wasn’t anything like that. His was a species over two meters tall, possessing high regenerative powers. This must’ve been the reason he was able to coat himself in flame.

As he entered the ring and performed shiko, his extreme size stood out all the more. The muscles in his shoulders and arms were a sight to behold. That robust, muscular body of his had a thin layer of fat under the skin. His build was closer to that of a pro wrestler than a sumo wrestler. *Magnificent.* I was excited to face such a splendid rikishi.

“Face each other.”

Aikio and I synchronized our breathing, then got up and crashed into one another.

“Gah!”

As the troll shook from the impact, I firmly gripped his mawashi with my right hand.

“Damn, you really rammed into me! How’d you do that with such a frail build?!”

As Aikio grabbed my mawashi, we became locked up. My plan was to push him before he could fully regain his balance and use his flames on me. *Kgh!* I felt the heat building up. The arm gripping his mawashi was practically burning. It smelled like someone at a cleaner’s was doing ironing. *It’s so hot!* The troll had managed to stop my charge.

“Who do you think I am?! I’m the blazing Aikio!”

Flames began to roar on his body. Their force was staggering. I was worried my dress might catch fire. It wouldn’t be long before my whole body started to burn.

I couldn’t keep up the pressure and Aikio managed to push me back, the muscles in his shoulders swelling up. *Kgh!* I was losing ground. But suddenly, we stopped. It appeared we were now both on the white part of the ring, and it felt like the strength of the troll’s flames had decreased. But they were flames nonetheless. *Ngh...* It was agonizingly hot. My only saving grace was that my dress was made of silk, so it didn’t catch fire easily. Was there anything I could do? *Anything...?* I couldn’t allow myself to lose to the monsters here and be captured together with the prince. The fate of Aryaka rested on my shoulders.

“I promise we won’t mistreat you or the prince if you lose.”

Kgh! Aikio’s sweet offer was tempting. But as the Aryakan yokozuna, I couldn’t let myself lose to some flames!

Aikio wasn’t the only source of flames I felt nearby. Several parts of the elven town were on fire, and flames were creeping dangerously close to Yggdrasil. But then I sensed the approach of a mighty wind—a different kind of power was on its way. It felt as though Yggdrasil was crying. And it wasn’t just Yggdrasil, but the various other trees that had protected this town over the past five thousand years: the Road Tree, the Outer Wall Tree, the Residential Tree, and even the Castle Tree which had created that state guest house we had fled earlier. They all seemed to be linking themselves to my sumo system.

“Save this town, Floortje, envoy of the goddess Florence,” uttered a voice in my mind.

I felt the wind concentrating itself directly above the dohyō.

“Kgh! What’s this—some new trick of yours?” asked the troll, perplexed, as he pushed me with his Herculean strength.

“Speak the words: ‘Air Battle Form,’” continued the voice.

“Don’t give up, Floortje!”

“You can do it, milady!”

As the voices of Prince Richie and Adela revitalized my fighting spirit, I followed the advice of the mysterious voice.

“Air Sumo Form!!!”

In an instant, the mighty winds descended from above and wrapped themselves around me.

“What?!” exclaimed Aikio.

I could no longer feel the heat! All thanks to the wind creating a thin layer of quickly circulating air over my body. As I gripped the troll’s mawashi, it felt like my hands had a thin membrane of wind around them that carried heat away, dispersing it into our surroundings.

Sparks flew and flames swirled.

“Wh-What is this?! I’ve never seen such wind magic before!!!”

“I don’t know what it is, but it lets us have a proper bout, Aikio!”

“Shit! Did some elf give her magical wind armor?!”

The gray referee looked around, but could not locate any such elf. After all, this magic had been granted to me not by some elf, but by the combined will of this town’s vegetation! I was certain of it.

While we were still locked up, I began to push Aikio. This was the sumo I knew. *My* sumo.

“Damn it! But all right—this is fun too, Floortje!”

“Let’s enjoy it, Aikio!”

“Agreed!”

Little by little, I pushed the troll. He halted my advances and went for a *ketaguri*—a pulling inside ankle sweep. Bending my legs to deflect his attempted technique, I slid my way close to him and initiated a hip throw—which Aikio thwarted by shifting his balance. He was good. The two of us were engaged in a dance on top of the yin-yang-shaped dohyō, at the very center of a vortex of wind and flame, clashing with our techniques and raw strength.

"Man, was sumo always this fun?! Can you even call what I've been doing up till now 'sumo'?! This is seriously amazing, yokozuna!"

"See, Aikio?"

"Yeah! Damn it, I want to do sumo with you forever!"

I felt the same way.

What I needed right now was a water skill. I wanted to bring Aikio down with something that spawned a water current. The Air Sumo Form that I had currently engaged would no doubt force that water up and turn it into torrential rain.

Throughout my entire sumo career in Aryaka since the conclusion of Jonas's rebellion, I hadn't managed to discover a single new skill with a magical effect. It surely took a life-or-death situation to bring forth such a skill. No technique I was currently capable of could spawn water. Did this have something to do with the name of each skill? Sure, the pulling body slam—in Japanese, *butsudan-gaeshi*, or "return to a Buddhist altar" where one pays respects to deceased family members—would probably cause death if used. But the inner-thigh throw—*yagura-nage*, a "turret throw"—did not have anything in its name to connect it to its lightning attribute. The beltless arm throw—*sukui-nage*, "scooping up and throwing"—had the attribute of wind: was that because of the scooping motion you performed as part of the move?

I couldn't figure it out. What I did know was that I needed a water skill. I needed to create one right now and save this town!

Aikio and I both continued to push and be pushed in return. The buff and debuff applied by these different zones of the ring were a much bigger deal than I'd expected. At such a high level of sumo, the smallest difference in strength had a big impact on the bout's outcome. I juiced up my sumo powers

to deal with the black dohyō's debuff, but that extra power only ever came after a delay.

Thanks to my Air Sumo Form, Aikio's flames had no effect on me. The coating of wind sucked them up and expelled them behind me. Perhaps after a while I began to grow used to this, because at some point that expelled air started propelling me forward.

"Grrrnnhh!!!"

With a bellow, Aikio redoubled his advances. I made use of his momentum to grab hold of his elbow and push my head under his arm. Waves came clashing against my feet, their source unknown.

"Wh-What?!" screamed the troll.

Was this going to be *Tasuki-zori*, a reverse backwards body drop? No, I had a better idea... Using the power of wind to strengthen my sumo spirit, I lifted my enormous opponent onto my shoulder.

"Billow Bell Hammer Backwards Body Drop!!!"

With that, I threw Aikio as high as I could. Billows came surging, seemingly from out of nowhere—forming a vortex and climbing into the air, lifting Aikio along the way, and soaring higher still.

"Come forth, tempest!" I shouted, unleashing the Air Sumo Form on the illusionary billows.

Kaboom! The power of wind sent the billows high into the skies. The whole sky clouded over, and a second or two later a torrential rain came pouring down. Aikio came tumbling down too, his flames extinguished by the downpour as he smashed into the dohyō.

It was raining buckets, and I got soaked to the skin.



Thus all the fires in the Town of Yggdrasil were put out.

“Winner, Floortje!”

As the gray referee raised his hand, the enormous crowds of elves and monsters spectating the bout erupted in cheers that felt loud enough to blow the rain away.

“Thank you for saving our town, yokozuna Floortje!”

“Damn, that was a hell of a bout! What a skill she used at the end!”

“Holy shit, sumo is amazing!”

The heavy rain didn’t seem to dampen the spectators’ excitement.

Aikio got up, his legs wobbling.

“Sorry I sent you so high up,” I apologized.

“Hey, I was on the receiving end of the fabled technique that is the bell hammer backwards body drop. It’s the proudest day of my life. Heh.” The troll’s face creased up in laughter.

“Even I didn’t think I could pull it off.”

It was surely thanks to the combination of my sumo spirit operating at maximum power and the Air Sumo Form. After all, even in my previous life the bell hammer backwards body drop was a fabled bold move. It had never been used in grand sumo even once. Of course, I had never used it either.

“Thank you, Floortje. The town is safe now,” spoke a voice directly into my head once more.

“Don’t mention it. In fact, I’m grateful to you for the Air Sumo Form. It really helped.”

“You shall be able to use the Air Battle Form for as long as you are in the Elven Forest Republic. We would be delighted to assist you in your further adventures.”

Apparently, I had gotten the name of the skill wrong. *Oh well, no biggie.*

“We’ll make sure you can use it by calling it the ‘Air Sumo Form’ too.”

“Thanks!”

The yin-yang dohyō slowly sank into the ground, while the gray referee bowed and vanished.

“You did it, Floortje!” uttered the prince.

“Milady! Your sumo got you through this one too! It’s amazing!”

“W-Well, the Air Sumo Form isn’t a sumo power.”

“It’s not?”

“Grr...”

I was already regretting having memorized the wrong name for it. Regardless, since this power was limited to the confines of the elven forest, it seemed reasonable to assume it had been granted by the fairies. This meant that the prince should be able to use it too. All demons and monsters seemed to have special powers themselves, so a protective power of our own was most welcome.

“Now, Aikio, allow us to pass through the gate.”

“You may go. I wouldn’t go back on a promise made in sumo.”

“Thank you.”

“Will you fight me again in the future?”

“No problem. Let’s meet on the dohyō again. You too, Givun.”

“I’m so happy, ribbit! We should definitely do that, ribbit!”

The prince had an awkward smile on his face.

“You befriend everyone you fight in the ring, huh?”

“That’s what’s amazing about milady!”

“You’re giving me too much credit.”

I felt a little awkward being praised by both the prince and Adela. This was simply the natural outcome of coming to understand each other on a deep level through sumo. It wasn’t as though I had done something special.

“Now slow down! We have orders to arrest the Aryakan Crown Prince Richie

and the Crown Princess Candidate! Cease your resistance at once and proceed with us to the Administration Tree!”

Around thirty elven soldiers stepped forward, pointing their spears at us.

“I’m the one guarding this gate, and I say they can pass. Stay out of this, you salad munchers!” shouted Aikio in return.

“And who do you think you are?! This land belongs to us! Why should we take orders from some monsters?!”

Aikio’s unit and the elven commander’s unit glared at each other. Then, a gorgeous, slender elven woman with a shopping basket—perhaps a housewife—threw a radish at the elven troops.

“Look what you’ve done! Yggdrasil would’ve burnt down if the yokozuna Floortje hadn’t saved it with her sumo magic! Get out of here before you do any more damage!”

The other townsfolk all began to voice their agreement with the woman, protesting against the soldiers.

“You idiots! We’ve removed the old-fashioned fairy king from power and accomplished a revolution! Don’t you realize we’re fighting for people like you?!”

Still, the townsfolk looked ready to attack the elven troops any moment.

“Yokozuna Floortje! We’ll handle this, so hurry up and go!” said Aikio.

“Let’s meet again somewhere, ribbit!”

“Thanks, you two!”

Adela nimbly got into the driver’s seat of the coach and brought it towards us.

“Don’t let them escape! You—monsters! If you get in our way, your superiors will hear of this!”

“By all means, tell them, salad muncher!”

“They’ll kill you if you do, ribbit!”

A scuffle broke out between the monsters and the elven troops. Elven townsfolk joined the fray on the monsters’ side and punched their ilk without

restraint. Meanwhile, Prince Richie and I jumped aboard the speeding coach.

“We’re breaking through the gate, milady!”

“Do it, Adela!”

“We must hurry and let my father know what has transpired here in the Elven Forest Republic.”

Indeed, we had to hurry to the border with Aryaka, lest our kingdom fall to the Demon Lord’s army too. Driving through the town gate at full speed, we ended up on a highway. The skies were already dark, and only the moon lit the road ahead.

Interlude: On the Fifth Floor of the Elven Forest Republic's Administration Tree

At the Town of Yggdrasil, all residences and public institutions were located inside large trees. Commoners lived inside smaller trees, while those of higher rank or wealth lived inside bigger ones. The dwellings were connected by passageways on the middle parts of the trees, which made this town rather three-dimensional.

The Palatial Tree where the fairy king resided was directly connected to the Administration Tree: the cornerstone of the Elven Forest Republic's administration. An enormous demon with copper skin stood on the tree's terrace, observing the torrential rain falling on the Town of Yggdrasil. The tempest summoned by Floortje had extinguished the many fires burning all over the town and was gradually coming to an end.

"So...she escaped... Yokozuna Floortje..." uttered the red demon.

An oriental beauty appeared by his side without so much as a sound. Below her hips she had the trunk of a spider, with six legs extending from it. She was of the arachne: female warriors who served the spider goddess.

"So it appears, sir. However, this works in our favor: that hellfire troll unit is strong, but their abilities seem rather incompatible with this town."

"Replace them..."

"Yes, sir. I will dispatch a messenger to our lands right away."

The red demon, whose name was Arima, had his gaze fixed on the west town gate in the distance.

"We must chase the yokozuna... Who should I send...? Any recommendations...secretary Kukuri...?"

The arachne, Kukuri, turned over a piece of parchment on her clipboard.

"I would like to join the unit in pursuit of them, sir. An alraune and a minotaur have announced their candidacies. Naga and slime rikishi have expressed their

desire to join as well, although...”

“We will have...team sumo...with Aryaka... Legless species...complicate the ruleset... We will go...as three...”

“Understood, sir. Then it will be the alraune, me, and—”

“I...will join you...”

“Yes, sir!”

Chancellor Mickaël came running into the council room, making a ruckus.

“Arima! Are you aware that your subordinates lack discipline?! They let the Aryakan Crown Prince and Crown Princess Candidate escape! How do you intend to make this up to me?!”

“Make it...up to you...?”

“If we had those two in our custody, they would be valuable assets that would allow us to make demands of the Kingdom of Aryaka! And yet your subordinates decided to play some children’s game called ‘sumo’ and lost, then let the two escape! This is *your* responsibility!”

Arima glared at the chancellor. So did Kukuri.

“I will go after them... What about...the Aryakan rikishi...who were in the reception hall...?”

“W-Well... They were surprisingly strong and, uh, they fought their way out of the building. There were some reactionaries who, well, they got them out of town through a secret path... Those bastards.”

“Don’t underestimate...Aryakan rikishi... Their combat prowess...is exceptional...”

“So General Maurilio and his rikishi escaped...” uttered Kukuri, glancing over the town.

In the past, she had assumed human form to infiltrate the capital of Aryaka in order to learn about sumo. As fate would have it, she happened to join Clifton’s stable which housed the spider goddess Arachne herself. There, she ardently trained in sumo, learning its ways. It was during one of those days that General

Maurilio had visited her stable to train with his rivals.

“He was a single-minded wrestler, as befits a soldier...” recalled Kukuri.

Though they were now enemies, knowing her acquaintance was safe gave her a faint sense of relief. She shook her head to drive the thought away.

The elven liberation forces entered the room, with the tied-up commander of the hellfire troll unit Aikio and the poisonous frogman Givun, in tow.

“It was these two!!! I want you to punish them severely, Arima! If you intend to execute them, I’ll gladly have a scaffold built!”

Ignoring Chancellor Mickaël screaming bloody murder, Arima approached the two monsters.

“Commander-in-chief, we have failed in our duties!”

“We have no excuse, ribbit!”

“How was...the yokozuna...?”

“S-She was amazing, sir! She brought me down with a bell hammer backwards body drop!”

“She was frighteningly strong and frighteningly kind, ribbit!”

“I see... Good, good...” With a smile on his face, Arima untied the two monsters.

“You hellfire trolls...don’t go well...with this town...”

Arima looked over to Kukuri. The arachne nodded.

“Another unit from our lands will be coming to relieve you of your duties here. Once they arrive, the hellfire troll unit is to return home.”

“What?! Is that because we failed?”

“No. If you start any more fires, the elven folk will grow to resent us.”

“There will be...no punishment...”

“Oh... And here I was all prepared for it...” Aikio slumped his shoulders.

“I will...have use for you...later... For now...go...”

“Yes, sir!” replied Aikio and Givun, saluting their commander.

“You can’t spare them like that, Arima! This will set a bad example! If you don’t dispense proper reward and punishment, it will be difficult for me to work with you demons!”

Arima glanced at the chancellor in annoyance. Then, another soldier from the Elven Liberation Army came running into the room, visibly rattled.

“Terrible news, Chancellor Mickaël! The fairy king has escaped!!!”

“Wh-What?! That’s impossible! There’s no way he could’ve!”

“He’s vanished into thin air, sir! The room we kept him in is empty!”

“This cannot be! Find him immediately!!!”

The chancellor rushed out of the room in panic. The sight made Kukuri knit her brows in disapproval.

“Makes you wonder how someone like that can be in a position of power. Shall we dispose of him?”

“Not...yet...”

“Understood, sir.”

With a distant look on his face, Arima stared at the western sky.

“First...we give chase...to the yokozuna...”

Chapter 2: Sumo at the Great Elven Forest

A heavy rain pounded on the roof of our coach as we raced down an elven forest highway at midnight, in total darkness. The prince and I had both taken off our soaked evening dresses and were relaxing in our daytime clothes—which, given the diplomatic nature of this trip, were rather fancy. Adela had changed into a new maid outfit too, though she was currently wearing an oilskin raincoat over it as she drove the coach. Which must have been pretty difficult in this rain, with scant lighting from magic lanterns along the night highway her only source of illumination.

Inside the coach, the prince was looking at a map.

“Where does this highway lead, Your Highness?”

“It is known as the ‘Prayer Tree Highway,’ as it leads to a religious elven town. Past it lies the Border Tree Town, at the edge of the Elven Forest Republic.”

“How long will it take us to reach that border town?”

“About three days in a coach. But since we want to avoid major towns and make stops in small highway villages, it will probably take a bit longer than that.”

It had taken us roughly a month to make the trip from the Aryakan capital to the Town of Yggdrasil, but now that we were in hostile lands, we needed to make our way back to the border as fast as possible. It would surely take some time for Chancellor Mickaël’s rebels to gain full control over the republic. Perhaps a week, or even a month. But once that happened, the elven and demonic forces would no doubt make a combined assault on the Dwarven Great Caves. They wouldn’t invade Aryaka until they were done with the dwarves, so we had some time to spare.

I wished I had brought Phalaris along. We could’ve come home in a day on the back of a dragon. He found diplomacy a “pain in the butt,” however, and had gone to visit some elder dragon instead.

The coach came to a sudden stop, forcing me and the prince to brace for

impact.

“What’s going on, Adela?” asked I, leaning my head out the window.

“You should see this, milady.”

Opening the door and looking to the front of the coach, I spotted something akin to a puppy, lying on the road in the light of a magic lantern.

“What is that?” I wondered.

“Did we hit a weasel?” asked the prince.

Adela climbed down from the driver’s seat, and the two of us went to give the animal sprawled in the center of the highway a closer look. Lifting it up, I discovered it was warm. A puppy, perhaps? It was drenched to the skin and was wounded and bruised all over.

“It’s a puppy.”

“It has sword wounds and some arrows seem to have grazed it too. Who could’ve done something like that?”

The puppy lightly opened its eyes and whined. Something warm welled up inside me at the sight. This little creature in my arms felt precious to me. And though it was all messy right now, it would no doubt be a fluffy delight once we got it dry. *Ah, what a precious little thing. Dosukoi dosukoi!*

“♪ There’s all kinds of frogs and toads... Like the tree frog fond of hortensias... ♪”

Oh my, being drenched in the rain made me sing a jinku about frogs.

“Don’t tell me you’re going to keep it, milady!”

“Oh, come on, Adela—don’t you feel sorry for it?”

“I just don’t think we have time for this.”

“It’s okay. ‘In traveling, a companion; in life, compassion.’”

“You’re as kind as ever, Floortje,” spoke the prince, a gentle smile on his face.

Oh, please, Your Highness. Dosukoi dosukoi!

“There he is!!! He’s on the highway!”

A group of elven soldiers came running from deeper into the forest, armed with spears and bows.

“Adela!”

“Got it!”

I handed the pup to my maid and lowered my center of mass. Prince Richie spread his legs and lowered his hips. Not a pose a Crown Prince and Crown Princess Candidate should be making on a nighttime highway, but we were past that. For we were a firmly linked pair of sumo wrestlers!

“Shit! It’s the fugitive Crown Prince and that ‘sumo princess’! They have him now!”

So it wasn’t us, but this pup they were chasing?

“All right! Time to kill two birds with one stone! Slay them all!!!”

Booing with angry looks, the handsome elven soldiers charged at us. Adela took cover inside the coach with the pup in her arms. Shuffling his feet along the wet road as if sliding, the prince closed the distance to the elves and performed a Tornado Beltless Arm Throw on a spearman. The usual tornado appeared and swept up several other soldiers before blowing them away. *Come to think of it... It’s raining. One of my skills should be highly effective!*

I singled out what appeared to be the commander of the elven unit: an obese, revolting elf who, nonetheless, had a pretty face. Grabbing him by the belt, I shoved my knee between his legs. *Bzzzt!*

“Aggghhh!!!”

“Take this! Lightning Inner-Thigh Throw!”

Smash! Of course a lightning effect would be extra powerful in the rain! A group of elven troops collapsed from electric shock.

“Damn it! Retreat, retreat!” shouted one of the elves, prompting the rest of them to start carrying their fallen comrades back into the woods.

“Elves can be dangerous deep in the forest, milady. Chasing them would be ill-

advised.”

“You’re right,” I replied to Adela, whose face had appeared in the coach window.

Deciding not to stray too far from the highway, Prince Richie and I stopped and looked at each other.

“Looks like they weren’t after me,” spoke the prince.

“They were chasing that pup...but why?”

I stared at the dark depths of the forest. The highway was a winding one, and the elves had come from the direction of the Town of Yggdrasil. Who *was* this pup?

I made Barkus drink a potion I had received from Adela. As an aside, Barkus is the name I gave the pup.

“We barely have any potions and you’re giving him one anyway,” complained Adela.

“Don’t you feel sorry for him?” I replied.

The prince smiled at the sight. *Please, Your Highness, you’ll make me blush if you stare at me like that. Dosukoi dosukoi!*

Once the potion healed Barkus’s wounds, I borrowed a towel from Adela to wipe him clean. *What beautiful bluish gray fur!*

“You’re safe now, Barkus. Let’s travel together, shall we?”

“Milady, you don’t have good naming sense, do you?”

“Oh, leave me alone.”

“I like ‘Barkus’—it’s a good name. Nice to meet you, Barkus,” spoke the prince.

Barkus barked in reply.

“This isn’t even a dog,” said Adela.

“Really?” I wondered.

“He’s small, but he’s a species of wolf. Since he only has one head, he isn’t a

cerberus. Could be an orthrus pup or even a fenrir.”

“A fenrir? Don’t they live deep in forests?”

“Perhaps he got captured by hunters, then escaped when they tried to sell him. The sale of such captives could be funding the elven revolutionaries.”

The revolutionaries were obviously rotten, but would they really capture and sell what was essentially a symbol of the Elven Forest Republic? Fenrirs were enormous lupine monsters believed to be keepers of the forest. They were said to be big as bulls, highly intelligent, and capable of using wind magic. According to legends, they lived deep in elven forests and manifested when elves required protection from danger. The flag of the Elven Forest Republic had one on it too.

Barkus had apparently relaxed enough to fall asleep in my arms. He was pleasantly warm.

“Adela, are we moving out again?” I asked.

“Yes. Elves can comfortably traverse forests, so to them this place is within a stone’s throw of the Town of Yggdrasil. Let’s keep going until midnight, then make camp.”

“Don’t push yourself, Adela.”

“I’m tough, milady, so don’t you worry.”

Adela puffed out her chest. Rain kept beating against her oilskin raincoat.

“You and His Highness should sleep. The road will get bumpier, so the coach might shake. Here—this will help with motion sickness.”

Adela took out a bottle of medicine from her pocket. She really did have just about anything in there.

“Elves move through forests so quickly...”

“Yes, Your Highness. They say forests love elves: trees make way for them, allowing direct passage. In fact, because elves traverse forests so often, they can move like monkeys,” replied Adela.

That’s elves for you. Pretty faces weren’t their only special characteristic. They generally fought better in forests, and could use the trees to attack from above.

One should not be deceived by their frail and elegant appearance. They traveled straight through forests—it was much faster than using highways for them. The highway we were currently on was meant for the transportation of goods, as well as for use by species other than elves. Near the capital, the Town of Yggdrasil, the roads were well maintained. However, the further you went out into the countryside, the worse they would get.

Adela got out of the body of the coach and climbed into the driver's seat. We heard her shout "Come on!" and the coach started moving.

"Good thing we have her," uttered the prince.

"Agreed. It helps to have someone with so much worldly wisdom."

I worried about General Maurilio and his rikishi whom we'd had to leave behind in the Town of Yggdrasil. Hopefully they were all alive. I needed to hurry back to Aryaka, prepare an army, and rescue them. There was no avoiding a war. As I held Barkus tight, the warmth of life that I felt from him pained my heart.

The coach raced through the nighttime highway, rattling all the while. The rain didn't appear to be stopping any time soon. As the shaking grew worse, and the prince and I were nodding off, we came to a stop. The sound of raindrops hitting the coach roof had ceased. Looking outside, I saw we were parked under a large tree. Adela stepped inside and took off her dripping-wet raincoat.

"We'll rest until morning."

She took a mattress out from under a seat, laid it on the floor, lay down, and wrapped herself in a blanket.

"Thank you. Let's sleep, then, Your Highness."

I lay down on my seat and wrapped myself in a blanket too, holding the warm Barkus against my chest.

"Good night, Floortje."

"Good night, Your Highness."

How romantic it was to sleep in the same coach with my beloved prince!

Dosukoi dosukoi! Well, Adela was between us and I had Barkus in my arms, so the prince and I couldn't engage in any misconduct.

Our surroundings had grown nearly silent, with the only sound reaching my ears being that of raindrops falling from enormous trees.

What a terrible day it had been. I hoped tomorrow would at least bring something good. Unfortunately, we weren't exactly keeping a low profile by driving on a highway, so it was safe to say the elves knew where we were. And while I worried about the elven revolutionaries, those Dark Sumo rikishi from the Demon Lord's army were a concern too. As I pictured in my mind the mighty wrestlers I had yet to encounter, sleep finally took hold. A small part of me was looking forward to facing them in the ring...

I woke up to the cracking of tree branches. Adela, who had slept on the floor, was nowhere in sight. Looking outside, I saw it was morning, and last night's rain was over. Barkus jumped out of my arms and ran around a little. *Cute.* Going outside with him, I noticed a lot of twigs on the ground near the coach. What was this about?

"It's an early warning system, milady. Good morning."

"Ah, so we can hear any rascal that tries to creep up on us. Morning, Adela."

Adela had made a fire with some twigs and was boiling water in a kettle. Though little more than a generic maid in our sumo stable, when we were outdoors, she brimmed with life. Perhaps she was the sort of maid meant for this kind of environment.

As Barkus started playing with her, she took a piece of sausage out of her pocket and threw it to the pup. She even had sausage in there... Was it some sort of a magical pocket?

"Morning, Floortje, Adela, Barkus."

"Good morning, Your Highness."

"Good morning."

"Bark, bark!"

Once the prince stepped out of the coach, we did our morning greetings. In Aryaka he spent almost all his time in the palace, so it was rare for the two of us to say "good morning" to each other. But it would probably happen every morning after we got married. *Ah, what a sweet future awaits...*

"♪ Aah... Go, my only daughter, go to your husband... ♪ Aah... Take the chest, the dresser, the cabinet... I'll give you all I can... So go, and never come back... ♪"

"And milady is singing again."

"I like her voice."

"Bark, bark!"

Oh my, I ended up singing another jinku. Perhaps I was just that excited about

finally going on a trip with the prince (the presence of the maid and pup didn't count). *Naughty Floortje. This isn't that kind of trip—we're making an escape here. Dosukoi dosukoi!*

We ate the breakfast Adela had prepared for us and did some morning sumo training. Skipping a day of training meant you had to train for a whole week just to get back to your previous level. Prince Richie and I did some battering practice while Barkus tried to play with us. The prince had grown into a splendid wrestler over the course of two years since he'd started learning sumo. Unable to gain weight, he instead had to be the kind of wrestler that relied on speed and technique. His rivalry with Phalaris was somewhat famous: Phalaris relied on his strength, while the prince gambled on technique.

"It's always sumo with you two."

"Sorry, Adela," replied the prince.

"Sorry I kept you waiting. You too, Barkus. Let's go," I said.

"Bark, bark!" He jumped in delight, evidently bored of waiting for us to end our practice.

"So what's the plan? Do we head straight for the Border Tree Town?" I asked.

"It's closed off by now, I'm sure," replied Adela as she climbed into the driver's seat, with a distant look to the west. "See that tall mountain range, milady?"

"I do. Pretty tall indeed."

To the right of us was an enormous mountain range that reminded me of the Alps from my previous life.

"It's known as the Dome Mountains. Halfway up are the Dwarven Great Caves. Rather than heading directly to the border, I suggest we make our way there and have the dwarves help us get home. What do you say?"

"Dwarves..." I considered.

From what I'd heard about the otome game *The Rondo of Light and Darkness*, dwarves had so little presence in it that they didn't even have sprites. Some

background elves appeared in Douglas's route, though.

"You're thinking of the Magic Train, aren't you, Adela?"

"That's right, Your Highness. So you're familiar with it."

"Yes, together with the dwarves my brother arranged for the construction of a magic railway to connect our countries. But I don't know what became of the whole project since his downfall."

It was surprising to hear that even Jonas had tried to do something good for Aryaka. But then I remembered he had been a wise prince before becoming Jaromíra's plaything.

"Even if it was stalled, I'm sure they've built at least part of the tracks. It'll make for quicker travel to Aryaka. And most importantly, we should let the dwarves know about the coup," suggested Adela.

"I agree. It sounds like a better idea than simply heading to the Aryakan border, as they no doubt expect us to do," I replied.

"Okay, let's do that. Good suggestion, Adela, thank you."

"Heh heh heh. You're too kind, Your Highness."

"Bark, bark!"

"By noon we should arrive at the nearby highway village of Hufton, where we'll have lunch and stock up on supplies. Sound good?" continued Adela.

"Do you think elven revolutionaries will be there?" I asked.

"Hmm. Such reformist political organizations are bound to exist in urban areas, but I doubt we'll run into one in a village."

"We'll handle them if we find any, right?" spoke the prince.

I had defeated an army of ten thousand before. We should be fine if we weren't facing something like fifty thousand at once.

We entered the coach and got going. Barkus was behaving himself and quietly sat on my lap. I patted his fluffy back. Ah, I could get addicted to this sensation. Barkus's eyes told me he enjoyed it too.

"These recent events are similar in many ways to those of two years ago, but

there are various differences too," said the prince.

"That's true. Back then I had Yustin and Lord Clifton join my stable. I'm sure that won't be the case with Aikio and Givun."

"Their Dark Sumo was pretty amazing. I could tell it was a proper form of sumo."

"Indeed. They've done their due training for Grand Sumo. That and their special monster abilities make them mighty opponents to be reckoned with."

Aikio and Givun were both good wrestlers. The depth of their training showed in our bouts. Wanting to face them in the ring again, I wondered if it was possible to hold a joint sumo event with those who practiced demonic sumo. It felt like an opportunity for cultural exchange between humans and denizens of the demonic realm. If both sides knew they shared an interest in sumo, they might be able to respect each other for it. For now, though, I had to hurry back to my fatherland Aryaka. Everything else would have to come after.

Once the coach came to a stop, I looked outside to see a small village. Villages like this were built alongside highways to assist with the transportation of goods. My pocket watch said it was almost noon. I was eager to stretch my legs.

"Bark, bark!"

"You want to go outside too, Barkus? Let's go, then."

"You're obsessed with him, aren't you? I feel a little jealous."

"Oh, Your Highness, the love I feel for Barkus is not the same as the love I feel for you."

"Heh heh, I guess not."

Smiling, the prince got out of the coach. I followed, Barkus in my arms. The weather was clear and pleasant. It was unfortunate that we were in the midst of making an escape because I was in the mood for a tour around the Elven Forest Republic.

"Let's have lunch here, milady. Though being where we are, we'll probably be stuck with vegetables."

“It’s really the cooking that sours the experience of coming here. The vegetable dishes are good, but the locals don’t serve any meat or fish at all.”

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do, Floortje. Though I can’t wait to dig into a steak once we get out of here,” spoke the prince.

“Would you like chanko for dinner? I wonder if we can find meat somewhere.”

“We don’t have miso or soy sauce, Milady.”

“You don’t have any in your pockets?”

“I have a Traveler’s Bag inside, but rice, miso, soy sauce, and other such things take up too much space to be worth bringing.”

So she did have a Traveler’s Bag in there. Such a vessel has the appearance of a small bag, but contains an alternate dimension which allows storing much more than the apparent size of the bag would allow. No wonder she kept pulling all sorts of things out of her pocket.

“Welcome to Hufton. You must have come from the Town of Yggdrasil,” spoke a beautiful elderly elf.

That’s elves for you. Even the elderly and the very young were all beautiful. And theirs was a slender, vegetative kind of beauty.

“Yes, we left it yesterday evening,” I replied.

“I heard something big happened in the capital around that time, so you three must have been caught up in it too.”

“Yes, the fairy king is supposedly gravely ill, and Chancellor Mickaël has seized all the power. He forged an alliance with the Demon Lord and let his monsters wreak havoc in the capital.”

The beautiful elven elder looked up into the sky, then shook his head.

“What a fool! Only an idiot could do something like that!”

“Bark, bark!” agreed Barkus.

It was almost as if he understood our speech. *No way, right?*

“Looks like the Elven Liberation Army is yet to reach this village.”

“We wouldn’t let those thickheaded fools in regardless!”

It appeared the liberation army was not exactly popular with the elven folk.

“I thought elves were too wise to become the Demon Lord’s puppets.”

“Indeed, traveler. We elves live for over a thousand years. How old would you say I am?”

“In terms of human age? About seventy.”

“Hah hah, yes... That would be the case if I were human. I’m actually 1200 years old. Elven society normally sees very slow progress. However, we took after human nations and united the elven clans to create a republic.”

“About five hundred years ago, if memory serves me right. The Fairy King Ulupano was at the center of that decision, I hear.”

“Correct. If you look past his occasional cheap flattery, Ulupano is a very wise ruler.”

We had met Ulupano on the day of our arrival at the Town of Yggdrasil, and he was very much a shallow flirt of an elf. Could you believe someone as frivolous as him was actually a high elf—that is, an existence superior to regular elves? His looks were stunning, however.

“And so, we formed a republic like those of humans. Created an administration and various forms of control. But we are elves, and we live much longer than humans. Can you guess the result?”

“Ah—those in power never leave?”

“Precisely. Young elves who want to build a career cannot do so, while all the higher posts are almost permanently held by the elderly. Our mistake was looking to humans for our choice in systems of government. Elves are generally laid-back, but being stuck in lowly positions for five hundred years is bound to frustrate the young. That’s how the Elven Liberation Front came to be.”

It made sense. Anyone would get frustrated being stuck at the bottom of society forever. It was a problem to be expected with long-lived species. The fairy king, a high elf, had a life span of five thousand years, while even regular

elves didn't show signs of aging until they were past the one-thousand-year mark. That explained the origin of the Elven Liberation Army.

"Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. I am Vivi, chief of Hufton."

"Richie of Aryaka."

"And I am Floortje."

"Well, well, if it isn't the Aryakan Crown Prince and Crown Princess Candidate! I am glad you've managed to escape the capital. In the name of the Elven Forest Republic, we welcome you in this village of Hufton."

"Not to rush things, but we would like to stock up on supplies and have lunch."

"Of course, of course! We will provide you with everything you need, free of charge, in apology for your unpleasant experience with those fools at the capital."

"No, we'll pay, Chief Vivi."

"Please, there is no need. It would be a disgrace to my people to make a guest of the state pay after everything that's happened."

The chief appeared to be an older kind of elf with a strong sense of duty. I sensed I could trust him.

"Bark bark bark!!!" barked Barkus at the village entrance all of a sudden.

A long line of elven soldiers could be seen entering the village.

"Wh-What's the meaning of this?!"

"Chief Vivi! We have orders from Chancellor Mickaël to seize the village hall for the needs of the Elven Liberation Army, as well as to arrest the Crown Prince and Crown Princess Candidate of our enemy nation of Aryaka, and their maid! You would do well to cooperate!"

"I would never, you half-wits! Einus! Kenwood! Those fools are here! Show these youngsters the power of elven magic!"

"Gladly."

"Time to get these impertinent brats out of here."

Called over by the chief, two elderly elves with a dignified bearing came our way.

“There’s no need, elders,” said I.

“That’s right. Let us handle this, please,” added the prince.

“B-But we could not force our honorable guests to...”

I looked over to the Elven Liberation Army, a smile on my face.

“Trouble yourselves not. It is time for sumo.”

Elven troops spread out to encircle the village, readying their longbows.

“Hah hah! I am aware you caused a lot of trouble in the Town of Yggdrasil with some martial art you call ‘sumo.’ But you stand no chance against a rain of arrows! Now, surrender if you value your life!” shouted a beautiful elven commander with a mustache, his voice replete with hatred.

Um... I learned to handle bows long ago, though. Perhaps these elves were thickheaded, just as the chief had said.

“To hell with you! Archers, fire!”

With the sort of beautiful firing posture you would expect from a race renowned for their archery, the elves launched their arrows at us. In the meantime, I performed a beltless arm throw at the air in front of me, spawning a tornado which quickly scattered the subsequently launched projectiles across the ground.

“Wh-What the—?!”

“Harite Catapult!” uttered the prince and I.

Boom! Our shock waves swept the archers off their feet. Two of them rolled off into the distance and stopped moving entirely.

“Th-That’s impossible! What kind of outlandish skill is that?!”

“A harite,” I answered.

“That’s right,” added the prince.

On top of the covered wagon that had brought these troops here in the first place, an elf sat up abruptly.

“Heh heh heh. Not bad, you two. Cap’n, lemme handle these fellas.”

“Boorman! Maybe you can do something about them!”

“They got my interest, all right. Let’s have a one-on-one, eh?”

The elven troops seemed excited about this “Boorman” making an appearance. He was a beautiful elf, slim and seemingly coldhearted, with a longsword on his hip. It wasn’t every day you saw an elf who used a sword.

“Truth be told, I was planning to chop up some local old geezers, but you two seem worth my time, so you’re going on the chopping block too. The name’s Boorman—the best swordsman among elves.”

“Interesting,” I said.

I considered summoning a dohyō, but abandoned the idea. The distance at which we started the bout would put a sword user at a disadvantage.

“I’ll handle him, Your Highness.”

“Okay. Good luck, Floortje.”

“For real? You’re making a lady fight first? Wow, you’re a disgrace to men everywhere, fella.”

I flashed him a smile.

“It’s because I’m stronger.”

I lowered my center of mass, assumed the squatting position, and extended my arms with open palms.

“Mgh...?”

Boorman tensed up at the sight of my form. It appeared he at least had enough skill to gauge the strength of his opponent by the way they carried themselves.

“Guess you know your stuff, eh?”

As a cold smile appeared on Boorman’s face, he placed his hand on the hilt of

his sword. I wondered if he intended to draw his sword and attack in one stroke during the fight. Shaking his head, he simply drew his sword in a flash and assumed a stance.

“Would be hard to aim with a draw attack.”

His judgment was solid too.

Little by little, we closed the distance on each other. The ideal distance for a swordsman and a sumo wrestler is very different. The sword used by my opponent required him to stay an extra arm’s length away from me.

I could sense Boorman’s ferocity seeping into the surroundings. Pressure built up as the very air around us seemed to warp. Another half-step and I would be in range of his sword. I engaged my sumo spirit, then charged at my opponent, shuffling my feet and getting close and personal.

“Kgh!”

Boorman swung his sword with unbelievable speed, but I dodged to the side and avoided it. He then nimbly shifted his elbow to redirect the swing. But it was for nothing, as I already had a full grip on the sash of his robe. I lifted him on my hip and threw him to the ground.

“Gaaah!!!”

I’d won with a hip throw as the finishing move.

“Y-You beat the invincible Boorman?! Damn it! All troops, move in for a combined attack!”

“What the hell is wrong with you?! We’re having a one-on-one here!”

“Shut up, Boorman! And you—take this!”

The elven troops all came upon us at once.

“Heh, I see you’re all still standing. Good for you!” I shouted.

Pulling on the belt of the nearest spearman, I executed an inner-thigh throw. *Bzzzt!*

“Agggh!!!”

A group of elven troops received an electric shock and got blown away.

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Boorman in admiration.

Prince Richie performed a beltless arm throw and sent an elven trooper flying and crashing back down. Before long, no elven soldier was left standing. All of them were groaning as they lay on the ground.

“Well, that’s done with,” I said.

As I clapped my hands to get rid of dust, Chief Vivi approached me with a big smile on his face.

“Magnificent! That magical martial art was simply magnificent!”

“You deployed those spells so quickly, it must be the type of magic that uses body language!”

“Such techniques! I’ve never seen anything like them!”

The three elven elders appeared to be researchers of magic. It was said that the most respected members of the elven race were magic researchers and farmers. Soldiers and politicians, on the other hand, were in particularly little favor with the masses.

“Would you share with us how you trigger those magical effects?”

“I don’t understand it myself. They occur when I use specific techniques.”

“How splendid! So you trigger magic without concentrating...”

“You have it wrong, Einus. She concentrates to perform the technique, then applies mana to said concentration to produce magic.”

“I did not consider that. What a marvelous design!”

These elders felt more like fans of magic rather than researchers.

In the meantime, all of the villagers were busy tying up the collapsed elven soldiers. It would be best to let elves pass judgment on their ilk.

Boorman prostrated himself before me.

“Sorry about earlier! Please teach me sumo!”

“Oh my.”

“This martial art is really something else! I wanna study it too, lemme study

under you!”

“We’re on the run from revolutionaries and the Demon Lord’s army, so I can’t right now. I’ll visit the Elven Forest Republic again once things settle down, then I’ll have time for you.”

“All right, gotcha. Please teach me when the time comes. I really wanna get into this martial art!”

Never would’ve thought I’d find an applicant here of all places. Boorman was athletic, so he would likely make a good sumo wrestler. I was looking forward to it.

“Lunch is ready, milady!”

“Bark, bark!”

About time. I was rather hungry.

“The whole village of Hufton has gathered to create these dishes, giving them our all. Please help yourselves, Crown Prince Richie, Crown Princess Candidate Floortje.”

Chief Vivi had brought us to a banquet laid out at the village square. A total of twenty-three villagers were sitting at the long table.

“You didn’t have to go this far, Chief Vivi.”

“Please, Your Highness. We could never properly repay you two for repelling the revolutionaries who came for our village. It’s only modest country cooking, but please help yourselves.”

“Thank you. We’ll take you up on that offer, then.”

“Time to dig in,” I said.

“Bark bark!”

One shouldn’t give grapes, garlic, or onions to dogs. But what about Barkus? I couldn’t be sure, so I decided to avoid giving him anything with onions for now.

“I’ll feed him.”

“You should eat too, Adela,” I offered.

“A maid always eats last.”

With that, Adela started picking out the things Barkus would likely be able to eat and putting them on a plate, then placed the plate on the ground.

“Bark, bark!”

The pup happily dug into his meal. It was about time for me to start eating too.

Most of the cooking was vegetarian. The main course was stew, but there were plenty of dishes I had never seen before. I transferred an eggplant sandwiched between herbs to my plate, then tasted it. *Surprisingly good.* It felt like the herbs added depth to the eggplant’s flavor.

“I hope the dishes are to your liking, Lady Floortje. Alas, it is but modest country cooking.”

“The dishes are unsophisticated, but the vegetables taste appetizing nonetheless.”

“Thank you kindly. Would you like some lingonberry wine?”

“Certainly.”

The lingonberry wine the chief poured for me was red, sour, and had a deep taste.

“The cheese and wine are delicious too.”

“The whole region around Hufton is agriculturally prosperous. We have to feed the townsfolk at the capital, see.”

So that was the purpose of Hufton. Its produce was quite scrumptious.

“You must’ve lived like this for thousands upon thousands of years.”

“Hah hah hah! I must admit, we elves resent change. Were it not for the influence of human nations, we would have continued to lead calm lives in our villages deep in the forest.”

For thousands upon thousands of years, the elves had lived in harmony with nature. But with the advent of cultural exchange with various races across the continent, that lifestyle had apparently become a thing of the past. Chief Vivi

kept deprecating the rural life, but I felt there was something very precious about this lifestyle.

The lunch came to an end without incident. It was delicious.

“I see you ate a lot too, Barkus. Good boy, good boy.”

“Bark, bark!”

With some lively barking in reply, the pup jumped into my bosom and licked my face. *How cute... How fluffy... Dosukoi dosukoi!*

“Is that...?” spoke the chief.

“I found him collapsed on the highway. Don’t know what species he is. Perhaps you could tell me, Chief?”

“Hmm... No, surely he cannot be...”

The chief appeared to not know either. Just what *was* this pup?

Clap clap clap clap!—came the nostalgic warning sound of the table of rankings, and said table opened in front of me automatically. A square message box in its center said “alert” in red sumo calligraphy. Below, the text read *A strong opponent has appeared (rank: ōzeki)*.

Ōzeki?! Which race did this opponent belong to? As I pondered the matter, the whole left side of the table of rankings, up to and including the pillar in the center, turned pitch black. The white-on-black part which used to say “west” now said “demonic realm,” and the black-on-white part said “Aryaka” instead of “east.” *Wow, a combined table of rankings?* Several names were glowing.

Ōzeki, greater demon: Arima

Maegashira 5, arachne: Kukuri

Maegashira 13, alraune: Uta

I glanced through the rest of the table and found Aikio in jūryō, the second highest division, and Givun in makushita, the third highest division. The competition appeared to be quite fierce in the demonic realm too.

Three shadows passed through the village square. Looking up, I saw monsters

riding on gryphons high above.

“Floortje!”

“I know! It’s the Dark Sumo wrestlers!”

Of course, it had been easy to locate us since we had stuck to a highway.

The three gryphons landed in the village square without a sound. Their riders —a crimson greater demon, an alraune with flowers on her head whose entire lower half was that of a flower, and an arachne with the lower half of a spider.

“Oh, Kukuri? What brings you here, Kukuri? Is this a homecoming?”

“N-No, um... Y-You have me mixed up with someone else, Lady Floortje.”

“Oh please, I would never mistake you for someone else. How have you been? Are you staying in the Demon Lord’s army permanently? Lord Clifton will miss you.”

“Um, well, Coach and I, we, uh...”

Kukuri went red in the face. I shouldn’t tease her too much, I thought.

“Oh well. Come back to Aryagard once all this is over. You don’t want to miss the next tournament.”

“T-True... I-I mean, my name is Kukuri! I am a Dark Rikishi of the Demon Lord’s Army, and I am here to arrest the Aryakan Crown Prince Richie and Crown Princess Candidate Floortje!”

“So that’s the job they gave you, mm? You’re working hard, I see.”

As Kukuri and I had our friendly chat, the red demon took a big step forward.

“Sumo...”

“You want to settle this through sumo, Arima?”

The demon nodded. He was slow to speak, as would typically be expected from a sumo wrestler. I was quite fond of that.

“Come forth, black dohyō...”

“Come forth, dohyō!”

A yin-yang-shaped, black-and-white dohyō rose out of the ground at the

village square.

“You’re here for team sumo, right, Arima?”

He nodded.

“But Floortje, we’re missing one,” warned the prince.

“Should we send Adela in?”

“P-Please no, milady!”

Arima looked at Uta, the alraune. She was humming a tune and staring at the sky.

“Uta... You’re...in reserve...”

“Huh? I don’t wanna be in reserve! I come all this way and I don’t even get to participate? And seriously, let’s just win by default!” said Uta, sticking out her tongue.

Monster rikishi were...quite unrestrained, it appeared. Arima grimaced, evidently unhappy with such a proposition.

“I-I’ll go!” announced Boorman, the best elven swordsman, and stepped forward.

For a few moments, silence enveloped the village square. Arima and I looked at the volunteer at the same time. Elves were beautiful, elegant, and slim. Not the type you would ever expect to do sumo.

“I wanna do sumo as a representative of the elves!”

“So you say, but...” I wasn’t very confident about him.

“Don’t underestimate...sumo...”

“I get it, I get it, y’all trained for this for a long time and all I have is this sword on my hip and my skill with it. But I just really wanna do sumo, y’know? My soul is screaming for it!”

I supposed it was only natural to have elves participate in sumo that was to take place in an elven forest. But Arima didn’t seem to like this idea. His devotion to sumo gave him the same aura as us—in other words, people obsessed with the sport. It brought me great relief.

“Milady, milady.”

Adela was pulling on the sleeve of my dress. Was she about to give more of her military advice?’

“Let’s accept Boorman’s offer.”

“To what end?”

“We currently don’t know the fighting styles of Uta the alraune and Kukuri the arachne. And as Kukuri is in the makuuchi division, you are highly likely to face her again in the future. Field Boorman against her and you’ll be able to observe what techniques a spider-type monster uses.”

“Hm...”

I looked at Boorman’s beautiful yet rough face. He appeared to have eked out a living as a bodyguard, using nothing but that sword of his. And apparently his swordsman’s soul craved sumo. Sumo is done with spirit, first and foremost. And if he was able to awaken his spirit of sumo, he might just defeat Kukuri. We wouldn’t know if we didn’t let him try.

“Very well, Boorman. Please join our team,” I said.

“Thanks, I really appreciate it!” replied Boorman with tears welling up in his eyes.

“So, here’s our fielding order: Boorman, then Prince Richie, then me.”

Arima looked slightly doubtful.

“Very well... Kukuri first...then Uta...then me...”

“Thanks,” I replied.

“Uta would...badly hurt...a beginner...”

As should be expected from someone ranked ōzeki, he was a good person. Or should I say a good demon? I was looking forward to my bout with him.

“Boorman, you will go first. Your opponent will be Kukuri, the arachne,” I explained.

“Gotcha. Thanks, for real!”

Adela brought Prince Richie's spare mawashi from the coach, which the prince put on Boorman after stripping him stark naked. *That's elves for you—beautiful even when naked.*

"For the time being, focus on keeping your stance low and moving by shuffling your feet. Since you're used to wielding a sword, imagine holding one in your hands as you perform harite as your primary attack."

The prince taught Boorman how to perform harite. It was only stopgap knowledge, but we didn't have time to teach him how to execute throws.

"Your center of mass is surprisingly low. Keep it that way," advised the prince.

"Gotcha. Thanks, man!"

His footwork was unexpectedly good, probably thanks to his ability as a swordsman. It was too bad he could only use harite.

His opponent, Kukuri, wore a leotard on the human part of her body, with a reddish-brown mawashi around her hips. She looked good. Her lower half, beneath her buttocks, had the trunk of a spider and six insectile legs. She had the rather intimidating form of a large spider. The abdomen of her spider part resembled that of a Joro spider, with stripes of black and yellow.

"Is magic allowed?" I asked the gray referee.

Attacks using one's natural constitution should be allowed in sumo, but I couldn't be certain about acquired forms of combat, such as magic.

"Yes. However, ordinary magicians tend to get pushed out of the ring while they cast their spells."

"I see. So the gap between casting and the activation of a spell proves fatal."

"Spells and skills that remain on the ring are forbidden. This includes the special abilities of monsters. Laying a trap with threads, as arachne do, is against the rules, while suspending your opponent with threads and arresting their limbs is allowed."

"Hey, referee, don't go revealing my abilities like that!"

"Oh, my apologies."

The referee scratched his head, apologizing in reaction to Kukuri's protest.

"You're gonna suspend me with threads? Damn, that'll be a pain."

"I won't. There's no need to go that far against a beginner like you."

"That helps, thanks. Hell, I might even win this, then."

"You can't. As a swordsman, you should be able to tell. It's like if a boxer joined a fencing tournament."

"Yeah... Well then, guess I'll just have to fight with all I've got."

"Good. Just do your best, and Kukuri and I both will respect that," I added.

"That's right. Give it your best, fledgling rikishi," said Kukuri.

"Thanks. Hey, you're a good person, eh, Kukuri?"

"Don't be silly."

Her cheeks red, Kukuri turned away in a huff and climbed the dohyō. *That's right, Boorman, Kukuri was a wonderful student in Clifton's stable who did all of the cleaning and laundry by herself for the handsome wrestlers that were her fellow students, and never so much as looked displeased with it.* I wanted all of this to be over so I could take Kukuri back to Clifton's stable in Aryagard.

Boorman climbed the dohyō next, a wide smile on his face.

“Synchronize your breathing with that of your opponent, then get up at the same time. Make sure neither of you rises before the other,” kindly explained the gray referee, since Boorman was new to this.

“Gotcha.”

Adela spread out her white fan and got up on the dohyō.

“On the east, Boorman, Boorman... On the west, Kukuri, Kukuri...”

The face-off had begun, with Boorman and Kukuri behind their respective lines in the ground. Once their breathing synchronized, the two of them touched the ground, then got up and charged at each other—although Boorman was slightly late in doing so.

Kukuri used the spider stance, which Clifton’s stable also practiced. It involved keeping your center of mass extremely low—in Kukuri’s case, so low that her spider abdomen and human bosom were almost touching the ground. She walked briskly on her six spider legs, crashing into Boorman. The impact sent her opponent to the edge of his side of the ring. Kukuri was a professional rikishi in both Aryaka and the demonic realm, so her doing so well was only to be expected against an amateur opponent.

She tried to land another attack and finish him then and there, but Boorman smoothly dodged it. His footwork and defensive movements were just what you would expect from a first-rate swordsman.

“Hang in there, Boorman!”

“Show her some elven pride!”

The elven elders cheered for Boorman. On the inside, I cheered for him too.

“The arachne have an advantage in sumo, don’t they? Their legs are thin, but the fact that they have more of them than humans do provides much more stability,” commented Adela.

“Doesn’t that abdomen pretty much double her weight? It’s almost like this species was born to do sumo,” I added.

Kukuri was like a tank with frightening mobility. With so many legs and being so heavy, knocking her over would be difficult. Even in her human form, Kukuri

was a tenacious wrestler with a powerful spring in her step and a high aptitude for sumo. In monster form, she was even more amazing.

Over and over, Boorman dodged her ferocious attacks by the skin of his teeth. His basic physical parameters, as well as his combat instincts built up through swordsmanship, were paying off. I wished I'd had at least a month to teach him sumo techniques and how to grapple before he had to go up against Kukuri.

His foot entered the black dohyō, reducing his mobility. Seizing the opportunity, Kukuri initiated a grapple and grabbed the front of his mawashi. I could tell this was the end for him—grappling was simply too much for a beginner.

"Bark, bark!" cheered Barkus for Boorman.

Kukuri put strength in her shoulders. Throwing techniques involve causing your opponent to lose their balance before going for a throw.

"You did well for a beginner. You have talent for sumo," she said.

"Well, thanks."

Kukuri threw Boorman off-balance, then performed an overarm throw.

"Still in, still in!"

He was still in! With unbelievable tenacity in his hips, Boorman avoided the overarm throw. *Ah, if only he knew any techniques at all, he would stand a chance... How vexing!*

"Kgh!"

Immediately afterwards, Kukuri pressed herself against her opponent, pulled up on his mawashi, and went for a trip... *Huh?* She used her frontal and middle left legs to attempt to trip Boorman. *A multi-leg trip!* Just the sort of technique you would expect from an arachne, a species with six legs. The elf endured with all he had.

"Nggghhh!"

"Ngaaah!"

Flash! Behind Boorman, I noticed several swords forming a wheel as if

blooming out of thin air, then starting to rotate. The spirit of sumo!

“I can’t afford to lose!!!”

“Push her, Boorman!”

The two wrestlers were in a proper grapple at last. It was better to push, relying on one’s sumo spirit, than to keep one’s distance and focus on harite. Boorman was pushing the two spider legs Kukuri had tried to trip him with. He was overbuffed by his sumo spirit! Kukuri pulled her legs back and firmly planted all six on the ground.

“Well done, elf. Or should I say...wrestler Boorman,” uttered Kukuri.

“Unghh!!!”

His face beet red from exertion, Boorman grabbed Kukuri’s mawashi and pushed. *He might just be able to do it by pushing while buffed by the spirit of sumo...*

“You can do it, Boorman!”

“You’re doing great, Boorman!”

“Bark, bark, bark!”

The enormous body of an arachne was being pushed by the slim one of an elf. It wouldn’t be sumo if miracles like this didn’t happen. For sumo is done with spirit.

“He’s doing it, Floortje!” commented the prince.

“Unless...”

Kukuri’s three right legs hit one of the four bales set slightly back. As a look of determination surfaced on her face, thread-spinning wheels came into view behind her. *No...* Above and behind her spider abdomen, a sort of halo was revolving in place. The spirit of sumo... Could wrestlers of the demonic realm use it too? With that, the two wrestlers’ pushing force became evenly matched. *Of course, I should have known.* Though it was called Dark Sumo, it was proper sumo nonetheless. Thus it was only natural that the spirit of sumo would lend its strength to them as well. It was only fair.

“The spirit of sumo!” exclaimed the prince.

“We no longer have a patent on it,” I replied.

“This is getting interesting.”

“I was just thinking how exciting this is.”

Being equally obsessed with sumo, the prince and I both had ferocious smiles on our faces.

“You have talent, Boorman! I’m looking forward to our next bout!”

Kukuri spread out her body and utilized the elf’s momentum against him to execute *kotenage*—an arm lock throw.

“Agghh!”

Boorman was sent rolling off the dohyō.

“Winner, Kukuri,” announced the gray referee, raising his hand to the black side of the ring.

The arachne assumed the squatting position for the referee’s announcement of her victory. *You are incredibly strong, Kukuri. That was magnificent.* She had become much stronger since our bout in Aryagard when she was in human form, having grown through training in Clifton’s stable.

Beneath the dohyō, Boorman was beating the ground in frustration. The elven elders ran up to him.

“You did well, Boorman! You made me proud to be an elf!”

“So freaking what...? I lost, damn it!”

“Don’t be silly. That arachne fought so well thanks to her extensive training. You should be proud of how much of a fight you put up against her!”

“Say—what if we borrowed the power of spirits to use magic in sumo?”

“That is a wonderful idea! Let us develop our own style in this sport!”

The elderly magic enthusiasts were clearly excited.

“Boorman, come to Aryagard once this is all over. With some training you’ll become a splendid sumo wrestler.”

“Floortje... I...I...”

The elf burst into tears. *Yes, you should cry when you lose, and then train.* The fact he had been able to invoke his spirit of sumo in his very first bout attested to his promise as a student.

Next, the alraune Uta climbed the dohyō.

“My turn now. Don’t keep a girl waiting, pretty prince.”

This one seemed rather flippant. Despite being an alraune, she had legs and could walk, albeit slowly and unsteadily. Was she really a strong contender in sumo? Her skin was pale green, her eyes—red. On her head bloomed a great number of flowers. There were flowers around her hips too, which looked like underwear or bloomers of some sort. Said flowers were divided by a mawashi made of ivy sitting tight on her hips. I didn’t want to let the prince have a bout with such a gorgeous beauty, but there was nothing I could do about it. Such were the rules.

“Be careful, Your Highness,” I warned him.

“I know. It’s pretty interesting to fight monster rikishi with their special abilities. They’re so strong too.”

“Yes. Please don’t lose.”

“I’ll be fine. Trust me on this one, Floortje,” replied the prince with his usual kind smile.

The cat ears that were his pride were pricked up, as they always were. Ah, in two years he had grown so dependable. He was the kind and strong prince of my dreams.

“♪ With large and bright eyes... ♪ With hair dark as the wet feathers of a crow... ♪ Standing, she’s as lovely as a Chinese peony; seated—as lovely as a tree peony, and walking—as lovely as a lily... ♪”

“What a beautiful song! I love your songs, Floortje.”

“Oh—I didn’t mean to.”

I couldn’t keep myself from singing a jinku that glorified female beauty. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

“So, His Highness is going up against an alraune. A vegetative type of monster that lives deep in the demonic realm.”

“Is there anything you don’t know, Adela?” I asked.

“Of course. Regardless, the special ability of an alraune is using pollen to charm or poison her opponents. She can also shoot out ivy to entangle them and suck out their vitality over a long period of time.”

“Sounds like a somewhat prurient type of monster.”

“It is. Alraune are known as vegetative succubi.”

I didn’t think that she would instantly attain victory just by successfully performing those abilities of hers, but Prince Richie would have to be careful: he was about to face a Dark Rikishi of the makuuchi division.

Adela climbed the dohyō and began to announce.

“On the east, Richie, Richie... On the west, Uta, Uta...”

The two wrestlers climbed the dohyō next. Uta blew the prince a kiss and was scolded by the gray referee. I wasn’t fond of such frivolous wrestlers. She was still unsteady on her feet, her balance poor as she performed shiko. Was she going to be okay?

“Face each other.”

The two’s fighting spirit grew. This part—where the wrestlers have to synchronize their breathing—is the real thrill of sumo.

Finally, Uta and Prince Richie’s breathing synchronized. They touched the ground with their fists and got up. The alraune was rather slow in doing so, however, allowing the prince to crash into her at full speed! *This should be...*

“I see you’re pretty strong, Prince.”

Despite the force of the impact, Uta hadn’t moved an inch. *Why? He crashed into her when she was in the half-sitting posture, barely keeping her balance!* The flowers on her body began to sway, releasing pollen of various colors.

“Charming pollen, poisonous pollen, numbing pollen, all free of charge,” spoke Uta.

“Air Sumo Form!”

As the prince uttered these words, an armor of wind formed around him, blowing the malevolent pollen away. He took advantage of the gust of wind to boost his speed as he charged into Uta once more.

Smash! The prince took a step back, astonishment written across his face. Even with its increased speed, his charge hadn’t managed to move Uta one bit. As he put a little more distance between them, Uta remained in place.

“Heh heh heh... My sumo is rather immobile, you see. I prefer to be heavily fortified instead.”

“You’ve put your roots down, haven’t you?!”

“Bingo.”

Uta raised a leg, putting on full display the thick mass of thin roots which extended down from it, covered in the soil of the dohyō. There was a large hole beneath them. So *this* was why she was so unsteady on her feet and so slow to get up at the start of the bout. She had literally planted her roots in the dohyō. *This* was her sumo.

“Bark, bark, bark, bark!!!” barked the pup in my arms.

Prince Richie had lost the initiative. Uta, meanwhile, started to move her hands as if performing teppo.

“Teppo Whip.”

A coil of ivy shot out of her palm, assaulting the prince with the force of regular teppo, which he smoothly dodged. Prince Richie, a tricky lightweight wrestler, was facing a walking fortress who could plant her roots in the dohyō. Their styles of sumo were the polar opposites of each other.

Uta remained in the black part of the ring, shooting her Teppo Whips at the prince. He continued to dodge, moving around freely. All of a sudden, he attempted to grab one of her whips instead. This made sense, because if he could simply make it touch the ground, it would result in his victory.

“Bad move,” said Uta in a playful voice.

Bam! The Teppo Whip made a sharp turn and struck the prince on the chest.

“Kgh!”

Ah, a red line has formed on the prince’s white skin...



That expression of agony on your face is a sight to behold, Your Highness! Dosukoi dosukoi! Oh, wait, I shouldn't be like this.

The attacks of the ivy whips continued raining down on Prince Richie, bypassing his wind armor. Wales formed on his skin one after another.

"I'll be taking the win, Prince. Thousand Whips!"

Uta arched her back, releasing countless ivy whips at the prince!

"You're selling me short," he replied.

The spirit of sumo in the form of gears manifested behind the prince, beginning to rotate at a high speed. Moving fast enough to leave an afterimage, he dodged the incoming attacks. *This* was Prince Richie's sumo: speed and technique.

"You can do it, Your Highness!"

Thunk! As the prince heard my cheer, the gears of his sumo spirit started rotating even faster. Eventually, he managed to slip through the storm of ivy, charge into Uta, and grab her mawashi.

"Kgh! So what if you've got a hold on me?! I'm the immovable Uta!"

"Heh. In Aryakan Sumo, we make the impossible possible."

With a daring smile, Prince Richie performed an inside leg trip on Uta's right leg. As I began to suspect what move he was going for, he tripped her left leg with his hand.

"Wh-What are you trying to do?!"

"Heh heh heh."

His body began to shine, and a rail track of light formed behind Uta.

"Maglev Triple Attack Force Out!!!"

The prince pressed his head against Uta's chest while shouting the name of the technique. With a splitting sound, the maglev propulsion uprooted Uta from the dohyō.

"Gaaah!!!"

Vwoom! Picked up by the maglev track, the alraune was sent flying off the dohyō at an unbelievable speed. She smashed into the local church, bounced off, then rolled across the ground for quite a while.

What a magnificent use of the Maglev Triple Attack Force Out it had been. Magic-imbued techniques were banned from being used in Aryakan Sumo in provincial tours due to the danger they posed, but there was no restriction on using them when facing Dark Rikishi. *Fun.*

The prince climbed down the dohyō and approached Uta.

“Sorry about that. Are you hurt? You’re strong, so I ended up going too far.”

“M-My prince!”

He helped the alraune to her feet. His move appeared to have been extremely effective on this maiden of a monster, as she was visibly flustered and red in the face. *Mgh, stay in your lane, Uta. Prince Richie is* my *betrothed.*

Arima began performing shiko. *STOMP! STOMP!* It sounded heavy, just how I liked it. Such a fine shiko with so much weight could only have been achieved through endless, exhausting training. *Wonderful.* Being ranked ōzeki meant he was almost a yokozuna. I couldn’t help admiring the perfection of his bearing. The way he carried himself made him look like a work of art.

I responded with a shiko of my own. *STOMP!!! STOMP!!!* Ah, shiko was so nice—it purified your mind. Arima smiled at the sight. Though he engaged in what was known as Dark Sumo, he was nonetheless fully deserving of respect as a fellow sumo wrestler.

“The score is 1-1. Everything will be decided with this next bout. Good luck, Floortje,” spoke the prince.

“Thank you. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Bark, bark!”

“You’re cheering for me too, Barkus? Why, thank you.”

I squatted down and petted the pup’s head. The fluffiness of it invigorated me. *Thanks.*

Adela climbed the dohyō, spread her white fan, and began announcing.

“On the east, Floortje, Floortje... On the west, Arima, Arima...”

Let’s do this.

I slapped my cheeks to fire myself up and entered the dohyō too. Standing across the ring from me, Arima looked enormous. He was two meters in height, had crimson skin, and his trained muscles were covered in a thin layer of fat. The perfect slim build of a sumo wrestler. Did greater demons like him have any special powers? I hoped he wouldn’t start teleporting or anything like that. He had a scary face, but his eyes were round and cute. Large horns were growing out of his forehead. On his back were small bat wings—could he fly with them? *Ah, I’m so happy to have the chance to face such a formidable opponent.*

“Face each other,” spoke the gray referee, holding his palm between me and Arima.

Our breathing began to synchronize. Once it was fully in sync, we touched the ground with our fists and charged at each other. *Smash!!!* The sound of two trained wrestlers coming into contact resounded around the arena.

Like a halo, my spirit of sumo manifested behind me in the form of rotating gears. Behind Arima was one of his own, in the form of flaming, rotating wheels. We were completely matched in our initial charge, as should’ve been expected.

He attempted to grab my mawashi. I tried to block it while moving to grab his. *Ah, how grand!* I could feel the spirit, technique, and strength driving our bout.

I lowered my stance and rapidly closed the distance, grabbing—

“Blinding Head Chop Down...”

Smack! As I felt an impact on the back of my head, everything went dark. He had used a technique imbued with magic—one that debuffed you with blindness! I hadn’t seen it coming. It should’ve been obvious that he could use such skills as he had his own spirit of sumo. While I was recovering from the impact on my head, Arima grabbed my mawashi from above.

Sometimes, sumo bouts end in an instant. A technique can be executed so well it becomes unstoppable. And even as I felt my opponent pull my mawashi

from the left and go for a throw, I couldn't do anything without my eyesight. Revving up my sumo spirit, I realized what technique he was about to use.

A hip throw! I adjusted my center of mass to just barely neutralize it. Though faint and hazy, my sumo senses told me what Arima was doing. How long was this blindness effect going to last? Until it wore off, I had to rely on this hazy "vision" to ward off my opponent's fierce attacks.

A hand reached behind me, grabbing the back of my mawashi. *Kgh!* It was the *harimanage*, a backward belt throw! And just as the Japanese name of the technique suggested, it was imbued with water magic! Continuing to defend would spell my defeat. I needed to go on the offensive!

I shoved my right knee between the demon's legs. *Bzzzzt!*

"The Lightning...Inner-Thigh Throw...?"

Arima released the back of my mawashi and retreated to avoid my technique. *Haah... Haah... What an incredible bout.* By now, my eyesight had returned to normal.

Arima smiled in satisfaction.

"You're...strong..."

"So are you!"

"Let us..."

"...enjoy sumo!"

I was smiling too. The ferocious smile of a predator had naturally surfaced on my face. This was great. Doing sumo with a mighty opponent like him was amazing. Using the spirit of sumo and magic-imbued techniques while having a bout on a yin-yang-shaped ring. Pushing forward with all you had, thinking of nothing but how to win. This was a high-level bout entirely different from those that occurred in Aryakan Sumo, and we had to read each other on the go.

His head chop down technique carried the blindness debuff. His backward belt throw was imbued with water magic. And because of our difference in height, I had to be particularly wary of the former.

We became locked up once more.

“Show him what for, Floortje!”

“Bark, ba-bark!”

“Do your best, milady!”

I heard the cheering of the prince, Barkus, and Adela.

“You can do it, sir! Bring her down!”

“Take the win, ōzeki!”

The cheering of Kukuri and Uta reached my ears too.

Arima and I pushed each other back and forth, used techniques, and blocked their magical effects time and time again as the bout went on. The magical effect of a technique could be stopped if the technique was not performed in full. Thus you could block such an effect by avoiding the technique itself.

He was strong. The bout could really go either way. And I was enjoying myself oh so much.

It was fun to go against a powerful opponent. The enormous amount of training Arima had done, the feelings and effort behind his techniques, the harmony of it all... I felt these things clearly. The ritual that was sumo more than amply expressed Arima’s raw existence as he continued to use his dreadful strength and magnificent techniques on me. *Terrific, truly terrific.* No doubt Arima felt my existence in the same way. This connection was deeper and heavier than words, or even acts of love. It was incredibly fulfilling.

Arima held down the right side of my mawashi and went for an underarm throw. I lowered my stance and executed *uchimusou*, pushing his inner thigh with my hand.

We exchanged countless techniques, successfully neutralizing almost all of them. I admired the power behind my opponent’s back and legs, as well as the thickness of his trunk. My gears and his flaming wheels—the representations of our sumo spirits—picked up speed. As his wheels burned brighter by the moment and my gears gave off sparks, our techniques reached the realm of the gods, attaining ever greater refinement.

It was coming. I could sense a new magically imbued technique on the way.

Arima approached me in a low stance.

“Blinding Head...”

I felt him stretching to perform a head chop down again. *What next?* As dictated by my sumo senses, I grabbed both of his knees.

“...Chop Down!”

Smack! Everything went dark as Arima’s arm struck the back of my head again. But I didn’t mind. Holding his knees in my arms, I lifted them up.

“Spinning Backwards Body Drop!!!”

Propelled off the ground by an explosive force, the two of us ended up in the air above.

“Gwoh!” groaned Arima.

I thought we would fall together, but instead we were floating in the air. In a white haze, amid the darkness that had consumed my eyesight, I could see something flapping on Arima’s back.

Wings.

Those small wings of his were more powerful than I had thought, being strong enough to suspend the two of us in the air. I sensed an air boundary manifesting above and around the ring. Arima flapped his wings with abandon, desperate to resist the spinning power of my technique.

“Faster!!!”

I added even more speed to our rotation as we descended back to the ground. *Smash!*

“...Winner, Floortje!”

Phew. That was close. Had I not increased the speed, I would’ve ended up on the bottom when we landed.

I got off Arima and extended a hand to him.

“Magnificent...”

“You were magnificent too. I can tell just how much you’ve trained.”

“I need to...work harder...to reach the level...of a yokozuna...”

“Let’s keep pushing forward on the path of sumo together, shall we?”

“Absolutely...”

Applause came from every direction. Friend and foe alike clapped together as fellow sumo wrestlers who had all exerted themselves in the ring.

Everybody was clapping: humans, elves, monsters, and even Barkus.

“Do you think we’ll get to have another bout?”

“One more tournament...until you...cross the border...”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“I will train more...and come...for a rematch...”

“By all means. Kukuri and Uta, you did well too.”

Hearing my praise, the two monsters smiled.

The gray referee raised his hand to the east side of the ring.

“The team competition between Aryakan forces and the Demon Lord’s army has concluded in the favor of the Aryakan forces with a score of two to one!”

The referee bowed, then began to fade from view, and finally disappeared as the yin-yang-shaped dohyō sank back underground.

“You did it, Floortje!”

“Th-Thank you, Your Highness.”

Embraced by the prince, I could feel my rapidly beating heart. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

“Bark, bark, bark, bark!”

Barkus clung to my feet, making it hard to walk. The elven elders and Boorman approached me next.

“Well done, well done! What a splendid bout that was!”

“I have never been so excited since reaching this ripe old age!”

“Did the magical effect of that Spinning Backwards Body Drop draw its propulsion from the earth? I’m assuming the skill was of the earth attribute.”

These elders and their enthusiasm for magic... How would I know the workings of magically imbued techniques? I did have a sense that this one was purely about motion, though, without any particular attribute.

“That was a hell of a bout, Floortje! I’ll work hard so I can fight like that one

day!”

“Show due diligence, Boorman, and you’ll become strong in no time.”

“I’ll do all it takes!”

I was covered in sweat from all that wrestling.

“Do you have showers here in Hufton?”

“We don’t have anything so advanced, but there is a hot spring in the forest nearby.”

A hot spring!!!

“That’s great, milady! Let’s go take a relaxing bath!”

“I agree. Let’s go wash that sweat off, Floortje,” added the prince.

“Good idea, you two.”

“Bark, bark!”

“Are you coming with us, Barkus? All right, Chief Vivi, we’ll be borrowing that hot spring.” I turned to face Arima and the two monsters. “There’s a hot spring near the village. Would you like to accompany us?”

The three of them exchanged glances, waved my offer away with forced smiles, and mounted their gryphons. Too bad. Seeing them fly away in the direction of the Town of Yggdrasil, I looked forward to facing them in the ring again.

Chief Vivi personally led us to the hot spring.

“It’s just us villagers using this place, so I’m afraid you won’t find any fancy facilities. Sorry about that.”

“Th-That’s okay, Chief, but... I-Is this hot spring meant for mixed bathing?”

Oh, Your Highness! Dosukoi dosukoi.

“Hah hah hah, no! That wouldn’t bode well for public morals, so there are separate sections for men and women.”

“Tsk. Well, that sucks,” grumbled Boorman, who for some reason had joined us.

“Boorish elves are hard to like, aren’t they, milady?”

“They sure are, Adela.”

Realizing his blunder, Boorman awkwardly scratched his head.

“Bark, bark, bark!”

Look! Even Barkus is saying “shame on you”! Probably.

Deeper in the forest, a rustic structure came into view.

“That’s the place,” said the chief.

“Wow, how atmospheric!”

“I’m glad you feel that way. The structure above may be old, but the spring water is perfect.”

Swinging the door open, we were greeted with a pleasant smell typical of hot springs. And there were indeed two sections. But the fact that the dividing curtains had “MAN” and “WOMAN” written on them made them feel, perhaps, a little too Japanized. *Oh well.* This was, after all, the world of an otome game.

I parted with Prince Richie and entered the women’s section. To my surprise, the changing room had proper lockers.

Adela helped me undress. I had never considered this in my past life, but it was normal for a daughter of a marquis to be assisted by a maid. Since I wore a corset and my dress was held by a plaited cord on the back rather than a zip fastener, I couldn’t do without her help.

Looking at my naked body in a full-length mirror, I saw it still didn’t have even the slightest bit of fat. Or muscle. As much as I wanted both of those things, my body hadn’t changed at all over the years.

“It’s too bad.”

“Your body is incapable of growing heavier or more muscular, so give up this pointless struggle, milady.”

“I want to gain weight somehow...”

“Please don’t.”

“Bark, bark, bark!”

“See, even Barkus says so,” said Adela.

If only it weren’t for the curse of this otome game world... I wished *The Rondo of Light and Darkness* had been a pro wrestling simulator. *Oh well.* Taking Barkus in my arms, I headed to the baths. Stark naked, Adela was evidently intent on going in with me.

“Bark, bark!”

Barkus seemed happy too.

I used a wooden bucket to pour hot water over myself and entered the bath. The bathtub was made of wood too and felt pleasant against the skin, while the water was clear and had a faint smell of sulfur, the concentration of which didn’t seem very high. Soaking myself up to my shoulders, I let out a relaxed sigh. Barkus seemed fond of the bath too as he calmly sat in my arms, submerged in the water. Adela entered after us.

“This is good water.”

“Yes, it’s invigorating.”

There was a hole in the ceiling for ventilation, letting in the soothing sound and light of the forest outside. I was already becoming very fond of this hot spring.

“What a wonderful place. Let’s come here again once this coup is over,” I suggested.

“Certainly. Those vegetable dishes were delicious too.”

“I do want meat for dinner, though.”

“Bark, bark, bark!”

“You’ll get some for us, Barkus?”

“Bark!”

“You think he can understand us?”

“It does feel like it.”

Hearing that, Barkus turned away and began swimming around.

“He’s surely a fenrir, because then it would make sense,” supposed Adela.

“Must’ve been separated from his parents. I wish we could return him to them somehow.”

“As lovely as that would be, we surely won’t find his parents at the Dwarven Great Caves we’re heading to.”

“Maybe we should release him while we’re still here?”

“Bark, bark!”

Still swimming in the bath, the pup barked as if to reject my idea. *What a cute little thing.* I patted him on the back. As his fur was wet it wasn’t fluffy, but it still felt good because of his warmth.

“Let’s take him with us to Aryaka for now. We’ll have to visit these lands again to reunite with General Maurilio, and we can look for his parents after that,” I proposed.

“Sounds good.”

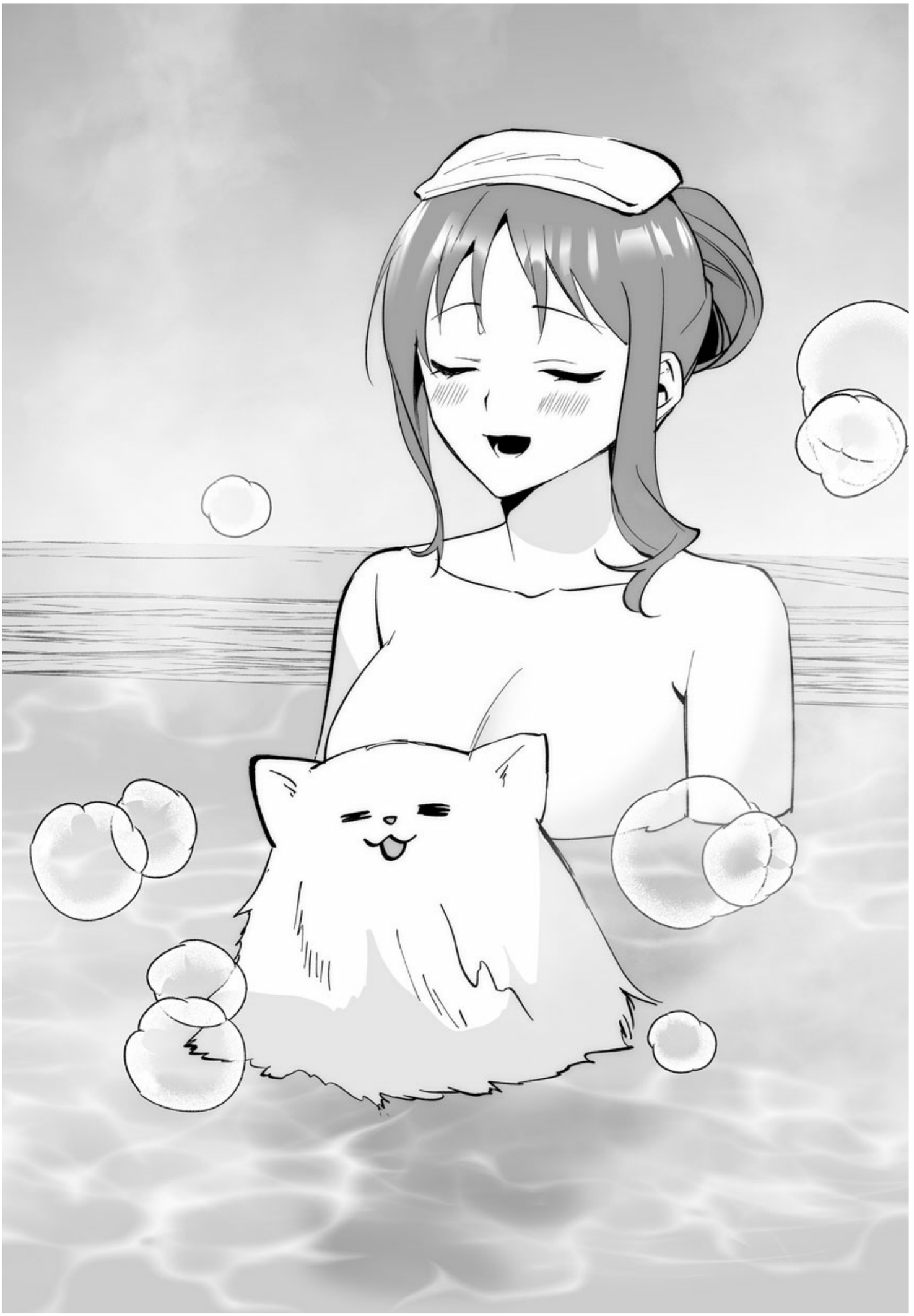
With Barkus in my arms, I stepped out of the bathtub. I then sat on a wooden chair and had Adela wash me. Elven soap smelled good, but didn’t seem to foam much.

“I wonder if it’s made from the fruit of some tree. It doesn’t foam very well, but the smell is nice and I feel like it’s good at removing dirt,” spoke Adela.

“It would be nice to stay in this area for a few days and have a taste of how the old elves live.”

“It would indeed. The Town of Yggdrasil went so far with modernization that the whole place didn’t feel very elven anymore.”

After washing my body and hair, Adela proceeded to wash Barkus too.



Though he seemed upset earlier, Barkus behaved himself during the process. *Good boy.*

Adela wiped me once we entered the changing room. She even had a bath towel in her pocket, as it turned out. I wondered if the prince didn't have a hard time without a personal assistant. Putting on clean underwear and a clean dress felt refreshing. Hot springs were so nice! As we went outside, we saw the prince teaching sumo to Boorman.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Ah, you're so beautiful right after a bath, Floortje."

"Oh, stop it, Your Highness..."

"Bark, bark!"

"See, even Barkus agrees. Right, Barkus?"

"Bark, bark, bark!"

As the prince patted the pup's head, the latter seemed to be barking in agreement.

And now, with our spirits revitalized after a short break, it was time to head to the Dwarven Great Caves.

Interlude: In the Audience Chamber and on the Balcony of the Palatial Tree at the Elven Forest Republic

Yggdrasil, the world's largest tree, reached high into the sky. At its base was the Palatial Tree—the residence of the fairy king, replete with splendor. Though it wasn't as big as Yggdrasil, it was nonetheless an enormous Palatial Tree, the likes of which couldn't be seen outside of this town. The structure inside the hollowed-out tree abounded with elegance.

"You still haven't found the fairy king?!"

"No, sir. We've searched every corner of the dungeon, but it's a complete mystery how he managed to get out of his cell, and where he's gone."

The Palatial Tree was currently in the hands of Chancellor Mickaël. Its original owner, the fairy king, had evidently made an escape.

"Damn iiit! Do you understand how big of a setback this is to our revolution?!"

"Yes, sir! We have mobilized our entire force to search for him!"

On the receiving end of the chancellor's anger was General Dainagon, the elf in command of the elven revolutionaries. Originally, magicians and farmers were held in the highest regard amongst elves, while politicians and soldiers were looked down upon. It was a nation so behind the times that they considered a reclusive lifestyle deep in the forest to be the most admirable of all. Perhaps it was the sense of discrimination lurking beneath the surface of this beautiful race that made the political sector of the Elven Forest Republic, then led by Chancellor Mickaël, forge an alliance with its military sector and start a coup.

"I cannot bring forth the glorious elven revolution if the fairy king and that royal pair from Aryaka are out there!"

"Understood, sir!"

Gryphons landed on the palace's balcony, flapping their wings. These were magical beasts with the head of a bird, the body of a lion, and large wings. The Demon Lord's army had tamed them for the purpose of aerial transportation.

"Man, we should've gone to that hot spring! You're such a wet blanket, Arima!" spoke Uta, an alraune, as she dismounted her gryphon, swaying from side to side. Being a vegetative monster, she had some difficulty walking.

"We cannot...act friendly...with enemies..." slowly spoke Arima as he dismounted too.

"Oh, come on, you're so stubborn! Ah, but yokozuna Floortje and Prince Richie were so fantastic! I wanna go to Aryaka like Kukuri did!"

"The Aryakan capital is a good place, yes," said Kukuri.

"This is simply unfair. I wanted to be the one sneaking in there!"

"You can't assume human form, Uta, so that wouldn't work."

"I'm so jealous of you. You've found someone nice in Aryaka, haven't you?"

"N-No, I didn't. I-I went there strictly for work reasons."

"Yeah, right, like I'd believe that! But man, I wanna see the sumo tournaments in Aryaka! They ban magically imbued skills, right?"

"Yes, they compete in orthodox sumo."

A furious Chancellor Mickaël opened the glass doors to the balcony.

"You! Why have you returned without that royal pair, Arima?!"

"They escaped..."

"What?! You're telling me such a vicious and ostensibly evil trio let those two get away again?! Explain yourself!!!"

"What's up with this guy?" uttered Uta as she furrowed her eyebrows and glared at the chancellor.

"And what's with that look?! I am the leader of the elves—the race at the peak of humanoid races! We live over a thousand years and have higher intelligence than any species in the world! You monsters are far beneath us!"

The alraune was seething with rage, but since the chancellor had no training in martial arts, he couldn't even sense it. Kukuri patted Uta on the shoulder.

"Chancellor, we came into contact with Crown Prince Richie and Crown Princess Candidate Floortje at the highway village of Hufton and engaged them in battle. Alas, we sustained injuries too great to prevent their escape," explained Kukuri.

"Well, we lost two to one," added Uta.

"Th-They were such mighty heroes?!"

"She was...the strongest...of all humankind..."

"Yeah, that's a yokozuna for you," said Uta.

Chancellor Mickaël started pulling on his gorgeous silver hair.

"Shit! What the hell am I supposed to do?! They're about to escape to the Dwarven Great Caves! How do you plan to make it up to me, you blasted demons and monsters?!"

Just then, a particularly large gryphon landed on the balcony.

"Having some trouble, are we? Mr. New Fairy King."

"Wh... I-I'm the leader of this revolution, not that... Wh-What gives, Demon Lord?"

"I heard my lovely chancellor was experiencing difficulties and simply couldn't sit still. Now that I'm here, just leave everything to us!"

The Demon Lord, characterized by malignant beauty, dismounted his massive gryphon.

"My lord..."

His three servants knelt before him.

"So, Arima. You say our lovely Lady Floortje is on her way to the Dwarven Great Caves?"

"Yes... They will reach it...any day now..."

"I see, I see. Kukuri, get the word out to our engineers to bring out the you-

know-what. I'm gonna need it."

"Is it complete already?"

"That's right. It'll let me give proper chase." With that, the beautiful Demon Lord turned to face the elven chancellor. "So don't fret. I'm gonna catch Lady Floortje, so you focus on finding the fairy king."

"O-Oh, okay. Since you're giving me your personal assurance..."

The Demon Lord patted the elf's shoulders in a friendly way.

"Your revolutionaries don't have full control of the country yet, and it would be great if you could get that sorted as soon as you can. I'll handle the rest."

"O-Okay, got it. And thanks."

The chancellor left the balcony and retreated deeper into the palace together with General Dainagon.

"You've really got a glib tongue, my lord!" spoke Uta.

"Heh heh heh! It's easy for me, the Demon Lord, to take some idiot for a ride," said the demon as he patted Uta's head with a smile on his face. "All right. So I take it there's one more tournament before yokozuna Floortje gets back to Aryaka?"

"Yes..." replied Arima.

"Find one more rikishi. We're making it a five-on-five."

"Uh... But they...only have two..."

"Arima, my man, your sense of duty is too strong! If they don't find someone to field, we're just gonna snatch that win by default!"

"But...sir..."

"Not having enough members is on them. Don't let it get to ya," said the Demon Lord, before sneering. "Man, I'm all fired up for some good sumo! I'll show you, Floortje, what this Demon Lord—the yokozuna of Dark Sumo—is capable of."

The demon's laugh resounded across the balcony.

Chapter 3: Dwarven Great Caves and Sumo on the Magic Train

A day after leaving Hufton in our coach, we had finally left the elven forest behind and entered a mountainous region. The majestic Dome Mountains had come into view and I could see the entrance to the Dwarven Great Caves at the center of them.

Boorman had wanted to come with us, but we only had enough sleeping space in this coach for three and didn't have food to spare, so I had to turn him down. Not like we could teach him much about sumo in the middle of a getaway either. Our top priority was getting back to Aryaka, and hopefully the dwarves would help with that.

"There's the entrance, milady."

The prince and I looked outside the window and saw that the highway led directly inside a large cave—the fact that we could enter this place in a coach was a testament to the high technological level of the nation that called itself the Dwarven Great Caves. Ever since we had crossed the border at midnight, the quality of the roads had improved. Importing mineral resources and exporting crafted items was no doubt a major factor in the thoroughness of their road maintenance.

Adela stopped the coach. Two stern-looking dwarves approached, spears in hand. They must've been guarding the entrance.

Dwarves were a primarily cave-dwelling, bearded race with small but strong builds. They excelled at excavating and processing minerals. Many legendary items, such as swords—both demonic and holy—as well as demonic armor, had been the products of their craftsmanship.

The prince and I got out of the coach.

"I am Crown Prince Richie of the Kingdom of Aryaka, and this is Crown Princess Candidate Floortje."

“What a surprise! Welcome to the Dwarven Great Caves!”

“A coup has occurred in the Elven Forest Republic and we had to escape as a small group. We wish to speak to your leader.”

No longer on their guard, the dwarves spoke to us with smiles on their faces.

“Unlucky of you to get caught up in that. We’ve heard there was a change of government in the Elven Forest Republic, but not much information reaches us since we don’t have diplomatic relations with them. It would be of much help if you could share the news with us.”

Elves and dwarves didn’t get along well. Apparently their cultures were incompatible. Despite being neighbors, they had no official diplomatic relations, but they did exchange commodities nonetheless. Dwarves traded manufactured goods, while elves traded grain and food.

“Chancellor Mickaël has led the Demon Lord’s army inside the Elven Forest Republic and has the elven soldiers backing him up.”

“Making a pact with demons? How shortsighted.”

“Bloody salad munchers.”

A messenger dwarf ran up to one of the guards and whispered something in his ear.

“The chief is waiting for you. Go on in. Take your coach, I’ll lead the way.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s a pleasure.”

The dwarven guard, who wore a rather luxurious helmet and armor, ran on ahead. Once the prince and I returned to the coach, Adela got it moving again.

“Bark, bark, bark!”

What had caught Barkus’s attention was the ceiling. The caves resembled a beehive, their walls lined with dwellings stretching rather high. Our coach ran between orange magic lanterns.

“What an astounding place,” I mused.

“It sure is. And we never would’ve come here normally.”

“I’d like to visit again once all this is over.”

“Me too. And no other dwarven habitat is as big as these caves.”

Dwarves excavated the Dome Mountains to build large cities, each such project spanning over a thousand years. All of them were both brave warriors and craftspeople. Were the Demon Lord’s army to take this place, the military strength of human nations that were dependent on dwarven craftsmanship would suffer.

The coach arrived in the depths of the caves, stopping in front of a stone porch which was decorated by large, lavish sculptures.

“Your Highness, milady, this is the palace of the Dwarven Great Caves.”

“Such magnificent sculptures!” I exclaimed.

“Just imagine the amazing technology these were made with,” added the prince.

“Bark, bark!”

Depicting dwarven warriors fighting dragons, the sculptures brimmed with vigor.

“Please do come in, Crown Prince Richie.”

“Very well,” replied the prince and waved his mantle, gallantly stepping forth.

With splendid architecture as the backdrop, he looked like a legendary hero. *How elegant! Dosukoi dosukoi!*

Led inside by the guard from earlier, we entered a large hall. On a fancy stone chair in the back of the hall sat an imposing elderly dwarf with white hair. It might also be noted that all dwarves had flowing beards, small builds, and thick arms, so it was hard to tell them apart. My only option was to distinguish them by the color of their hair and beards.

“Oh, Prince Richie! Long time no see!”

“It *has* been a while, Chief Jörd.”

“I believe the last time we met was at your investiture as crown prince, so about a year ago. Thought I wouldn’t be seeing you until your wedding with

Floortje.”

“Of course, I will invite you when the time comes.”

“Looking forward to it!”

The white-bearded dwarf laughed. He was as merry as I remembered him.

“I hear something big took place in salad-muncher lands. Care to share some details?”

“Gladly. Chancellor Mickaël has led the Demon Lord’s army inside the Town of Yggdrasil and started a coup. The Elven Forest Republic is currently in the hands of the elven revolutionaries.”

“And what of the fairy king? He may be a dunce wrapped in cheap flattery, but his magic prowess is no laughing matter. Can’t imagine him ever losing to some run-of-the-mill elves.”

“We don’t know. The chancellor said he’s ‘bedridden with a terrible illness,’ so they might be keeping him in confinement.”

“Tsk. Even that impregnable Town of Yggdrasil has let enemies inside... We’d best be on our guard for any tricks they might pull to get to us too.”

“The elven chancellor said he intends to attack the Dwarven Great Caves together with the Demon Lord’s army, then invade Aryaka afterwards. We have to get back and warn the king as soon as possible.”

“I see... Agh, they’re such a pain in our rear. Fine—since this is an emergency, we’ll do our utmost to assist the crown prince of our friendly nation of Aryaka.”

“Thank you, Chief Jörd.”

Fortunately, the dwarves seemed all too happy to help us.

“You should stay for the night. We’ll have the Magic Train ready for you tomorrow to get you to the border with Aryaka.”

“You mean it’s complete?!”

“Sure is. Aryaka’s forgotten all about it ever since your brother’s downfall. Engineers, though—they make the most of their budget. They’ve got an experimental track finished, though it only goes as far as the border.”

“That’s incredible!”

“I was planning to go to Aryaka on it, surprise King Arvi, and ask him for funding to finish laying the track all the way to Aryagard. It’ll probably work much better if I’m helping to bring the crown prince back at the same time.”

“Huh... If you say so...”

This dwarf was unexpectedly calculating. But it would be great to have the Magic Train run all the way to the eastern part of Aryaka. We could use it to go to the Dwarven Great Caves—or, less importantly, to the Elven Forest Republic—for tourism, trade, or more. The economic benefits seemed pretty major.

I had thought the setting of *The Rondo of Light and Darkness* was fantasy, but it was, in fact, surprisingly modern.

A dwarven maid escorted us to where we would be staying for the night. It was a marvelous, spacious room within the palace, one reserved for special guests. There were no windows, though, because it was underground. But the sculptures and the furniture were rather incredible indeed.

“This is just the sort of VIP lounge I would expect to find in Dwarven Great Caves. I don’t want to imagine for a moment having to clean a room with this many valuables in it.”

“You *are* my ditzy maid, at the end of the day.”

“Bark, bark!”

The pup barked as Adekichi started to pout. I was grateful to him for being so well behaved and not wreaking havoc in this room that looked like it could be a showroom for national treasures. Since he was such a good boy, I patted his fluffy back. *Mmm.* After the visit to the hot spring, he was now so clean that his fur felt like velvet.

“You must be tired after driving the coach every day, Adela. Why don’t you rest in your room until dinnertime?”

“That was my intention, milady. What about you?”

“Well, I wanted to go take a look around while we’re here.”

“I’ll come with you,” the prince piped up.

“That would be wonderful, Your Highness.”

“We’ve been rather occupied these past few days, after all.”

“Bark, bark!”

“You’re staying with me, Barkus. It’s not often milady and His Highness get to be alone together, so you mustn’t disturb them.”

“Whine...”

Nice one, Adela. Holding Barkus against her chest, my maid left the room. Incidentally, there was a waiting room for maids next to this one.

It had been a while since my last date with the prince. The tightly packed schedule of constant diplomatic trips meant we could never quietly spend time together. The two of us left the palace, arm in arm.

“Crown Prince Richie, where are you headed?” asked the door guard.

“I’ve found some free time and was planning to spend it on a short walk with Floortje here around the caves.”

“Very well. I shall assign this dwarf to escort you.”

“Thank you.”

They all looked the same to me, so I could only tell them apart by the color of their beards—and our new escort had a blond one.

“What’s your name?”

“It’s ‘Werner,’ Lady Floortje.”

So, the blond Werner. Perhaps he had experience in martial arts, as his stance was low.

“You do some sort of martial art, don’t you, Werner?”

“Yes, I do some Dwarven Sumo...”

“Dwarven Sumo!!!” simultaneously exclaimed the prince and I.

Had sumo reached the Dwarven Great Caves too?

“Oh, it is nothing like Aryakan Sumo. Ours is but a shoddy rural martial art.”

“I still want to hear more about it. Do you have something like a dojo?”

“We do. In fact, wrestlers should be training there right now. Would you like to come see it?”

“Absolutely!” spoke the prince and I in unison again.

We looked at each other and smiled.

After passing through thoroughly interwoven cave roads, we entered a hall where dwarves practiced sumo. Small but stout dwarves, male and female, were grappling and throwing each other. They wore slightly short tops and only shorts or underwear below. There was no ring, so it looked more like judo or a similar martial art. The dwarves were all small but muscular and had low centers of mass, so their training was an encouraging sight to behold. Seeing them use throws and foot throwing techniques made me think about how all humanoids used similar techniques in wrestling-type martial arts.

“Hey, Werner, who are these guys? These training grounds are sacred!”

“Watch that tongue of yours, Mamiana. This is the Crown Prince and Crown Princess Candidate of the Kingdom of Aryaka!”

The dwarven girl apparently named “Mamiana” kept staring at me, unfazed.

“So you’re the yokozuna of that fake sumo they do in Aryaka, huh.”

“Stop it, Mamiana!”

“Oh, knock it off, Werner. I hate liars. All wrestling around the world, including all forms of sumo, originated from Dwarven Sumo!” She turned to me. “And look at you—you’re all skin and bones! There’s no way a form of sumo in which you hold the title of champion could be legitimate!”

“Oh? Are you sure about that? Why, then, I’m sure you know what a sumo wrestler must do at times like these,” I told her.

“Wh-What, you’re gonna fight me? Sure, why not? Let’s do sumo!”

“Gladly.”

“Someone, give her the outfit,” called Mamiana out to her fellow female

wrestlers.

It would be immodest of me to wear clothing fit for an individual the size of a dwarf, however. And so, I transported myself to the usual dressing room and put on my mawashi, then returned.

“Wh-Where did you disappear off to just now? And what’s with that belt?”

“It’s a mawashi. The official outfit worn in Aryakan Grand Sumo.”

“*That’s* what you wear? And on top of a dress that flutters so much?”

“Yes. Because sumo is done with spirit.”

“You talk big, but let’s see how you fight!”

Having the deeply ashamed Werner be our referee, Mamiana and I entered a grapple. It appeared that, in Dwarven Sumo, they started bouts after grappling each other rather than from the squatting position.

“You lose if your head, shoulders, or back touch the ground.”

“Okay.”

“A-All right. Go!”

At Mamiana’s cue, the showdown between Grand Sumo and Dwarven Sumo began. And I threw her down with a *kubinage*. With the bout over in an instant, the other dwarven rikishi cheered for me.

“Wh-Wh-Why?”

“That was a head lock throw,” I explained.

“Damn it! Let’s go again!”

“As many times as you wish.”

I continued to throw Mamiana time after time. She was very strong and knew good techniques, but lacked experience. It was obvious what technique she was about to use, and she didn’t do a good job of trying to throw me off-balance. *Wait, why am I doing sumo on my date with the prince?* An awkward smile surfaced on my face as I threw Mamiana down for the umpteenth time. It always came to this. *Oh well*—I was an indefatigable sumo wrestler first and foremost.

“I’m terribly sorry, Lady Floortje!” apologized Mamiana eventually, prostrating herself. “I deeply apologize for boasting to a personage of godlike skill such as yourself.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. You can’t know how strong someone is until you have a bout with them.”

Mamiana cried while pressing her forehead to the floor.

“I was but a frog at the bottom of a well! Ah, I’m so ashamed of myself!”

I embraced the dwarven girl and helped her up.

“That’s not true. You’re a great sumo wrestler.”

“Thank you so much!”

Her tears were hot as they landed on my shoulders.

“Come to Aryaka once this whole mess is over. I’ll teach you Grand Sumo.”

“Really?! Thank you!”

“So don’t cry.”

“Okay!”

I patted the head of this good girl. Young female dwarves had the height of a primary schooler even if they were of age. And they had strong builds. They would surely make for good sumo wrestlers.

“Thank you for opening my sister’s eyes, Lady Floortje.” Werner lowered his head to me.

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

It was almost as if I had put a cheeky dwarven girl in her place through sumo. *Perish the thought! Oho ho!*

“Mamiana is really gifted,” said the prince.

“She is. This trip hasn’t done much for diplomacy, but we’ve found some good rikishi material. Can’t wait for the day we’re all working hard in Aryakan Grand Sumo together.”

Boorman from the elves, Mamiana from the dwarves... And, surely, Kukuri

would rejoin us from the Demon Lord's army. World peace forged through sumo was such a beautiful thing.

I had the dwarven siblings, Werner and Mamiana, show us around the Dwarven Great Caves. It was fascinating just how different things were in the rock-drilling levels compared to topside: tens of thousands of dwarves lived here. The temperatures didn't change much in the caves, so it was apparently cool in summer and warm in winter. We visited a large workshop where numerous dwarves made whatever hardware they wanted, a dwarven school, the water and sewer system, and some other places. I was told this place was originally a large mithril deposit, and as they excavated it, a village was built, then a town—and eventually, it grew into one of the few great caves on the continent. Extremely impressive as it was, the only issue I had with the place was its winding roads. The connections were so three-dimensional it was hard to keep track of where you were.

We did some window-shopping at the central shopping district and drank cave tea at a café. The shopping district was very crowded—not only with dwarves, but with humans and elves too. There seemed to be many merchants who stocked up here and resold goods in their own towns.

Cave tea was made by brewing moss and had a surprisingly good aroma and flavor. You were meant to drink it with hard, sweet cookies. We had a most relaxing teatime as I looked out the café window to watch the crowds walking by. Touring cities for the first time was nice even by itself, to say nothing of doing it together with my beloved prince. I felt warm and fuzzy all over.

Arima had said we would be having one more tournament, but I had to wonder how they were going to go about setting it up. Wouldn't we be out of their reach once we boarded the Magic Train?

"Don't worry, Floortje. No matter what happens, I'm here with you."

As I was lost in thought, the prince became worried. *I'd better stop this.*

"Thank you, Your Highness. That makes me happy."

"Since before the goodwill visit, I'd been planning to propose to you once we were back. And when we cross the border, I intend to do it."

“Oh my! Th-Thank you!”

Ah, dosukoi dosukoi! My cheeks were hot. The prince had taken me by surprise. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

It had been a long two years of waiting. But it was probably for the best. I felt like there was less distance between us thanks to our most recent experiences. An engagement... We would be another step closer to happiness. And my chest was filling with happiness already.

“♪ Haae... Let’s gather flowers and dance... ♪ Haae... January, the blessing of the flowering Adonis... ♪”

Oh no, I was so happy I couldn’t keep from singing a jinku again.

“That brings back memories. You sang that song to me when we first met.”

“Oh, I suppose I did.”

“We’ve come so far since that day, Floortje. Let us continue our journey through the rest of our lives together from now on.”

I was so overcome with emotion I could almost cry. The two of us would finally attain happiness... It was like a dream.

The prince was looking at me with a gentle smile. My blushing self was reflected in his eyes. And he was surely reflected in mine. Werner and Mamiana sitting near us looked like they had overdosed on sugar, but I didn’t care. For we were a pair of sumo wrestlers head over heels for each other. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

The magic lanterns in the caves gradually grew dim. They were linked to the amount of light outside, and were only about half as bright at nighttime. You couldn’t tell day from night inside a cave, so that must’ve been the dwarves’ way of letting the locals know what time of day it was. Still, even at night the brightness wasn’t so low you couldn’t see around you.

Werner escorted us back to the state guest house. The roads of these caves were like a labyrinth, so we would definitely have gotten lost without a local there to guide us.

“Welcome back, milady.”

“Bark, bark!”

Holding Barkus to her bosom, Adela greeted us in front of our room.

“Have you gotten some rest, Adela?”

“Yes, Barkus and I had a good nap.”

She must’ve had it rough, having to drive the coach all the time. We couldn’t have made it out of the Town of Yggdrasil without her help. *Thank you as always.*

“A messenger from the chief came earlier to invite you to dinner.”

I considered the offer. It had been my intention to try what the locals downtown ate, but it would’ve been rude to turn down the chief’s invitation.

“All right. It’s a diplomatic opportunity, so we’ll have dinner with him.”

“No objections from me, Your Highness.”

“Understood. I’ll go let him know,” said Adela.

I took Barkus from her and relaxed on the sofa.

“After we board the Magic Train tomorrow, we’ll be at the border with Aryaka in half a day,” said the prince.

“It’s *that* fast?”

It surely wasn’t as fast as the bullet trains from my previous life, but it seemed to have about as much speed as a locomotive. It was a big help.

I patted Barkus’s back. Ah, it was such a wonderful, relaxing sensation. *Mmmmm...*

“Barkus is such a good, well-behaved boy,” noted the prince.

“Yes, it makes me want to keep him forever.”

“Bark, bark!” The pup seemed happy about the idea.

Keeping a pet was such a healing experience. After a while, Adela returned and led us to the dining room.

“Will the meals be served in courses?” I asked.

“No, it seems they will be served on large plates, and we’ll help ourselves from there.”

Brightly lit by magic lanterns, the banquet hall was full of luxury.

“Glad you’ve decided to join me, Crown Prince Richie, Crown Princess Candidate Floortje. Please help yourselves to our modest dwarven cooking on this fine evening.”

Rather than a stand-up dinner party, it appeared to be the kind where you sat at a table and took as much as you wanted from a platter. And unlike the meals in the Elven Forest Republic, here it was meat all around.

“Thank you for inviting us to this wonderful dinner, Chief Jörd.”

“Can’t imagine you had any decent meals with those salad munchers. Please, eat to your hearts’ content.”

The dwarven chief personally poured a transparent liquid in Prince Richie’s cup.

“Dwarven spirits. It’s customary to drink at the very start of a banquet.”

He poured spirits into my cup too. *Wow, this smell is really strong...* The alcohol content must’ve been through the roof.

“Now, then. To the joint future of the Kingdom of Aryaka and the Dwarven Great Caves!”

“Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

My throat burnt from a single gulp. This was worse than whiskey. The prince and I both coughed several times.

The dinner continued without issue. I had my drink replaced with wine. It seemed only dwarves could handle their spirits—Chief Jörd, his wife, and even their child were all drinking a lot of it. Furthest away from the chief sat Werner and Mamiana. Were they related to him?

My face felt hot. I could see the prince’s face was all red too. Regardless, I enjoyed finally getting to eat some hard meat.

“Where do you raise cows and pigs?”

“There’s a farm outside the caves. We raise our cattle there.”

Cattle did ultimately need sunlight. The dwarves must’ve grown their vegetables outside too. And surely they imported the grain for their bread from the Elven Forest Republic. The two nations didn’t get along well, but that didn’t stop them from engaging in active trade. What a curious relationship.

In general, dwarven cooking seemed to be lightly salted. The strong taste made alcohol a necessity, and dwarves drank their spirits straight and in heavy amounts while digging into salty-sweet meat. The display of such vigorous appetite was pleasant to look at.

“Is the impending attack by the Elven Forest Republic of any concern?” asked the prince.

“What’s there to worry about? You’d be appalled how weak elven soldiers are. The problem is those demons and monsters, of course. They’re strong, but not strong enough to force their way into these caves,” replied the chief.

“So these caves are safe?”

“Yup. This half we’re in faces the elven forest, while the other side faces the lands of the Demon Lord’s army. They come at us pretty often and we push them back every time. No warrior is as strong as a dwarf in a cave,” uttered Chief Jörd with a grin as he bit off a large piece of meat.

Some monsters specialized in cave combat, but there weren’t enough of them to secure an overwhelming advantage. The Demon Lord’s army was an aggregation of monster races, and they *could* mount a strong assault with lots of arachne, which were strong inside caves, but sending ten thousand of them carried the risk of making them all go extinct.

“Rest assured, once we make it to Aryaka, we’ll gather an army and return.”

“You’re leading your troops against those salad munchers? The Dwarven Great Caves will gladly send some of our own to assist you.”

“That would be of much help.”

“The main force of the Elven Forest Republic are those old magicians hiding

deep in the forest. They would make it difficult if they decided to stand in our way, but young elven soldiers and regular monsters are of no concern whatsoever."

For the most part, this coup was carried out by the elven army. Judging by the elders in Hufton, I didn't expect any old elf to help the revolutionaries. As such, it seemed we could just make a combined march with the dwarves on the Town of Yggdrasil, rescue the fairy king, and that would be that.

"Bark, bark!"

Eating his meal under the table, Barkus made himself heard. Of course, I would need to look for his parents and return him during my next visit. This escape would be over once we reached the border on the Magic Train. And here I wanted to have another bout with Arima...

"Wake up, milady. It's morning."

"Ngh... Already?"

"Bark, bark, bark!"

Adela's voice woke me up. Barkus, who had been sleeping with me, was jumping on the bed. I looked around for a window and, upon not finding any, remembered I was in the Dwarven Great Caves. It was underground, after all. As great as it had been to finally get to eat some meat, my stomach felt heavy from all the fatty foods I had eaten the day before.

As I got dressed and stepped outside my bedroom, I ran into Prince Richie, who had just stepped out of his. Though he was a prince, he had been able to take care of himself ever since going through communal life at my stable in his early sumo days. Sumo stables were popular with nobles as places to train their children and teach them discipline, since nobles and commoners received equal treatment there. Some nobles were concerned about potential romance between their children and commoners, but... *Yeah.* Sumo is all about merit: when you're standing in the ring wearing nothing except a mawashi, your social status doesn't matter.

"Good morning, Floortje. You are beautiful as always."

“Thank you. And Your Highness is as handsome as always.”

“Bark, bark!”

“Good morning, Barkus. Lively as ever, mm?”

A dwarven maid brought breakfast on a cart. Time to dig in...

Meat in the morning. *Wow, dwarves.* Why couldn’t they give me fried eggs with ham? I ate a bit of the meat, along with spongy bread and moss tea. The soup was full of solid ingredients: delicious, but rough on the stomach.

“I thought being stuck with bread, soup, and salad for breakfast in the Elven Forest Republic was bad, but this breakfast is a whole different beast,” spoke the prince.

“Can’t wait to get back to Aryaka and have some chanko.”

“Me too. And I want to eat some rice and miso soup.”

Somehow, Japanese food had become commonly available in Aryagard after the construction of the sumo hall, and going on trips such as this one, I felt like Japanese people did in my past life when dining overseas. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

Once I was done with breakfast and was relaxing with a cup of moss tea, Chief Jörd entered the room.

“Morning, you two. Had a good sleep?”

“Thank you for providing us with this marvelous room, Chief Jörd. We had a good rest.”

“Glad to hear it. All right, you ready to head to the Magic Train terminal?”

“It’s ready?”

“Sure is. Loaded the firebox with magic stones and finished checking everything yesterday. You can leave anytime.”

Thanks to that, it appeared we would be able to reach Aryaka by noon.

Behind the chief stood Werner and Mamiana.

“Morning, you two.”

“Good morning, yokozuna and prince. We’ll be your bodyguards until you

reach the border.”

“Please and thank you,” replied the prince.

“Mamiana, would you like to come to Aryagard with me while we’re at it? I’ll find you a sumo stable to join,” I offered.

“I-Is that okay? U-Umm... Grandfather...”

“Sure, if that’s what you want, I have nothing against it.”

“Thank you, Grandfather!”

The road from the border to the capital would take about three days in a coach. After that, it would take two more days to assemble troops, then another three to get back to the border again.

“Now come, you two. It’s this way.”

The chief led the way through heavily winding passages. After descending a staircase that seemed to go on forever, we finally reached the train platform. And wasn’t the Magic Train itself a sight to behold! I adored its fancy design which resembled that of a bullet train. Steam blew out from both sides of the locomotive.

“I present to you the first in a series of Magic Trains, which shall be the pride of the Dwarven Great Caves: the Trailblazer!”

“How magnificent,” was the prince’s reaction.

“It looks great,” I added.

“Bark, bark, bark!” Barkus seemed to be agreeing with me.

The Trailblazer had five cars. An engine, a magic stone storage car, a first-class car, a second-class car, and a third-class car.

“Today’s test run is exclusively reserved for you, Aryakan Crown Prince Richie and Lady Floortje.”

“Thank you. It’s an honor,” replied the prince.

I opened the door of the first-class car and entered. The interior design resembled that of Meiji-era steam trains. I liked its retro look and the luxurious leather-covered seats.

“Now, take your seats. We’re about to depart.”

Taking the chief up on his offer, Prince Richie and I sat facing each other. Adela sat beside me, while Barkus took the seat near the prince, tail wagging in apparent joy.

“Once these get into regular operation, it will be of great benefit to trade with Aryaka,” spoke Chief Jörd.

“I have no doubt that many would want to take a ride, even if the cost was high.”

Traveling was difficult in this world unless you had a dragon to ride. Ordinary people had to use coaches, but having to look after horses made it not much faster than walking. It had taken us a month just to get to the Elven Forest Republic, bumping around in a coach the whole way. Even though we were able to rest in highway towns and villages, it was still a pretty tiring journey.

With this railway connecting the Kingdom of Aryaka and the Dwarven Great Caves, it would become much easier to reach the eastern part of the continent. However, that extended to the Demon Lord’s army as well. If they managed to take over the Dwarven Great Caves, it would become easy for them to transport troops to the border with Aryaka. The convenience of new technology came with its own concerns.

Sounding its steam whistle, the Trailblazer began to leave the dark station with a dull chugging.

“Does this train run on steam?” I asked Chief Jörd who sat in the box seats nearby.

“Steam?”

“You’re not boiling water with fire magic stones and turning it into steam to turn the turbines with?”

“What? Why would we do something so pointlessly complicated? The engine operates on wind magic stones, taking power from them directly and transferring it to the wheels.”

It turned out they had engines that could directly extract gyration, which was simpler than complicated steam engines.

As the Trailblazer chugged along the rails, I once again considered the scale of this whole project. Before Prince Jonas got involved with Jaromíra, he was highly competent. It was truly regrettable he had fallen from power over something so silly.

After everything that happened, he apparently submitted a petition to finally marry Jaromíra. He seemed to be taking his farm work seriously, and even requested to study for the position of an agricultural adviser. And if a former prince became an agricultural adviser, those nobles who made fun of farmers and never listened to them would surely change their attitude. Prince Richie was happy about Jonas's plans, saying it was "just like him to come up with such good ideas." *Two years can change a person in many ways*, I thought. The king was pleased too and, in his reply to Jonas, granted him both permission to marry and permission to study. After just a year of studying Contemporary Magic Agriculture he would become an agricultural adviser. And he would finally marry Jaromíra, no doubt.

As far as I knew, Erhard was living earnestly in reclaimed lands too. When I went to see him together with Phalaris the other day, it surprised me how good at sumo he had become. He was talented, after all. Another eight years of farm work, and he would return to Aryagard to take part in Grand Sumo. I wondered if Maurilio's stable would suit him most. That was so long as General Maurilio welcomed him, of course.

It really felt like Aryaka had entered a new age through sumo. I wanted it to become an even brighter and more peaceful place. And the ones bringing about such a new era would be the prince and myself.

As the Trailblazer kept chugging along the tracks, the windows were suddenly filled with light. We had left the tunnels and entered a red canyon devoid of trees. The train ran on the tracks laid through the middle of the canyon and passed over a railway bridge. I could see the horizon thanks to the clear weather.

“Wow, it’s beautiful!” I exclaimed.

“I know, right? This is the power of dwarven engineering!” said the chief.

“Bark, bark!”

“Oh, it’s clear to you too, pup? Good boy.”

I couldn’t have agreed more with the chief. It felt like the dawn of a new age. They might even be able to make an airship with this technology. One that used helium, that is. If they made one with hydrogen, it would go up in flames.

“Chief, you must see this!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Some strange object is approaching from behind us!”

“What?!”

Chief Jörd got up and made his way to the rear cars.

“What do you think it could be, Floortje?”

“Let’s go find out.”

“Good idea.”

“Bark, bark!”

We got up too and followed the chief. Our escorts, Werner and Mamiana, came with us.

We entered the second-class car. The box seats here were a little tighter, and all the seats had cloth covers. The interior was still very nice, though. Dwarves appeared gruff, but were meticulous in their craft.

On to the third-class car. Being appropriately third class, this car didn’t have seats that faced each other—there was only a row of wooden benches. They smelled of wood and varnish, as they were new.

Opening the door at the end, we came out onto a part of the train designed like a terrace, allowing for a good view into the distance. Chief Jörd was standing with a dwarf who appeared to be an engineer, both of them looking up at the sky and talking to each other.

“What *is* that?”

“Eight large transportation gryphons are carrying something big...? Huh?! Is that a Magic Train?”

There were eight large gryphons in the sky, trying to place something big on the tracks.

“Grrr, bark bark!!!”

Landing with a bang...was another Magic Train. A passenger car was placed at the front, while the engine landed in the back.

“Th-That’s impossible! Where did they get one of those?! E-Even the Northern Great Caves don’t make Magic Trains!”

The strange Magic Train behind us sounded its steam whistle and began chugging along in pursuit. Its passenger car had a terrace-like design in front, just like ours, and on said terrace stood a handsome man with horns growing out of his forehead.

“Mwah ha ha!!! How do you like my special demonic assault-class Magic Train, the Thunder?!” loudly proclaimed the demon, his beauty as striking as it was malignant.

“Th-This cannot be!!! Are you telling me you knew the right gauge?!”

“Mwah ha ha! I helped myself to the details of the project for a bullet train running between the Dwarven Great Caves and Aryaka, and built one of my own! How do you like it, Chief Jörd?! The technological prowess of the demonic realm is second to none on this continent!”

The Thunder picked up speed, quickly approaching the Trailblazer.

“And Lady Floortje, the Aryakan yokozuna! Allow me to introduce myself! I am! The yokozuna of Dark Sumo! The Demon Lord!!!” He bowed to me with an insufferably smug look on his face.

“Is that so...” was the best reply I could come up with, dumbfounded as I was.

With a clank, the two trains were linked together.

“Aggh!!! You bastards even stole the specifications for the coupler!!!”

“Heh heh, you haven’t seen anything yet! Deploy the dohyō!!!”

With the sound of grating metal, the passenger car of the Thunder split down the middle, spreading itself out to each side. Within was a pitch-black dohyō with a black referee. Other than the Demon Lord, the passenger car had Arima, Kukuri, Uta, and a minotaur I hadn’t seen before. The Demon Lord clapped his hands.

“Now, Lady Floortje, let us do sumo! If we win, we take you captive. If you win, we detach this Thunder of ours and let you escape. It’s the first tournament on a train in history!!!”

“With pleasure, Demon Lord!”

Intriguing. Most intriguing. I was highly fond of such overblown wackiness.

“Okay, five-on-five, let’s do this!”

A moment of silence.

“Sir... Don’t...” protested Arima, shaking his head.

But we don’t have five rikishi...

“It’s fine—what does it matter? We have our five, why don’t they have theirs? That’s a them problem!”

Of course, someone who named himself the Demon Lord would so matter-of-factly add conditions we had never agreed upon. *Now what?* We only had me and the prince. I would feel bad for Adela if I made her participate.

“I-I’ll take part, you bastards!” shouted Mamiana, taking a step forward.

Gotcha!—said the Demon Lord’s meaningful smile.

“Ha ha ha! Looks like you have a chance now! All you have to do is win every bout!”

“Wait, Mamiana—there’s no way you can go against them in the ring!”

“Sure I can, Werner! If I don’t offer to help now, then can I even be called a dwarf?!”

I liked her spirit, but she didn’t know much about proper sumo. And we still needed two more.

“Do you think you could go, Adela?”

“Of course not! Who do you think I am, milady?”

“W-Well, it’s just...I thought you could apply some of that remarkable military knowledge of yours. And you’ve been watching bouts from up close all this time.”

“My remarkable military knowledge is saying I can’t beat anyone if I go in the ring. Even this new minotaur looks really strong!”

He certainly did. Though he was surely below Uta on the table of rankings.

“M-Maybe you stand a slim chance against Uta.”

“Never did, never will. I couldn’t possibly bring down a wrestler who takes root in the ground.”

Perhaps. The prince barely beat her last time, having to rely on the Maglev Triple Attack Force Out. *What do we do...?*

“Also, milady... Now that we’re out of the elven forest, you might be unable to use Air Sumo Form anymore...”

“Oh...”

She had a point. Add that to our list of troubles.

“Don’t worry! You still have our protection.”

Numerous green lights appeared out of my and the prince’s bodies and surrounded us.

“Wh-Who are you?”

“We are spirits of the wind. We couldn’t help you in the caves, but we can here!”

“Let’s do sumo together!” said another spirit.

“Sumooo sumooo!” said a third.

“I love sumo, it’s fun!” said a fourth.

The green lights appeared to be spirits—and honestly, their aid would come very much in handy. We needed a way to deal with Uta’s poisonous pollen and

Kukuri's threads. Maybe if we had Mamiana use the Air Sumo Form and fielded her against Uta... *Hmm...* Was it doable? Frankly, having to win every bout put us in a tight spot. If only we had one more...

"Bark, bark!!!" barked the pup in my bosom.

"What? You can't participate, Barkus, you have four legs."

"He would definitely need arms..." added Adela.

Barkus began twisting in my embrace. He quickly grew in size.

"RUFF, RUFF!"

Suddenly, I realized I was clinging to a muscular wolf-headed man.

"Ahhhh!!! Go back, go back!!!"

Together with Adela, we gave the half-naked wolf-man a good drubbing. *Give me my sweet little Barkus back!!!*

"Floortje, Adela, come back to your senses. B-Barkus, you want to participate?" asked the prince.

"RUFF, RUFFF!"

Nooo! Even his voice is deep now—this isn't our Barkus at all!!!

"Floortje, spare him the harite. He seems to be in pain."

"But this isn't my Barkus!!!"



“B-But we could really use some man power right now, so don’t go putting him out of commission before we even get started.”

As the prince grabbed my arm, I finally realized I had been unconsciously performing harite on the strange wolf. *Sorry.*

It seemed we now had four. Could we do this...? Suddenly, I felt a gust of wind blow from the direction of Aryaka—*Yes... We might get our fifth.* Such a premonition flashed through the back of my mind.

“What about the fifth spot, milady? I’m not participating, of course.”

“We’ll proceed as four.”

“You and His Highness are the most promising contestants, milady. There’s no telling how well Mamiana and the wolf-man will do.”

“W-Well, for now let’s just do our best,” I replied.

“Hopefully the god of sumo will help you out...”

“Luck *can* be the deciding factor.”

“You’re at a pretty big disadvantage today, though.”

She was right, but we had no choice, since we were making our escape to Aryaka.

“In what order shall we field our rikishi?” asked Adela, her eyes those of a soldier.

Let’s see...

“Mamiana first, then the muscular wolf, then Prince Richie, no fourth, and me at the end. How does that sound?”

“The other side will probably field the minotaur first, Uta second, Kukuri third, Arima fourth, and the Demon Lord last.”

“I’m going against Kukuri? This is getting exciting.”

“You’ve brought Uta down before, Your Highness, so it *would* be an option to put you against her once more for a higher chance of victory...”

“No, she has probably come up with a countermeasure for the Maglev Triple

Attack Force Out by now. And I have no doubt Kukuri would beat Mamiana and Barkus."

"I agree, Your Highness."

Still, regardless of whether they faced Uta or the minotaur, I couldn't imagine Mamiana or the creep in the wolf mask winning at all. In any case, we would just have to see how this went. *Woman up, Floortje!*

A bridge was extended between the tail of the Trailblazer and the front of the Thunder. It even had handrails.

“Hm... Not bad for a demonic imitation of our train,” spoke Chief Jörd.

“Yeah, this goblin professor here knows his stuff. He made it,” replied the Demon Lord.

“N-N-Nice to gob-meet you! I used your Trailblazer as gob-reference!”

“Oh, a goblin made it? How interesting... It’s a job well done. Nice work,” said the chief.

The goblin professor looked bashful and happy.

“It was easy to gob-model it after yours since you made yours first.”

“Come on, you’re not giving yourself enough credit. Just knowing a train’s design and seeing one in action is hardly enough to make such a close copy. You should be proud of yourself, Professor.”

“Th-Thank you, gob. Y-You dwarves are the best at gob-making stuff. I have the utmost gob-respect for you.”

“So how did you design the engine? What lets you move faster than the Trailblazer?”

“I-It’s an autonomous triple cylinder gob-engine operating on fire magic stones. It heats air and utilizes its gob-expansion, gob. It is, however, gob-inefficient.”

“Oh! I’ve never thought of that. Would you let me take a look at your engine?”

“Gob-follow me. We’ve done a lot with the gob-design.”

“Can’t wait to see it. In exchange, I’ll tell you the obscure technical know-how behind the Trailblazer.”

“Y-You’d gob-do that for me?!”

“You can’t make amazing machinery by keeping knowledge to yourself. But mind that we’ll borrow any useful know-how of yours too!”

“Be my gob-guest!”

The two technology enthusiasts happily proceeded to the Thunder’s locomotive together. As silence permeated the surroundings, the Demon Lord and I looked at each other.

“W-Well, what can I say? Engineers sure love exchanging their tech,” said the demon.

“Looks like it. Never thought a goblin would be so capable with it,” I replied.

“Yeah, it’s because of how there’s so many of them. You get a lot of unique individuals.”

I wondered if goblins were like the humans of the demonic realm. Among all the races on the continent, humans lost to the elves in terms of intelligence, to the dwarves in terms of toughness, and to the halflings in the arts. However, there were a lot of us, so we had many unique outliers.

We stepped onto the dohyō car, silently bowing to the line of Dark Rikishi waiting for us. Arima lowered his head as though to apologize for his lord. *Don’t let it get to you*, I thought: enforcing rules of team competitions was a valid strategy. Arima was certainly an upright wrestler.

“So, we’re fielding Mamiana first, Barkus second, Prince Richie third, no fourth, and Lady Floortje fifth,” spoke Adela.

“No fourth, eh? That’s nice,” replied the Demon Lord.

“Have you ever heard of sportsmanship?”

“Hah hah hah, what a lively maid you’ve got here! You’re an amusing... Huh? Huuuh?!”

The Demon Lord stared at Adela in astonishment, his mouth agape. It was an odd sight, given his otherwise easygoing character.

“Wh-What’s the matter, Demon Lord?”

“I-I mean, you, you’re actually...”

Adela stomped on his foot. Faced with such a turn of events, the rest of us went silent.

“What. Is. The. Matter?!”

“Oh, n-nothing, sorry, I-I misunderstood...”

“Good. If I catch you saying something silly, you’ll be in for a divi...for a maid curse!”

“Yes, I’m sorry.”

W-Wow, Adela. She must’ve been the first maid in history to stomp on the foot of a Demon Lord. *Also, what’s a “maid curse”?*

We helped Mamiana and Barkus put on their mawashi. Thankfully, the prince and I had spares we could lend them. The one Barkus got was pretty gaudy, being adorned with various patterns.

“It’s a sample mawashi from an armorer I frequent. It suits him well, so it’s not a problem, is it?” said Adela.

“That’s true. But hurry up and return to being my adorable Barkus.”

“Yes, hurry up.”

“RUFF...” I could hear dejection in Barkus’s voice.

With Mamiana, I put a mawashi on top of her traditional Dwarven Sumo outfit.

“It’s pretty tight. You’re meant to be gripping this for the most part, I take it?”

“Yes. It might be difficult for you to adapt, coming from Dwarven Sumo which is focused on throws, but I know you can do it.”

“I’ll do my best!”

Mamiana had the basics down, which already put her above Boorman, but she would need more training before she could do proper sumo.

The minotaur Gogontes performed shiko. He looked to be a fine wrestler who would make for a tough opponent for Mamiana. He didn’t appear to have any special abilities, however, relying instead on raw muscle, and he’d probably be a real menace at the initial charge. *Maybe I should tell Mamiana to perform a* henka*, sidestepping at the start to dodge him...* On second thought, though, I decided a beginner shouldn’t even try such a move. It could only end with her

getting simply pushed out in the aftermath.

“Mamiana, your opponent will come charging at you full force at the start, so be sure to endure as best you can.”

“Got it. I’ll show you how tough dwarves are!”

My team members made me nervous. Still, that was part of the fun of team sumo.

I raised my hand towards the black dohyō and cast the summoning spell for one of my own. White parts quickly spread on the black surface, finally settling in the shape of the yin-yang symbol. The translucent referee, too, became a gray one.

With the loud sound of a steam whistle, the two trains sped through the canyon.

“Now let us do sumo, yokozuna Floortje!”

“Yes, it is time, yokozuna Demon Lord!”

It was time for a Magic Train tournament!

“On the east, Mamiana, Mamiana... On the west, Gogontes, Gogontes...”

Spreading her white fan, Adela announced the participating rikishi from atop the dohyō. *Good luck, Mamiana.* Her opponent Gogontes was, well, massive. He was at least as big as the hellfire troll Aikio, and his muscles, resembling wires tied together in appearance, were intimidating.

“Heh heh heh. A beginner like you is no mino-match for me.”

“We’ll see about that, you big oaf!!!”

The two rikishi were already engaged in verbal warfare on the dohyō.

It must be noted that sumo done to the sound of a speeding train under a clear blue sky with a canyon around you was a blissful thing. Journeys didn’t get much better than that.

“Face each other.”

Gradually, the two wrestlers’ breathing synchronized. At last, they touched

the ground with their fists, rose up at the same time, and loudly crashed into each other. Gogontes had put his back into it, slamming into Mamiana with incredible force. He appeared to be the type of sumo wrestler that focused on charging. Alas, there was so much difference between his three or so meters in height and Mamiana's sub-one-and-a-half that his chest and forehead—the body parts of a charging wrestler carrying the most momentum—didn't find their target. Mamiana, meanwhile, got close to Gogontes and headbutted his chest. *Bam!* With the sound of a firing cannon, the minotaur's charge was stopped, allowing Mamiana to enter a deep double underarm grip. She attempted a major outer reap with her leg, but Gogontes was still steady on his feet and simply rebounded her leg with his raw muscle. His brawn was no joke.

"Kgh!"

"You're stronger than I mino-thought. But...!"

Reaching over Mamiana's back, the minotaur got a firm grip on the back of her mawashi and began pulling up with such strength, you could see his muscles swell. *Oh no, he's going to lift her up!*—or so I thought for a moment, but Mamiana held on to his mawashi for dear life. Dwarves were amazing for being able to rival minotaurs in their enormous strength despite being so small.

"Finish her, Gogontes!!!"

"Show her how it's done!"

Shrill cheers were coming from the monsters' side—mainly from Uta.

Remaining in a deep double underarm grip, the dwarf twisted to try and throw Gogontes off-balance. This bout was now all strength, no technique.

"Push him, Mamiana! You win if he steps outside the ring!"

"Bring him down!"

"RUFF, RUFF, RUFF!"

Mamiana herself appeared to have realized the correct strategy to use as she began pushing her gigantic opponent with all she had. After all, there was no ring in Dwarven Sumo, and you had to bring your opponent down to the ground to win. In response, Gogontes readjusted his grip on her mawashi to hold both

his arms over hers, and began pushing too. Now both were using the pushing style of sumo. Mamiana had the advantage thanks to her deep underarm grip, which allowed her to push the minotaur's body parts which had a low center of mass. *Is this one in the bag?*

"Y-You're really strong for someone so mino-small. I took you mino-lightly. But it's time to end this!"

"Ngh, ggghhh!!!"

An image of an erupting volcano manifested behind Gogontes. The spirit of sumo! The red, viscous lavalike liquid began rotating in a circle.

"There it is! Gogontes's great eruption!"

"Do your best, Gogo!"

His nickname was "Gogo"? *How unexpectedly cute.*

Under the buff of the spirit of sumo, his strength and agility had reached new levels.

"W-Wow, Gogontes is strong," commented the prince.

"He is," I agreed.

Mamiana began to lose ground. Gogontes pushed diagonally to make her end up on the tail of the black dohyō. She would be debuffed at the last moment.

"Agh, give mino-up already!!!"

"There's no way I could!!!"

But the sumo spirit's buff wouldn't allow her to endure, giving Gogontes the strength to continue his push.

"I'll become the best sumo wrestler on the continent!!!" bellowed Mamiana, not giving up in her efforts to push.

Soon enough, she wasn't losing ground so quickly anymore.

"Gah! It cannot mino-be!"

"Aaaggghhh!!!"

An image of hammers and pickaxes appeared behind the dwarf—her spirit of

sumo. Countless hammers and pickaxes bloomed out of thin air and started to rotate. Mamiana had finally managed to stop the minotaur's advance, her feet having barely avoided ending up on the black part of the ring. This time, she began to push him. Behind Gogontes was a ring of lava. Behind Mamiana—a flower of tools. In their indomitability, the two spirits of sumo struggled to surpass each other in speed.

"Not bad, Mamiana!"

"You too, Gogontes!"

Frozen in the center of the ring, the two of them tried to push each other, neither giving an inch.

"Don't go easy on her, Gogontes! She's a worthy wrestler!" shouted the Demon Lord.

As Gogontes heard this, his eyes briefly opened wide in surprise, and he let go of Mamiana, which she saw as a perfect opportunity to make an all-out push.

"Sorry. Blinding Head Chop Down!"

Smack! The minotaur's upper arm landed on Mamiana's nape.

"Agh!"

She tried to keep pushing in spite of this, but Gogontes dodged her advance, causing her to fall.

"Winner, Gogontes," announced the gray referee, raising his hand to the west.

There was nothing she could do against an opponent who moved out of the way while she was blinded. The Blinding Head Chop Down was a pretty terrifying technique. Mamiana was sitting on the dohyō in a daze.

"I couldn't mino-win without a magic skill. You're mino-strong."

"Th-Thank you."

With her face all creased up, Mamiana cried, but got to her feet. This outcome was for the best. If she trained while remembering this bitter experience, she would no doubt become a force to be reckoned with.

Friend and foe alike clapped for the spectacular bout. *Ah, sumo is so nice.*

“Good luck, Barkus. End it quickly and return to how you were before.”

“RUFF...”

With his shoulders slumping from my words of encouragement for whatever reason, Barkus headed to the dohyō. In this thin but muscular beast-man form, Barkus looked nothing like his old self. And his mawashi was gaudy.

“On the east, Barkus, Barkus... On the west, Uta, Uta...” announced Adela on the dohyō.

Barkus looked pretty good there too, appearing tough and masculine. But I couldn’t expect a former pup to win in sumo. Especially because he was going up against Uta, an alraune. He would probably come back in tears after she poisoned him. But I had to appreciate him trying to help us out.

Uta climbed the dohyō next, unsteady on her feet as ever. I doubted she could perform shiko at all. Did she have a way of dealing with magic?

“Hey there, my adorable doggy. I’ll send you to the world of dreams right away, okay? ♪”

“RUFF, RUFF.”

Deflecting Uta’s provocation, Barkus raised his leg and performed shiko.

STOMP!!!

Huh? What’s with that incredible force? I sensed the air of a mighty warrior from him. *S-Stop it, I don’t know of a Barkus that’s strong!*

“Milady, if he is who I think he is...” spoke up Adela, who had finished her announcing duties.

“I think I feel the presence of a fenrir from him. Are these monsters as powerful as the people say?” I asked.

“Yes. Strong enough to be called kings of the forest. Some say a fenrir can even kill a dragon.”

“N-No... I don’t want a strong Barkus...”

“Milady, we’ll be down two if Barkus loses. It’ll be the end for us.”

“I don’t like either option. We yokozuna are selfish like that.”

Adela frowned.

“Wh-What’s up with you? Why do you look so strong, little pup?” asked Uta.

“GRRR...”

“Man, you’re kinda freaking me out, so I’m gonna put you down in an instant.”

You shouldn’t say things like that out loud, Uta.

“Face each other.”

The two wrestlers took their positions behind their respective lines in the ground. You couldn’t get up without synchronizing your breathing, but there were some wrestlers in Demonic Sumo whose breathing was difficult to read. I wondered how they dealt with that.

At last, the two’s breathing synchronized and they touched the ground with their hands. It looked almost as if Barkus’s body had swelled up to twice its size. At the same time, Uta sprayed poisonous pollen from the many flowers on her body.

“Now go numb alr—”

“**RUUFFFFFFF!!!**”

Barkus’s howl blew the pollen away. It might’ve even had a paralyzing effect, since Uta was frozen in place as Barkus headbutted her chest with the speed of a bullet. With an incredible *smash*, Uta was almost blown away, but just barely managed to remain in place thanks to the roots she had underfoot.

“Wh-What the hell?! What’s wrong with you?!”

Having lost her cool, Uta used her Teppo Whips, but Barkus easily dodged all of them with incredible speed. His ability to perceive moving objects and dodge them in time was unbelievable. These weren’t the sort of reflexes one would typically need in sumo, but they were certainly incredible.

“Kgh!!!”

Uta sprayed her pollen once again. This time, it moved slowly towards Barkus.

Perhaps its mass was greater than before.

Barkus howled at the sky. It was the sort of beastly howl that gripped you by the heart. Around him appeared so many green lights—spirits—and you could even hear them.

“Is that...Air Sumo Form?”

“How are the wind spirits helping him outside of a forest?”

With the spirits’ aid, the already fast Barkus became fast enough to leave an afterimage as he ran around Uta, performing harite. This wasn’t really sumo anymore, but he looked fierce regardless.

“It hurts, it hurts!!! Agh! Take this, you cheeky little dog! Thousand Whips!!!”

Endless coils of ivy shot out of Uta’s body, assaulting the beast-man. With a howl which registered on a different musical scale, Barkus caused countless red lights to appear from the ground. These lights formed a flame and burned the ivy away.

“N-Now it’s fire spirits! And there isn’t even any fire around us!” said the prince.

“This is spirit magic!” I exclaimed.

The fire spirits turned blue in midair, then unleashed a cloud of mist.

“Wh-Where are you?! What a dirty trick, you little doggy!!!”

“RUFF, RUFF, RUFF!!!”

Running through the mist with the speed of a cannonball came Barkus, crashing into Uta. *Not again! She can take a direct impact!*

With one more unique howl from the beast-man, the blue spirits turned yellow and sank inside the dohyō. *Smash!!!*

“No way!”

Uta came tearing out of the ground—the work of the yellow spirits, perhaps. Barkus’s incredibly fast charge sent Uta tumbling out of the ring. She almost fell off the train, but Kukuri shot web from her wrists like a certain hero from American comics and caught her by the ankles.

A few seconds of silence.

“W-Winner, Barkus!”

“RUFF, RUFF, RUFF, RUFF!!!”

The beast-man raised both his arms and pumped his fists. *You can’t pose like that on the dohyō, Barkus.* He looked happy as he left the ring.

“Great work, Barkus. You did well,” I praised him.

“Thank you, we really needed that win,” said Prince Richie.

“I’ve revised my opinion of you, Barkus,” added Adela.

“RUFF, RUFF, RUFF!”

I patted his head. With that, we had secured one victory. As long as the prince and I both won our bouts, we would be in the clear!

“By the way, Barkus, go back to how you were.”

“Go back.”

“Ruuuff...”

Barkus performed a somersault, causing smoke to appear. Once it cleared, the old adorable pup was back. *Thank goodness*. I was worried he would stay in that muscular form forever.

“Who’s a good boy? You’re a good boy. Well done, Barkus.”

“Good, boy, good boy!”

“Bark, bark!”

Together with Adela, we patted him to our hearts’ content. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

Chugga chugga, chugga chugga...

The two Magic Trains were passing over a long canyon bridge. Looking ahead, I saw we would soon be entering a mountainous region. Any bends would affect the bout through centrifugal force.

Prince Richie took off his mantle.

“I should get going, Floortje. Have to secure that advantage.”

“Be careful. Kukuri is very knowledgeable in Aryakan Sumo.”

“Yes, I’ve seen her bouts. She was a good wrestler with a spring in her step even in human form. I’m sure she’s even stronger now, in monster form,” said the prince with a smile.

I had met Kukuri a year prior, having directed her to Clifton’s stable. I had known she was a monster from the moment I met her, but I thought it would make things interesting if demons and monsters discovered sumo and we could have bouts together. Not that I ever expected them to get *this* serious about it. Aikio, Givun, Gogontes, Uta, Kukuri, Arima... They were all splendid rikishi. So what if they served the Demon Lord? They were all proper sumo wrestlers who entered the ring, performed shiko, and won or lost. I really wanted to visit the demonic realm on a sumo tour. Maybe I needed to talk to the Demon Lord about it once all this nonsense was behind us. It would be far preferable to going to war.

“On the east, Richie, Richie... On the west, Kukuri, Kukuri...”

Called up by Adela, the two climbed the dohyō. Arachne truly were at an advantage in sumo, with the weight of that spider abdomen and the stability provided by six legs. I was very jealous.

“Kukuri, you don’t plan on returning to Aryaka?”

“Y-You have me confused with someone else, Prince. And besides, neither of us will have time for sumo once war breaks out.”

“Clifton was greatly saddened by your departure.”

“I...see...” Kukuri was visibly shaken up by this.

I hated the idea of two people who obviously had feelings for each other being torn apart by a war. And to prevent that, I needed to hurry back to Aryaka, gather troops, and wipe out the elven revolutionaries.

“Face each other.”

Kukuri shook her head as if to cast her hesitation away, and entered the starting position. The two wrestlers’ breathing gradually synchronized, and once

it did, they loudly crashed and grabbed each other's mawashi. The prince had his right arm in an underarm grip and his left in an overarm one, and the same applied to Kukuri. They were locked up, trying to utilize the vibration of the train to make the other lose balance. It was quite a sight, as both of them were highly skilled wrestlers. *One shouldn't jump around in the ring regardless of one's strength*—I thought as I patted Barkus's back. He was asleep as he was probably tired from the bout.

Still locked up, Prince Richie and Kukuri tried various techniques on each other, to no avail. I once again realized how powerful Kukuri was in her monster form. But if we secured a win here, we'd be fine even if we had to lose the fourth bout by default.

The prince made a move, spreading himself out as if pulling on the right side of Kukuri's mawashi. She resisted it through complex movements of her six legs. Was the prince going for a *kakenage*—a hooking inner thigh throw—or a hip throw? Kukuri didn't wait around to find out, instead using her front-left and middle-left legs to perform a throw of her own. It was really amazing how arachne could use six legs. Things like that were what made me so excited about Demonic Sumo.

Kukuri tried to throw the prince off-balance. He leaned on her legs to avoid it and pulled on her mawashi. Was it *nichōnage*—a body drop throw? But he would have to sweep all six of her legs to pull it off. At that point, the technique would, in fact, have to be called *rokuchōnage* to account for that many legs. Could he even reach all of them?

"Hang in there, Your Highness!"

"Don't lose to her, Your Highness!"

The prince smiled in response to my and Adela's cheering. Behind him, his spirit of sumo in the form of turning gears appeared.

"I won't lose to you!" shouted Kukuri.

Behind her appeared her own spirit of sumo, taking the form of a thread-spinning wheel. The spirit of sumo seemed to take all sorts of forms—I wondered if there was any corresponding difference in their power. It felt like gears lent their strength to their user faster than any other form, but I could be

biased, since this was the form that mine took.

As the trains entered a mountainous region, the tracks began bending left and right. This altered the direction of the force applied by the wrestlers. Skillfully utilizing centrifugal force, the prince performed a trip.

“Zoom Body Drop Throw!”

As he went for a rokuchōnage, his right leg grew longer—or at least, it felt that way. The spiritual extension of his leg was translucent. He had discovered a new magically imbued technique, one that allowed him to make his leg longer!

“Kgh!”

“Ngh!”

The train passed through a rough patch.

“Got you!”

As Kukuri pulled her right hand back through what appeared to be empty air, the part of the prince’s leg extension that would have been the ankle was pulled along unnaturally with it.

“Kgh! Is this because of your threads?!”

“I’m not holding back!”

Blocking the prince’s body drop throw with her threads, she used her front-left and middle-left legs to sweep her opponent’s left leg from behind. The two of them went tumbling down, with Prince Richie underneath. As I wondered who would land first, the prince’s hand touched the ground. Kukuri, who had folded her six legs, landed on top of him. *So...?*

“Winner, Kukuri!”

Not showing us any sympathy, the gray referee raised his hand to the west. *Ahh...*

As the prince got up, shaking his head, demons and monsters came running to Kukuri’s side.

“He would’ve landed that rokuchōnage if not for your threads! He’s really good,” said Uta.

“Good mino-work.”

“You did it! This one’s pretty much in the bag now!” rejoiced the Demon Lord.

“Well done...” spoke Arima.

The prince made his way back to us.

“I’m sorry, Floortje. I lost.”

“You can’t win them all in sumo. And Kukuri was really strong.”

“I completely forgot she had threads. They’re so dangerous because you can’t see them.”

“You should’ve used the Air Sumo Form.”

“Oh, right, I forgot.”

She’d probably kept her thread-based skills under wraps specifically to make us forget she had them at all. That strategy of hers got her this win.

“But that Zoom Body Drop Throw was amazing. It looked very effective against many-legged opponents.”

“Thank you. I need some more practice with it, I guess.”

That’s right—my Prince Richie was no weakling who would be daunted by a loss or two. Still, we were now in trouble. What were we supposed to do?

“Hah hah hah, since you’ve got nobody to field next, it’s a walkover for us, Lady Floortje. You’ve lost,” crowed the Demon Lord.

Indeed, even were I to win the fifth bout, we would be down two to three—in other words, in dire straits.

“Referee, do we lose if our wrestler doesn’t show up right away? Or can we wait?”

“We can wait for a while... Why, is someone coming?”

I looked to the western sky—the direction of Aryaka. Our wrestler was coming...or so it kind of felt like. Sort of.

“Give us ten minutes. If nobody comes, we’ll accept defeat.”

“What?! Who the hell would show up on a running Magic Train?! You know

that’s impossible. You’re just wasting everyone’s time!” protested the Demon Lord.

A water bucket near the ring swayed unnaturally, then fell over.

“Oh, is it the vibration? For crying out loud...” complained Adela.

As she was about to climb the dohyō, broom in hand, a face appeared out of the water puddle.

“My! What a strange place this is.”

Inside the puddle was the face of a beautiful woman whose age I couldn’t estimate. Who *was* this?

“Up we get...” mumbled the woman as she climbed right out of the puddle. She was voluptuous and wore Japanese-looking clothes.

“Well, well, who do we have here? Why, it’s the Demon Lord’s brats. And what in the world is this place?”

“Gah, the mizuchi granny! Why did you come?” asked the Demon Lord.

“Why, I sensed some curious clashing of magic near my abode and came to take a closer look. What might you be up to, may I ask?”

“We’re doing sumo, o wise mizuchi,” I explained.

“Oh, that martial art the boy spoke of? I see... So you engage in it on top of a moving machine?”

“Ah, no, we normally do it inside buildings. This is a special occasion.”

Who was this boy she’d mentioned?

“Either way, we’re gonna win in five minutes and take you prisoner!”

“Hey, if we have Lady Floortje imprisoned, does that mean she can train us in sumo?!” asked Uta.

“Th-That’s a good idea. She’s incredibly strong,” replied Kukuri.

“We’ll be...hospitable...”

The Demon Lord frowned at the inappropriate excitement of his subordinates.

“Why are you so excited to learn from a woman who would lose because she didn’t think to bring enough wrestlers?”

“Eh? Come on, sir, you know this is just underhanded,” said Uta.

“I-I agree...” added Kukuri.

“That’s one way of winning team competitions! What is wrong with you two?!”

The mizuchi, who had come over to our side, cocked her head in puzzlement.

“Does the Aryakan side not have enough wrestlers?”

“Yes. We’re in the middle of an escape from the Elven Forest Republic.”

“I see. ’Tis good timing, then, for the boy should be coming to see me today. Shall I call him here?”

“Who is ‘the boy’?”

“Boy... Come here...”

Closing her eyes, the mizuchi started mumbling to herself. Just who *was* she? Since she and the Demon Lord were acquainted, was she related to monsters? The two didn’t seem to get along very well, though. Perhaps she was a hermit, given that she lived in the mountains.

Suddenly, my sumo senses directed my attention to the western sky.

“Ten minutes have almost passed. If nobody is coming...”

“He’s here,” I said, interrupting the referee.

A red dot appeared in the western sky, growing ever larger. *He’s here.* After circling around the dohyō car, the enormous red dragon descended directly upon the ring. He wrapped himself in smoke before landing, and by the time his feet smashed into the ground, he was in the form of a young boy.

“Hey, Floortje, Richie. What’s going on over here?”

“Phalaris!” exclaimed the two of us.

It was Phalaris, a holder of the ōzeki rank in Aryakan sumo. As a dragon who could assume human form, he was the perfect opponent for Arima.

“We’re doing team sumo with the Demon Lord’s army.”

“Whoa, that sounds fun! You winning?”

“We’re losing, currently down two to one. We were about to lose due to not having a rikishi to field.”

“Huh. I came because Granny called me over. Looks like I made it just in time.”

Phalaris took off his student uniform, leaving only the scarlet mawashi he had on underneath.

“Am I going up against that flashy guy?” asked Phalaris, pointing his finger at the Demon Lord.

“No, you’ll be fighting that red man,” I explained.

“Oh! Is he strong?”

“He’s a frightening wrestler who holds the rank of ōzeki in Demonic Sumo and has both magic-imbued techniques and his own spirit of sumo.”

“Just the way I like it! Man, this is gonna be great, ah ha ha!”

The mizuchi came to our side and smiled at Phalaris.

“Show me this ‘sumo’ of yours, boy.”

For a moment, Phalaris was speechless.

“G-Granny! Why’d you make yourself look so young?! I was wondering who this woman was!”

“Shush! ’Tis my usual human form! Have you no manners?”

“Who is she, Phalaris?” asked the prince.

“A water dragon I met not long ago. I was gonna pay her a visit today.”

So she was another dragon? That explained how she could just emerge from a puddle like she had earlier.

“I am the guardian of the lake by that mountain over there. Pleased to meet you, Lady Floortje, Your Highness.”

“Likewise.”

“Thank you for always looking after Phalaris.”

“Hwah hwah hwah! Oh, fret yourselves not—we elderly dragons rarely have much to do. ’Tis a blessing to have someone to talk to. Why, the boy told me a great deal about you two as well.”

We had just barely been saved by Phalaris’s friend. At some point, the train had left the mountainous region and entered a plain. *Now, let us get back to sumo!*

“Hey, you—the old guy. Are you the referee? Where’s the usual one?” asked Phalaris.

“Watch your tongue! For the sake of impartiality, the white Aryakan referee and the black demonic referee fused into one, producing me, the gray referee.”

“You sumo staff really feel like monsters, you know that?”

“Silence!”

In the ring, Phalaris was giving the gray referee a hard time. He was rather flippant.

“Listen, Phalaris. Arima is skilled with the Blinding Head Chop Down. As the name goes, it debuffs you with blindness,” I explained.

“Huh. Yeah, I guess I’ll have to watch out for that one, since he’s so huge.”

“You can avoid it by pushing forward with all you have, or by retreating. Be careful.”

“Thanks, Floortje.”

“Do your best, Phalaris. We’re counting on you.”

“No prob, Richie!”

“Are you ready yet?” asked the gray referee.

“Hold up a minute. Is everything allowed in Demonic Sumo? Can I use fire breath? Is that fair game?”

“Uh... Fire breath is too powerful, so it’s not allowed. It wouldn’t be sumo anymore,” replied the referee.

“Yeah, fair enough. Can’t call it sumo if you’re just hurling fire at each other.”

I certainly wouldn’t want to see such a bout either.

“What about wings?”

“Wings and flight are both allowed. To my knowledge, some wrestlers in Demonic Sumo specialize in aerial combat. When rikishi take flight, a colorful wall appears above the bales at the edges of the ring. Going through that wall will result in your loss.”

“Gotcha. This should be fun!”

As Phalaris crossed his hands in front of his chest, bat-like wings appeared out of his back. I was interested in how the bout would go with Arima using his own set of wings.

I thought back to what the referee had said: there was aerial combat in Demonic Sumo? There seemed to be a lot of depth to it.

Arima climbed the dohyō and performed shiko. *STOMP! STOMP!* I liked its sound. As if not to lose to him, Phalaris did it too. *Stomp! Stomp!* The sound of his feet was a little quieter. He didn’t have any weight to speak of, after all. And if he did sumo in dragon form, his body would stick out of the train.

He and Arima faced each other from across the lines in the ground.

“A dragon... This should be...interesting...”

“I’ve never had a bout with a greater demon before either. Should be fun!” replied Phalaris, a smile on his face.

Arima silently nodded to these words.

“Face each other.”

Phalaris and Arima stared each other down. With both of them having the rank of ōzeki, the menace in the air was so palpable that said air felt thick and sticky. The two wrestlers’ breathing synchronized. Flapping his large red wings, Phalaris charged as if taking flight. Arima, on the other hand, was more solemn in his charge as he met Phalaris head-on. The two smashed into each other, neither securing an advantage. They proceeded to grab each other’s mawashi. Arima struck his opponent with a teppo, but Phalaris paid it no heed as he

grabbed the left side of Arima's mawashi.

"Here I go!!!" he shouted, flapping his wings with all he had in order to push Arima.

Little by little, the demon was losing ground.

"Is he going to push him out just like that...?"

Suddenly, Phalaris's leg stepped into the black part of the ring. One could easily see his strength leaving him.

"Wow, it has *this* much effect?! For real?!"

Seeing Arima raise an arm, Phalaris let go of his mawashi and made a retreat, using his wings for extra speed. His naked back was covered in sweat.

"Man, you're strong! You're second only to Floortje!"

Arima remained silent.



As the demon pushed forward, the two of them crashed into each other between the lines in the ground again. This bout was particularly worth watching. They once again grabbed each other's mawashi and became locked up, trying to throw each other off-balance. Phalaris was stronger, Arima more cunning. The latter's moves were more fluid.

"You cheeky demon!!!"

Remaining locked up with Arima, Phalaris began flapping the wings on his back, lifting himself into the air. Arima flapped his small wings too. It was the start of midair sumo! Arima pulled his opponent onto his hips and threw him. The dragon skillfully readjusted his position midair. Next, Arima performed a Harite Catapult from above, firing a shock wave at Phalaris as his arm broke the sound barrier. Phalaris dodged it with adroit maneuvers. Bouts became really showy when both wrestlers had wings.

"Tunnel ahead!" warned the gray referee, pointing in the direction our Magic Trains were heading in.

There was indeed a pitch-black tunnel ahead. Arima and Phalaris hurried back to the ground. Inside, the tunnel's orange cave lights illuminated the two wrestlers in the ring as though someone was taking photos using a camera flash. Once we were out of the tunnel, the bright sun illuminated our surroundings anew.

It was like a life-and-death struggle. Arima and Phalaris both were drenched in sweat. The savage looks on their faces were beyond description as they pulled out one top-level sumo technique after another.

"Man, this is fun! This is seriously fun, Arima!"

The demon nodded with a smile on his face.

"Still in, still in!"

They were certainly evenly matched. Phalaris had grown really strong over the years.

With sumo taking place in one of the cars, the Magic Trains ran through a dull red wasteland in what felt like an endless journey, or a scene from a Western.

Phalaris had superior strength, and Arima superior technique. It was Grand Sumo where strength and technique were equally matched. Incidentally, it is when a bout becomes drawn out that we start calling it Grand Sumo.

As Arima shook his shoulders, a smile appeared on his face. Since his face was scary, his smiles were somewhat scary too. Behind him manifested a flame that resembled lava, which started spinning in place. It was his spirit of sumo!

“Ggghhh!!!” groaned Phalaris under Arima’s pushing.

“Looks like the boy is losing,” muttered the water dragoness observing the bout by my side.

“If only Phalaris had his own spirit of sumo...”

“Lady Floortje, we dragons are naturally strong, so gods are not inclined to lend us their strength.”

“Huh?”

Was the spirit of sumo actually just strength granted by gods? I had always thought it was some sort of sumo mystery.

“You see how Arima’s halo looks like lava? ’Tis the symbol of Tohil, the god of volcanoes and etiquette.”

I wondered which god my and the prince’s gears were a symbol of. I suspected it was Takemikazuchi—the oldest god of sumo. According to *Records of Ancient Matters*, he used his right arm of flame and left arm of ice to defeat Takeminakata, securing the province of Izumo as a reward. Sumo had so much depth to it...

Having lost his advantage in strength, Phalaris was losing ground. Try as he might to resist it, Arima’s simple pushing was unstoppable. The dragon was in deep trouble. Buffed by his spirit of sumo, Arima kept pushing his opponent even in the white part of the ring. Phalaris’s leg hit upon one of the bales set slightly back.

“Don’t give up, Phalaris!”

“Fight on, boy!”

As the mizuchi and I cheered for our wrestler, his shoulder muscles swelled

up. He looked beautiful as his sweat flew every which way.

“Everyone is counting on me! There’s no way I can lose here!!!”

Arima nodded with a scary smile.

With a loud sound, twelve feathers appeared behind Phalaris, beginning to revolve.

“Whoa! ’Tis the twelve feathers of the dragon god Nimens! He’s lent the boy his strength!”

Bellowing, Phalaris began to push Arima back. The latter laughed in satisfaction.

“So this is the spirit of sumo?! It feels like limitless strength!”

The life-and-death bout continued on the dohyō, with Phalaris and Arima trying to trip each other, throw each other off-balance, and avoid each other’s techniques. There was something both sacred and severe about their struggle which brought to mind two snakes coiled together, trying to consume each other.

“Show him what’s for, Phalaris! I’ll give you candy next time!”

“Keep it up, Phalaris!”

As Adela and I cheered for him, Phalaris started moving more smoothly. He seemed to be getting better at utilizing the buff of the spirit of sumo. It was the kind of Grand Sumo where both wrestlers had quickly revolving sumo spirits: their movements were smooth, their techniques—deadly.

Arima went for an overarm throw. Phalaris went for an underarm one. Exchanging throws, the two of them ended up at the edge of the ring.

“Time to end this!” shouted Phalaris.

Arima’s arm muscles grew in size, as did those of Phalaris’s thighs. With neither wrestler giving an inch, the explosive power of sumo was directed towards the edge of the ring. Before long, the two ended up in the air. Arima tried to slow down using his small wings, while Phalaris flapped his own to go faster instead.

Smash!!! Who was it? Who landed first?

“Winner, Phalaris!”

The dragon got up, beaming. It appeared his decision to gain speed had been correct. He extended his hand to Arima, which the demon took, getting up as well.

“You’re strong... Phalaris...”

“You’re strong too, Arima! Let’s do this again sometime!”

“Next time...I’ll win...”

“I’m gonna win again next time!”

This was nice. Good wrestlers didn’t lose their spirits regardless of whether they won or lost.

“You did it, boy! How wonderful the dragon god Nimens decided to lend you his strength!”

“So it was Nimens helping me? I’m really grateful for that!”

“Let us visit his shrine in the north sometime in the future.”

“Sure, let’s go together, Granny.”

Phalaris had the smile of a lady-killer on his face. It was highly effective.

I wondered if I needed to visit a shrine too after making use of my sumo spirit. But there was no Kashima Shrine in this world—that is, the place where Takemikazuchi was enshrined. Perhaps inviting him to a branch shrine in Aryagard was in order. Raiden of the Aryakan Sumo Association might be able to help with that. Either way, the score was now two to two. My upcoming bout with the Demon Lord would decide everything. *Do your best, Floortje!*

The rhythmical sound of the Magic Train speeding along the tracks, as well as the resulting vibrations, were pleasant as we left the wasteland and began approaching wetlands. The greenery ahead was easy on the eyes, and the smell of the air told me we were getting close to Aryaka.

“On the east, Floortje, Floortje... On the west, Demon Lord, Demon Lord...” announced Adela on top of the dohyō, spreading her white fan.

“Good luck, Floortje,” said the prince.

“Bring that guy down!” continued Phalaris.

“Don’t lose, yokozuna,” added Mamiana.

“May the bout go in your favor,” spoke the mizuchi.

“Bark, bark, bark!”

Everybody was encouraging me.

“I’ll be going, then.”

This escape would be over if I managed to defeat my opponent. With the score being two to two, this was to be the final bout regardless of whatever else happened. I had never done team sumo before, but it had been fun going against demons and various monsters. Getting from the Elven Forest Republic to the Dwarven Great Caves had taken a long time, but at least the final part of this journey—the ride on a Magic Train—wouldn’t take long.

The Demon Lord and I climbed the dohyō at the same time. My opponent was all smiles.

“You’re not very lordly for a Demon Lord.”

“I’ve got a long life span, see. Been ruling for two hundred years now. Eventually you realize there’s not much point in throwing your weight about.”

“Erhard was more solemn than you.”

“Yeah, he doesn’t get it at all. Thanks for making my son lose, by the way.”

“And you’re planning to settle that score?”

“Not at all. I really mean that. A guy’s gotta lose at least once, ’cause if he

doesn't come to realize he's not the strongest in the world and that there are fights he can't win no matter how strong he gets, he's gonna stay narrow-minded forever, you know?"

The Demon Lord was turning out to be rather different from how I had imagined him. He was more approachable and mature.

"I thought you were the haughty and whimsical type."

"Monsters may come in many shapes and sizes, but they're still people. Easier to lead them by example than rule with force."

"Looks like you're a proper monarch. I had the wrong idea about you."

"Thanks. Now, let's see who's stronger: Aryakan or Demonic Sumo!"

"Gladly. I'm highly fond of such silly contests of strength!"

"You're a hell of woman, you know that?"

It made me happy to hear such words from the Demon Lord.

I grabbed a handful of salt, cast it over the ring, and accepted *chikara mizu*—purifying water—from Phalaris.

"Wow, that Demon Lord guy looks hella strong!" he said.

"The demonic realm is a dog-eat-dog kind of place. Physical strength, no doubt, gives you a lot of benefits. He's going to be an exceptionally tough opponent," I replied.

"I wanna fight him next!"

"Let's go to their lands on a sumo tour next time, or invite them to Aryagard."

"We can do that? That would be so much fun!"

What a lovable sumo buff this dragon was.

I took my position on my side of the lines in the ground, as did the Demon Lord.

"Face each other."

Feeling out each other's breathing, we began to synchronize it. I enjoyed these moments of rising tension.

The Demon Lord wasn't all that big. He had the height of a regular adult man. And with a good set of muscles, he was a typical slim-built wrestler in appearance. The mawashi on his hips was black. Though he was a greater demon just like Arima, he had no wings on his back. Instead, he was a horned demon with a lion-like tail growing out of his rear—those features were the only things that set him apart from a human. I could sense his extraordinary strength, and it thrilled me. It might've been my first time going against such a ferocious opponent. I had no doubt he could use the spirit of sumo, as well as magically imbued techniques. Being a yokozuna of Demonic Sumo, he had the same standing as me, and judging by his temperament, I didn't think he had cheated his way to his current rank. It seemed to me he liked using loopholes in rules, but was a straight arrow in essence. I could see it in the way he carried himself: how much training he had done, how earnestly he had fought. A single, completely ordinary step of his told me everything. The Demon Lord was incredibly strong.

Our breathing synchronized. I rose, kicking the ground, and the two of us loudly smashed into each other. *Ah...* His moves, they were staggering in their agility. I could feel his strength directly.

"You're strong!" spoke the Demon Lord.

"So are you!"

As our initial clash left us equally matched, we grabbed each other's mawashi, both ending up in left-handed grips. *Wow, his hand is sticking to me like glue.* I had never fought a wrestler with such a firm grip before. As we pushed each other in the center of the ring, I could really feel his strength.

With a clank, it felt like the gears of my sumo spirit aligned and began to rotate. At the same time, four horned goat skulls appeared behind the Demon Lord, beginning to rotate at a high speed. *What a punk form for the sumo spirit to take!*

We were evenly matched in strength. The Demon Lord pulled on my mawashi to try and throw me off-balance. I pulled on his with the same amount of strength. Letting go of his mawashi and putting my arms around him instead, I attempted a beltless arm throw, which he smoothly avoided by adjusting his

center of mass. He then went for an overarm throw, but I grabbed his mawashi again.

The tension was numbing. Any lapse in concentration would see me thrown to the ground. We were perceiving each other's actions at an extremely high level. He was strong, astonishingly so. Before I knew it, a ferocious smile had surfaced on my face.

The two trains raced through the wetlands. The sound of their steam whistles scared off flocks of waterfowl, who escaped into the sky. With such striking scenery in the corner of my vision, I was locked up with the Demon Lord in the ring.



He was just utterly, ridiculously strong. Some strong people let their guard down every now and then when it came to defense, or allowed their attacks to become too predictable, but this demon didn't have such weaknesses. His well-balanced attack and defense were both of a very high level. Each sumo wrestler has their own peculiar rhythm, and the Demon Lord's was extremely stable. You might think such a rhythm would make it easy to predict incoming attacks, but that's not how this works. The one who creates the rhythm, after all, is also the one who can decide to break it at will.

I was smoothly dodging the sort of powerful techniques that would definitely work on Yustin and General Maurilio, having oh so much fun. Fighting such an opponent was extremely enjoyable. We attacked each other with harite, pushes, and thrusts. I avoided my opponent's underarm throw and went for a throw of my own, but the Demon Lord dodged to the side and began pushing me. Utilizing the buff of the white ground underfoot, I stopped his advance and grabbed his mawashi. The way he carried himself was downright artistic—I was enraptured.

"This is getting us nowhere... Don't hold this against me, Floortje!"

"Bring out whatever you've got!"

A pitch-black miasma gathered on the Demon Lord. His muscles swelled up, and thorns grew out of various parts of his body. This was the demonic form I had previously seen used by Erhard. It must've been a special ability passed down from the Demon Lord. A combination of the demonic form and the spirit of sumo was truly powerful.

"I still have...one more form...left!"

"Then stop keeping it to yourself and give me your best!"

"When I'm...fired up...enough!"

The thought of there being an even more powerful form I would have to contend with excited me. I *had* to make him use it. My newfound motivation boosted the speed of the rotating gears of my sumo spirit.

"Kghhh!"

Their increased power allowed me to put up a fight against the demon, but his demonic form was simply incredible. The Demon Lord's strength had doubled, his weight had increased, and his speed had fallen a little. Since his execution of techniques remained on the same level, it became more difficult to avoid them due to the greater strength behind them. He appeared to have trained in this demonic form as well, as his movements remained refined. Were I to let my guard down for a moment, he would no doubt hoist me up by my mawashi and throw me to the ground. His great weight made pushing him ineffective. I tried to remain in the white part of the ring, but he used his strength to pull me into the black zone.

Crunch! In an instant, a large portion of my strength left me, allowing my opponent to push me to the edge of the ring.

"My sumo spirit!!!"

It had been pulverized and vanished without a trace. *What? What happened?*

"I win!" said the transformed Demon Lord, a sneer on his face.

My sumo spirit had broken? How could a spirit break?

I endured the demon's vigorous pushing using my human strength alone.

"You can do this, Floortje!" shouted the prince.

"Bark, bark, bark!"

"Don't give up, Floortje!" continued Mamiana.

"Don't you lose on me, Floortje!" added Phalaris.

"Persevere!" said the mizuchi.

With everyone's cheering as the source of my strength, I just barely managed to hold on at the edge of the ring. But for whatever reason, I didn't feel imperiled. I could sense it—a different source of power was on its way. In the corner of my vision, I saw Adela praying with an earnest look on her face.

Clank clank! My spirit of sumo had restarted. But this time, there was another small gear in it that connected elsewhere. The ladylike gear with flowers painted on its surface rotated at a high speed, giving additional power to my sumo spirit. *A twin sumo spirit!!!* Could this be called the level 2 spirit of sumo?!

“All riiiiight!!!”

My new spirit of sumo had become faster. The surge of unbelievable power—I could feel it!!!

“What?!” exclaimed the Demon Lord as he found himself being pushed back. “Not bad! Not half bad, Floortje!”

With this, I could finally put up a fight. In fact, I was even stronger than my opponent in his current form! As always, it had taken a crisis for me to unlock new powers.

“Bring him down, Floortje!”

“Go, Floortje!”

“Ba-ba-bark, bark!”

Everyone’s feelings came flowing into me. At some point, my sumo spirit had begun shining gold.

“You can do this, sir!”

“Show her!”

“Keep it mino-up!”

“Fight on...!”

My opponent’s subordinates cheered for him too. His black, punk-like spirit of sumo had begun shining as well, leaving a golden afterimage behind as it rotated. This was the way I liked it: fighting on equal terms; coming head-to-head; pitting our spirits of sumo, our training, our love for sumo against one another. It had nothing to do with the differences in our species—victory and defeat would be decided by the heavens solely through an earnest prayer in the ritual known as sumo. The real fight started now. *I’m going to make you bring out that third form of yours, Demon Lord. And then I’m going to win!*

A railway bridge had come into view. Once we crossed it, we would be in Aryakan lands. *Prince Richie and I are back, my fatherland!*

My upgraded sumo spirit contended with my opponent’s demonic form. He and I were locked up and both tried to make the other lose balance, but we

each saw the incoming techniques and neutralized them every time.

The dohyō car jumped, causing the Demon Lord to fly up for a moment. I moved without thinking, smoothly closing the distance between us. One of the thorns growing out of his body tore my dress, but I didn't care. Lifting him onto my hips, I went for a throw. He attempted to dodge it. The two of us lost our balance, and we both came falling to the ground.

The two Magic Trains entered the bridge. I could hear the reverberating sound of rails, but it felt somehow distant. The ground approached in slow motion. For a moment, I thought I wanted to see my opponent's third form. That moment was enough to give the Demon Lord an opportunity to try to readjust himself. As I realized I would fall first, my arm unconsciously swept his thigh.

Smash! The two of us fell at about the same time. Who won? Who had fallen first?

"Dogfall!" announced the referee.

"Oh, come on! Her dress touched the ground first," said the Demon Lord, now back to his regular form, which allowed him to speak without pause.

"No, your thorn did," I retorted.

"Say what?!"

The two of us glared at each other in the ring. We both hated losing.

The trains had left the bridge and crossed the border with Aryaka.

"It's a draw, but we win," I said.

"Gnnnh..."

The coupled Magic Trains began to slow down on their approach to the final destination—the border station. It turned out a station had been built as well.

"Rematch!"

"We're out of time, referee! Damn it!"

The Demon Lord stamped his feet in frustration. I had never seen anyone do this literally. *Oh, wait—I think Jaromíra did that too.*

“So it’s a draw?” I asked.

“Yeah, with a score of two to two. I can’t believe this shit...” complained the Demon Lord.

The whole basis of this team competition had been their intent to take us prisoner if we lost before we made it to Aryaka. Kidnapping us out of Aryaka would’ve changed things a bit.

“We’ll settle this at the next tournament.”

“What next tournament?”

“You’re gonna take your troops to the Town of Yggdrasil, aren’t you? That’s where we’re gonna do it. Five on five. Bring five Aryakan wrestlers next time.”

“So a final set of bouts at the place where it all began. You’re going to show me that third form of yours next time, demonic yokozuna.”

“Next time, I’m going to settle this properly, as befits a yokozuna.”

“Right back at you.”

So, I would be able to fight him again.

“The winner gets the Elven Forest Republic for himself!” announced the Demon Lord.

“Should you really be betting a country you don’t own?” I asked.

“See if I care what Chancellor Mickaël has to say about it! Sumo is more important than politics!”

“You’re really obsessed with sumo, aren’t you?”

“Look who’s talking, yokozuna Floortje,” the Demon Lord replied with a smile.

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“Me too. Oh, and Fairy King!” He had turned to Barkus.

Fairy King?

“How long you gonna keep up the dog act? Don’t tell me you’re still cursed. Take this!” Forming a pitch-black orb of power in his hand, he launched it at the pup. “Guess my curses are so strong that the best you could do was take that

beast-man form.”

Barkus was covered in black smoke. Once it had cleared, a beautiful stark-naked man was standing there.

“Oh, come on, Demon Lord—why would you lift the curse here of all places?!”

Barkus... My Barkus...

“Barkus was a flirt!!!” screamed Adela and I together.

“It was a most pleasant journey, ladies. I won’t forget it as long as I live, ha ha!”

“Nooo, go back to being a pup, go back!!!”

“Oh, stop! I can’t return to that form anymore!”

He was a flirt! A beautiful elf too, sure, but a flirt nonetheless! My adorable little Barkus was no more!

“Ahh, stop, cut it out! No harite!”

The Demon Lord looked on, guffawing.

“This guy fell for a honeypot I set up for him, and that’s how he got himself cursed. Never thought he’d escaped from the palace and was traveling with you, though.”

Give me Barkus back!!!—went through my head as Adela and I beat up the flirt in front of our eyes.

“It hurts, it hurts! Help, Your Highness!”

A smile on his face, Prince Richie firmly grabbed him by the shoulders.

“Fairy King. You entered the hot spring with Floortje, didn’t you?”

“Th-That’s a misunderstanding!”

“You slept in the same bed with her...”

“L-Let me explain myself, Your Highness, I’m sure we can work this out!”

Though he had a smile on his face, on the inside the prince was really angry. *Shows you right, you shallow flirt.*

“Don’t keep me waiting at the Town of Yggdrasil. Have the fairy king come with an army and we’ll settle things once and for all at a joint tournament!”

The Magic Trains had reached the station and come to a complete stop. We made our way to the Trailblazer, escorted by the goblin professor.

“Let us meet again, Aryakans. Gob.”

“We’re gonna pay a visit to your lands later. Let’s trade some more knowledge when the time comes, Professor.”

“I can hardly gob-wait, Chief Jörd.”

It seemed the Dwarven Great Caves and the demonic realm would be exchanging their technology. Perhaps they would even extend the railway to connect their lands. It would let even us easily visit the demonic realm.

As the professor decoupled the Magic Trains, the Thunder began to leave.

“Let’s fight again, Arima!”

“Agreed...” Arima gave Phalaris a light wave.

“I wanna go against yokozuna Floortje next. Bye until then!”

“I want to fight you too, Uta. Look forward to it.”

Scattering her rainbow-colored pollen, Uta waved to me.

“U-Um... Tell Coach that...”

“I’ll bring him to the next tournament. If you have something to say to him, use sumo, not words.”

“I will!” replied Kukuri after a pause, with a deep nod.

As I made a mental note to add Clifton to my team, I waved at the retreating Thunder. This escape had brought numerous tough challenges with it, but I had come to know many sumo wrestlers as well. The fact that Dark Sumo was so developed was an important discovery. I wanted to visit them on tours and have them visit Aryagard in turn. But for now...

I made eye contact with Adela. We had to beat up this flirt.

“Gahhh! You’ve got it all wrong!!!”

Interlude: On the Balcony of the Palatial Tree of the Elven Forest Republic

The beautiful elves at the Town of Yggdrasil were looking up at the sky. Large transportation gryphons were flying in formation, carrying an enormous contraption.

As five gryphons landed on the balcony of the Palatial Tree, five shadows jumped off. It was the Demon Lord's team.

"The hell was that ridiculous strength?! Where'd a human like her get that?!" exclaimed the Demon Lord.

"So even you were scared on the inside, sir."

"I've never fought someone so strong before. Man, that was nerve-racking!"

"Prince Richie was very strong too," said Kukuri.

"And Phalaris..." added Arima.

"I was mino-astonished."

The Demon Lord looked west, in the direction of Aryaka.

"We better hold a boot camp. I somewhat underestimated Lady Floortje. If I can't beat her in my second form, I'll lose without ever getting to the third one."

"Let's train, let's train. I've been relying on my roots too much. If I stay in place all the time and don't move at least a little, they can throw whatever they want at me!"

"Yeah, being able to move at all would make you stronger. Kukuri's good as she is, she's the only one on a win streak here."

"We arachne have an advantage in sumo. Although my bout with the prince sent chills up my spine."

"I want to fight strong opponents mino-too."

“I dunno, your rank is too low to field you in this next one.”

“I’ll devote mino-more of myself to sumo...”

The Demon Lord fell into deep thought.

“I’m dead set on myself, Arima, and Kukuri. As for Uta and Gogontes, we’ll see how your training goes.”

“Oh, come on, I wanna join too!”

“Mino-same.”

“I’m pretty sure it’s the special abilities of monsters that make Demonic Sumo special. A rikishi who’s almost guaranteed to win their first bout would increase our chances.”

“Okay, I’ll train harder!”

“Me mino-too.”

“So yeah, we’ll see how well you do.” A natural smile adorned the Demon Lord’s face. “But damn, that was so much fun. Been a long time since things felt so tense.”

“Sumo is great, isn’t it?”

“I wanted to fight more...”

“All those Aryakan wrestlers felt good to fight.”

“Mino-agreed. Even that cute dwarf was mino-strong.”

“If they field her, I’ll send you in!”

“You mino-mean it?!”

“Yeah, well, she’s not gonna have long to train and Aryaka is full of strong wrestlers, like Yustin and Maurilio.”

“I pray for Mamiana to advance in her mino-training.” Gogontes brought his large hands together in prayer.

As the gang chatted, all smiles, Chancellor Mickaël entered the balcony. All expression disappeared from the faces of the Dark Rikishi the instant they saw him.

“Judging by how much fun you seem to be having, I assume you’ve managed to capture Prince Richie and Crown Princess Candidate Floortje?”

Everyone frowned at the sight of his smile.

“Unfortunately, we’ve let them escape.”

“Wh-What?! Then why the hell are you all smiling like that?! Explain yourself, Demon Lord!!!”

“We did sumo and tied. So, they escaped.”

Chancellor Mickaël’s beautiful face grew beet red in anger.

“Wh-Wh-Why the hell are you playing children’s games like sumo?! You demons and monsters should act the part—just gang up on people and kill them! Are you all out of your minds?!”

The team of Dark Rikishi went silent for a moment.

“The Aryakan army is about to show up. We’re gonna hold a tournament at the Town of Yggdrasil and try to stop them.”

“Y-You can’t be serious! This isn’t what we agreed upon! Station your monsters along the border, or this will be a serious breach of our agreement!!!”

“Look, Mickaël... You’re done, and so is this town.”

“Wh-What are you talking about?! Th-The Elven Forest Republic was going to generously compensate you. Don’t you want that?”

“I don’t need your compensation or whatever. We’ve already analyzed the defenses of this town. I can attack whenever I want, and set it all on fire if I wish.”

“Th-That’s not what we agreed upon! You promised you would support our revolution!”

The Demon Lord looked upon the chancellor with contempt.

“Why did you, a member of a superior race, put so much faith in an agreement with base demons? Get with the program already—you’re done. The fairy king is about to return.”

“Wh-What???!!!”

“He’s escaped to Aryaka together with Floortje. Their army’s gonna come here under his banner. Good luck putting up a fight with your revolutionaries.”

The chancellor turned ghastly pale, struggling to breathe.

“P-Please, protect us! We’ve dreamed of this revolution for a thousand years!”

“Why should I care about elven dreams? It’s the end for you. Even if we win at the upcoming tournament, you’re gonna be our vassal state.”

“Wh-Why?! Just why?! I thought we had agreed on an equal friendship between us!”

“I see no point in being friends with a nation I can kill whenever I want.”

It was only then that Chancellor Mickaël finally realized that the demon standing in front of him was an evil existence. At last, he fully understood that he had been a fool for making a pact with demons and monsters and expecting them to fulfill their part.

“Verbal agreements have no value. You gotta be able to enforce them. And yet you went and gave up the secret behind the highly sophisticated magical defenses that were protecting you.”

“Y-You feeble-minded demons and monsters could never understand the workings of our magic! W-We’re gonna strike back, and you’re gonna see just how frightening our magic is!”

“You and the revolutionaries can’t use such powerful magic, can you? You’re all bark and no bite. Think I’m scared of you?”

Holding his head, the chancellor crouched and screamed.

“Serves you right,” uttered Uta, her words resounding across the balcony.

Chapter 4: Sumo at the Town of Yggdrasil's Martial Arts Hall

The prince and I needed to return to Aryagard in order to explain the situation to the king and assemble an army.

"To Aryagard please, Phalaris," I asked him.

"You've got it!"

"It's great to have you with us," said the prince.

"I know, right? You should've brought me with you this time too."

"You said it was a 'pain in the butt' and didn't want to go, remember?" I retorted.

"Eh, I did?"

This dragon kid was such a scatterbrain—he always forgot inconvenient facts.

"Can you carry four of us?" I asked.

"Sure!"

It was a little scary fitting so many people on his back, but we had no choice.

I approached the fairy king, who was no longer naked since he had borrowed Prince Richie's spare clothes. They looked good on him, but were a little too short due to his height.

"Let's head to the royal capital, Fairy King."

"Visiting the capital on a dragon, hmm? What a thrilling experience. Especially with two young ladies at my side," said the flirt, grinning.

Stamp! Stamp!

"Agghh!"

Adela and I stomped on his feet at once. *Give us our Barkus back!* I didn't like this flirt of a man one bit.

“How cruel of you. You were so nice to me when I was Barkus.”

“You’re Fairy King Ulupano now, not Barkus. And really, just turn back into Barkus!” said Adela.

“I can’t! That curse turned me into a child in various aspects—that’s why I looked like that!”

“Then try your hardest to take that form again!” Adela pressed the fairy king, staring daggers at him.

“Well, let’s try.”

Performing a somersault, he disappeared into a puff of smoke. When it cleared, an enormous wolf the size of a bull was standing in his place.

“This is how I look now. I can assume the beast-man form too.”

“Not adorable,” I told him.

“Not adorable at all. Also, speaking is a no-no,” added Adela.

“You ladies are so strict.”

His fur looked stiff too. *Zero out of ten, Ulupano.* And when he returned to his human form, he was naked again. *How immodest.*

“Have to say, though, I love that look of disdain in your eye!”

The fairy king continued to talk nonsense as he put his clothes back on.

“So, how long do I have to wait here?” asked Chief Jörd.

“We’ll gather an army and return as fast as we can. How many can this train fit?” I asked.

“About a hundred. It’s still experimental, so we haven’t put many passenger cars on it yet.”

“So ten trips would only move a thousand or so. Looks like we’ll have to walk or use horses to move ten thousand,” spoke Adela, her arms folded.

“You’re a maid and you know a thing or two about army marches, huh. There’s a highway running alongside the tracks—why don’t you have your troops use it?”

“Wait here for three days, please. Actually, I’m surprised there was a town here,” I said.

Behind the station were brand-new houses: it seemed a new town was being built here. There was an eatery and an inn too.

“Yeah, it kind of appeared as we built the tracks. Gonna be a prime location before long.”

“Some shrewd merchants must’ve moved here. Looks like we have a new border town on our hands.”

Trading with the Dwarven Great Caves would no doubt be highly profitable, and everyone would want to use the Magic Train once it went into regular operation. This town would surely grow big.

“Ask King Arvi to extend the tracks to Aryagard.”

“I will. The economic benefits of having the train run to the outskirts of the royal capital would be incredible,” I replied.

“Father likes new things, so I think he’ll want a ride too.”

“Sounds great. All right, off you go, then,” said Chief Jörd, beaming from ear to ear.

It was amazing how the dwarves had actually laid the tracks all the way to the border.

Doing a somersault, Phalaris turned into a large dragon. Why did the nonhumans of this world perform somersaults to transform? As he brought one of his wings to the ground, we climbed it and made our way to the back of his neck. With four of us it was, of course, pretty tight, and we had to stick to each other. I sat at the front. Behind me was Prince Richie, then Adela, and Ulupano was at the end.

“Touch me anywhere weird and I’ll hit you.”

“Y-You’ve got me all wrong. I would never mistreat a lady. Women are, after all, the most beautiful things in the world.”

Looking behind me, I noticed a vein standing out on Adela’s forehead. If only he had stayed as Barkus...

“You okay, Phalaris?” I asked.

“Yeah, you’re all light. Just don’t go falling off.”

“We’ll hold on tight. We should have Chief Jörd make a saddle when we have the chance.”

“I don’t want a saddle,” replied the dragon.

I wanted a safety belt, though, since we were flying through the skies. There was this one time I flew on Phalaris and got caught in a rainstorm—I’d thought I would die that day.

The dragon started flapping his wings. With a movement of his neck muscles that I felt under my hips, he jumped and took flight, flapping his wings rapidly to gain altitude.

The view from high above was always great, no matter how many times I experienced it. I could clearly see the distant horizon. Looking back, I saw the Thunder disappear into a tunnel of the mountainous region, appearing minuscule at such a distance. I would bring down the Demon Lord next time. But first, I had to go to Aryagard and gather my team.

The trip to the royal capital on dragonback didn't take long, given the speed of these creatures. Phalaris landed in the central square, flapping his wings. He made frequent use of this place for takeoffs and landings, so by this point no one was surprised to see this. Some of his fans spotted him and cheered in shrill voices—he was surprisingly popular with girls, being a little wild and handsome.

As we made our way to the royal palace, we came across King Arvi.

"Oh, Richie, Floortje! What took you so long?"

"A revolution has occurred in the Elven Forest Republic, father. Chancellor Mickaël has let the Demon Lord's army into the forest and started a coup. Floortje and I were almost caught, but we made an escape."

"The Demon Lord's army?! And what about the fairy... Ah, Your Majesty Fairy King Ulupano. Welcome to Aryagard."

The fairy king somehow assumed a pose that made him look elegant.

"It has been a while, Your Majesty King Arvi. I was caught up in the events which your son accurately described, and had to make an escape with him. Would you lend me your troops? I intend to retake the Town of Yggdrasil."

"Hmm, very well. The friendship pact between our nations is still in effect, after all."

"That fool Mickaël broke it without asking anyone, but I was the one who made it on behalf of the elves and I do not remember approving of such an abrogation. In fact, I would pledge ever stronger ties between our nations."

"Good. Well, let's not stand around any further; let's talk through things at the palace instead."

With an arm around Ulupano's shoulder, King Arvi invited him to the palace. The fairy king was a good-looking fellow whose presence was strong whenever he got serious, so he was quite dignified.

"I'm going with them to help explain things. What about you, Floortje?"

"I need to scout the rikishi for the upcoming competition. Going to pay a visit to Yustin's and Clifton's stables."

“Remember, we can only have five.”

“We’ll bring others as standins. Clifton should definitely go, though, to bring Kukuri back.”

The prince smiled.

“Agreed. We need her back here, doing sumo with us.”

It was vexing to give up such a splendid wrestler to Dark Sumo.

After parting with the prince, we walked through Aryagard as three: myself, Phalaris, and Adela. I had missed this city.

“You’re gonna field me, right?”

“I don’t know about that.”

“Oh, come on, you *have* to field me. I wanna fight Arima again!”

“You should use the opportunity to fight someone else. It’s not every day you get to do team sumo.”

“Yeah, I guess that would be good too. I wanna fight Kukuri in her arachne form. Won our bout at the last tournament here, but she seems stronger now compared to when she was human.”

Being able to see different rikishi go against each other was part of what made sumo so fun. I wanted to go against Uta, not just the Demon Lord. Being able to root herself in the ground made her a threat, but you could launch anything you wanted at her since she couldn’t move. If she managed to overcome that shortcoming of hers, she would become even stronger. As these thoughts coursed through my head, we arrived at Yustin’s stable.

“Excuse me!”

“Who’s there? Oh, Lady Floortje, and Phalaris too. Are you here to practice together?”

I was greeted not by one of the younger wrestlers, but by Yustin himself.

“You’ve gained weight again! How dare you!” I exclaimed.

“As a sumo wrestler, it’s my job to eat. Gocchan!”

It's so unfair. Why do the prince and I remain so light while this man can get so fat?! You almost couldn't call him the slim-built type of sumo wrestler anymore—soon, he would be the big-bellied type. The slim-built type might look stronger, but weight is a very powerful weapon in sumo. However, big-bellied wrestlers are more vulnerable to attacks on their knees, as well as to diabetes. Gaining weight comes with its own problems.

"Something bad has happened in the Elven Forest Republic. Come with me, I'll explain along the way."

"Okay, but where are we going?"

"Clifton's stable. We need Aryaka's five strongest rikishi."

"Strongest rikishi? *Now* you've got my attention. Let's go."

With Yustin joining us, our party size grew to four. Well—considering we were going to defeat the Demon Lord, the term "party" was not entirely inaccurate. I explained the situation to Yustin along the way, and at every point in the story, he was irksomely vocal in his surprise and excitement.

"A team competition against Demonic Sumo, with the Demon Lord at the top of that form of sumo? Well, this is most exciting. What about Maurilio?"

"I had to leave him in the Elven Forest Republic. I'm sure he's alive, though."

"Yes, he is a military man. It would take a lot to bring him down."

"With you, me, and Richie, there's only two empty slots left. You gotta choose between Yustin, Clifton, and General Maurilio," spoke Phalaris.

"Y-You'll field me, right? I'm an ōzeki," said Yustin.

"I don't know about that... Also, Clifton is definitely going."

"Huh? You can't be serious. His rank is komusubi."

"Kukuri is on the opposing side. I'm having Clifton bring her back."

Clifton stared at me in round-eyed wonder.

"What? Kukuri was such a good wrestler! You mean she was a spy from the demonic realm?"

"Yes, and *because* she's such a good wrestler, I want her back in Aryakan

Grand Sumo. She was one of the strongest female wrestlers too."

"No argument there."

In the meantime, we had reached Clifton's stable. I recalled that this place housed the spider goddess Arachne, though due to a dearth of believers in Aryagard, her form was that of a small spider. *Anyway...*

"Excuse me!"

"Coming! Oh, Lady Floortje, Yustin, Phalaris. What's the matter?"

Opening the sliding door at the entrance was Edgar, a slender, black-haired rikishi, second-in-command at Clifton's stable. His slender appearance might have made you think he was weak, but he was the type who fought with speed and technique. He was also extremely knowledgeable about sumo—so knowledgeable, in fact, you could even say he had a PhD in sumo.

"Where's Clifton?"

"He doesn't leave his bed much these days."

"Why not?"

"It seems he only realized his feelings for Kukuri after she left, and now he's depressed."

How effeminate of you, Clifton! I burst into his room. I knew where a coach's room was, of course. Opening the sliding screen, I saw Clifton curled up in his bed.

Incidentally, these sumo stables had Japanese designs. We imported tatami and sliding screens from the sumo Valhalla for them. This was a little expensive, but you couldn't call it a sumo stable without those things. Then, nobles who saw this Japanese design grew quite fond of it, and it became a very popular trend—many high-ranking nobles with good taste ended up with Japanese-style rooms in their manors.

"How long are you going to stay in bed, Clifton?! Get up!"

"Ah, Floortje... What is it...?"

As he turned his head my way, I could clearly see dark circles under his eyes.

“How do you end up like this just because the girl you like went missing?!”

“I don’t think she’s coming back... I’ll never get to see her again.”

“If you love her so much, go bring her back!”

“But I don’t know where she is...”

“I do.”

“You do?!”

Clifton jumped out of his bed.

“See her in person and tell her yourself you want her back.”

“I will! Where is she?!”

“The Town of Yggdrasil, capital of the Elven Forest Republic. We’re assembling a team of strong rikishi to bring down those who fight with Demonic Sumo. Come, Clifton!”

“Demonic Sumo! So that’s why you have Phalaris and Master with you!”

“That’s right. It’s a team competition: five representatives of Aryakan Sumo will go against five of Demonic Sumo headed by the Demon Lord!”

“Now I’m fired up! Wait, does that mean Kukuri...?”

“She’s a mainstay of the opponents’ team. You can be sure they will field her in the upcoming tournament.”

“Kukuri...was a monster...”

A small spider descended from the ceiling.

I apologize for keeping it from you, Clifton. Kukuri is an arachne—my disciple and kin.

This spider was Arachne, the guardian deity of the arachne species. It appeared she had come to Aryaka and made this stable her home after developing an interest in sumo.

“So that’s how it is...”

“Kukuri faced Prince Richie in the ring.”

“H-How did it go?”

“She won.”

“What?!”

“She was strong even as a human. In her monster form, she has six spider legs, and her weight is doubled. You know what that means, right?”

Clifton raised his face.

“If you add a monster body to the skill she already had... That makes her really strong!”

The fight had returned to Clifton’s eyes. Indeed, the prospect of facing a mighty opponent was exciting for a sumo wrestler.

“Communicate your feelings on the dohyō like a proper rikishi. With your technique and your spirit.”

“I will! Thank you for inviting me. I’m in!”

“All right!”

With Yustin and Clifton joining my team, my search was done for the moment. We would look for General Maurilio during our march. I was looking forward to the tournament at the elven capital.

“Edgar, Arachne, I’m off to the Town of Yggdrasil. Have to bring Kukuri back.”

“Thought that’s what you’d do, Coach. Take care.”

Well said, Clifton, said Arachne. *Go bring her back. You have to push forward in both love and sumo!*

Wait, isn’t Arachne the same kind of character as the mizuchi? I just realized.

Clifton gathered his things and left his room. It was time to head to the palace and have the king give us troops. Now a party of five, we briskly walked to the palace.

“Ah, Lady Floortje. Please, do come in.”

At the palace gate, a rikishi of the royal guard let us through. The guards knew my face as I was a crown princess candidate. And a yokozuna.

“Where are His Majesty and the fairy king?”

“They’re having a discussion at the reception hall, together with Prince Richie.”

“Thank you.”

We entered the palace. After ascending the imperial staircase, the reception hall was to the east. The grand chamberlain opened the door upon seeing me. The three inside looked over our way in the midst of their friendly conversation.

“Oh, there you are, Floortje. We’ve heard the story. Let us board the Magic Train immediately and head to the Dwarven Great Caves!”

“What about the troops, Your Majesty?”

“We’re sending twenty thousand, under General Boccolini.”

“There’s a big difference in speed between using the Magic Train and having soldiers march all the way.”

“Well, we shall send a forward unit, and the rest will catch up at some point. We wish to board the Magic Train and pay a visit to the Dwarven Great Caves.”

Though the king was a wise monarch, his love for new things sometimes made him hasty in his decisions.

It was decided we would reach the border station in a high-speed coach, which would take us a day. The troops would march on foot, poor things. With there being twenty thousand of them, it would no doubt be difficult to provide food and shelter for everyone. General Boccolini was General Maurilio’s successor, and he was faultless in his work. Even as a rikishi he was capable, and was gradually climbing the rankings, helped by his large and muscular build.

By the king’s estimations, either way we would end up at a standstill at some point, which would allow the troops to eventually catch up. I was sure he just wanted to go on a pleasure trip to the Dwarven Great Caves, though. Apparently he also planned to ask the dwarves to lend us some of their troops in exchange for laying the rail tracks all the way to Aryagard. *Politics...*

After speaking with the king, I returned to my stable in order to feed my

wrestlers my best chanko before they had to march on the elven lands. Getting to eat chanko and white rice after such a long time was reinvigorating—and you could hardly call it chanko without white rice. A bath and a good night's sleep in a tatami room wiped away the fatigue from my whole recent ordeal.

"All right!"

"I can't believe how energetic you are, milady."

"I'm a yokozuna!"

Adela was dumbfounded, but I took her attitude as praise. It was time for *us* to go on the offensive. And reunite with General Maurilio.

As we made our way to the palace—me, Adela, and Phalaris—we saw three eight-horse high-speed coaches standing at the entrance.

"Floortje! Have you been able to rest?"

"Yes, Your Highness. It has been a while since I've had such a good sleep."

"Get in. Father is already inside."

King Arvi reminded me of a child going on an excursion.

"Good morning, Floortje. And it is truly a fine morning, perfect for an outing."

"Oh, Your Majesty!"

"We're taking that Magic Train, after all. It'll get us to the Dwarven Great Caves in a day, will it not? Such a fine project organized by Jonas."

"Yes, my brother was very competent..."

"Don't let it get to you, Richie. He might do something outstanding yet again."

"Yes, father."

How did Jonas, a member of the royal family, ever let himself fall for Jaromíra's charms? He had been so talented...

"Morning, Floortje. You're as beautiful as always. Looks like you and I are taking the same coach to the border station, and I simply cannot contain my excitement at that fact." The flirt was saying something. "Ah—I'm quite fond of that look of contempt too!"

Not only was he a shallow flirt, but also a pervert. *Ugh...* Even King Arvi's brows were knitted.

The coaches sped through the main street, passed through the east gate, and raced along the eastern mountain highway. The highway was well maintained, as it was actively used for trade with the mountainous region. We were certain to arrive at the border town by sunset.

I contemplated how convenient it would be to have the rail tracks run all the way to Aryagard and be able to go to the Dwarven Great Caves and back in a day. It would no doubt have a major positive impact on our economy as well. Just like my previous world, this one too seemed to be leaving the middle ages with the advent of the railway, and entering a modern period of history. And since tracks could even be laid to the demonic realm, the world was beginning to feel quite a bit smaller. I looked forward to going on a sumo tour there too.

Riding the high-speed coach for a long time was unexpectedly exhausting. I went outside and did some sumo practice at a posting station as we changed horses, but that was over before I could break a sweat, and the flirt was annoying me with his passionate look the whole time.

"Women who are good at sports are simply wonderful. You are so full of energy!"

"Oh, really."

"Heh heh, how cold. But that's what I like about you!"

Why did this flirt only ever seem to speak nonsense when he opened his mouth?

"Sumo has the power to change the world, does it not? Even demons and monsters seem to have grown very fond of it."

"Yes, it really surprised me. Thought they were too undisciplined for something like sumo."

"I was told the demonic realm was a hellish place where the strong preyed upon the weak day and night, but seeing how we've met an intelligent goblin, perhaps it's undergoing some changes."

“Maybe they’ve developed a culture of noble warriors from all the unending fighting?”

Just like the Japanese samurai from my past life. Just like the knights of medieval Europe. Perhaps noble warriors could only be born in a melting pot of constant deception and murder, a true hell on earth. Just like a white lotus growing in a contaminated pond. Perhaps a land of high intelligence and reason could only give birth to dastards like Chancellor Mickaël. Although there could be wiser and more prudent elves deeper in the forest, such as the elven elders from Hufton. I was pretty sure, however, that the flirt in front of my eyes was not one of them.

After eating lunch at the posting station town, we continued east in our high-speed coaches. Aryaka’s main highway had a system of post towns which assisted travelers. A royal high-speed coach could move pretty fast, given the opportunity to change its eight horses at a big enough posting station. And, being a main highway, it was well maintained.

The border station finally came into view. We’d gotten here surprisingly quickly, as it was still around four o’clock. As we arrived at the border town, Chief Jörd came out to greet us.

“Oh, Floortje! You’re a day early.”

“We come to decisions quickly here in Aryaka,” I replied.

“Chief Jörd! Welcome to Aryaka,” said King Arvi, climbing out of the coach behind me.

“Apologies for not going through customs, Your Majesty. We’ve finally opened the Magic Train railway your son Jonas was involved with.”

“Let us make this experimental track extraterritorial—or better yet, let us make this whole town a concession: a symbol of friendship between Aryaka and the Dwarven Great Caves,” suggested the king.

“Good thinking! It would improve our trade too.”

A concession was a trade town located within a government’s territory, but not subject to its customs or taxes. Many of them were port towns, but the more prosperous such a place became, the more it attracted the bad elements

who would make them unsafe. With this town being inland, however, perhaps it would be easier to manage.

“Let us stay here for the night and head to the Dwarven Great Caves tomorrow, shall we?”

“Why wait? Let us be off at once, Your Majesty! We will be in our lands by midnight.”

“Surely you jest! Is it that fast?!”

“Any countries connected by this railway are now much closer to each other. We dwarves are going to be neighbors with Aryakans!”

We entered the premises of the station as we listened to the dwarven chief. Steam rising out of its pipes, the Trailblazer had a great many dwarves performing maintenance on it.

“Hey, wrap it up soon, we’re taking a night train back!”

“Yes, sir!” replied the dwarven engineers.

The sight of a crowd of dwarves organically servicing the Magic Train was soul-stirring. They always looked great when working on something, being this world’s most technologically advanced race.

“So this is the Magic Train? What a splendid design!”

“Actually riding it feels good too, father.”

“Good, good.”

The mizuchi came walking from the direction of the town.

“I’m coming with you, boy.”

“You’re still here, Granny? Go back to your lake!” replied Phalaris.

“Oh, come now, I wouldn’t want to miss your display of strength. You don’t mind me coming, do you, Your Majesty?”

“Uh... And who might you be?”

“An old dragon who lives in a mountain lake. A mizuchi, Your Majesty,” she replied.

“Well, well—a dragon! How many centuries has it been since you’ve last made an acquaintance with a king of our line?”

“I was acquainted with a king several generations before you, but he must be dead by now, surely.”

“A love story between an ancient dragon and King Sanjika is a famous dragon legend. Would you happen to know anything about it?”

“Ah, yes, that brings back memories. Sanjika was so defiant in his courtship... ’Tis so tragic how quickly humans perish.”

King Sanjika had lived roughly five hundred years prior to this day, if memory served me correctly. As I contemplated the length of dragons’ life spans, I wondered if a day would come when Phalaris would think of us, gone by then, with nostalgia.

The train was now facing the way it had come from. Did the dwarves have a railway turntable or something similar?

“Lady Floortje! You’re coming back?”

“We’re leading our troops, Mamiana.”

“You’re heading to the Town of Yggdrasil where those demons and monsters have holed up, right? Can I come with you?”

“If you like. I’ll introduce an elven rikishi to you on the way.”

“An elven rikishi! They do sumo too? I never thought elves would be into it!”

“His name is Boorman; he’s a swordsman-turned-rikishi. We’ll be able to see him on our way.”

“I cannot wait! Also, would you mind giving me some sumo training while we march, whenever you have time?”

“You’re a keen one, aren’t you? Gladly. Let’s train together later.”

I hadn’t been able to train much during my escape, but I looked forward to training together with everyone from now on. Yustin and Clifton already wasted no time in teaching Mamiana all sorts of things.

With a blow of its steam whistle, the Magic Train seemed to be good to go. We entered the first-class car. Its good furnishing was relaxing, and the leather-covered seats were comfortable to sit on. The windows opened to a magnificent, picturesque view of the sun setting over the eastern Aryakan farmlands.

The Magic Train chugged to life, beginning to move. King Arvi, Yustin, and Clifton were all glued to the windows like children, watching the scenery that appeared so gorgeous when viewed from a train window. The train picked up speed as it passed through the evening countryside.

“This feels like a fresh experience since we couldn’t relax last time. Right, Your Highness?”

“You’re right. Almost as soon as we got on, the Demon Lord showed up on his own Magic Train and we ended up doing sumo. Let’s take it easy this time,” said the prince, giving me a gentle smile.

Journeys were so nice. I felt like the two of us had grown closer together. *Dosukoi, dosukoi!*

“Damn, it’s so fast!” exclaimed Phalaris.

“You fly faster, don’t you?” asked Clifton.

“That’s not the same.”

Clifton, regrettably, lacked an appreciation for the aesthetics of it.

We enjoyed our laid-back night trip. Since it was an experimental track, there was unfortunately no dining car, so I had to make do with a light meal, such as a ham sandwich made at the border town, and wine.

“Man, trains are fun. Hey, Chief, when are you gonna have these running regularly?” asked Phalaris, beaming.

“Somewhere around autumn, kid.”

“That’s great! I wanna ride it when the sun’s up next time.”

Phalaris was right: a night ride on a train was atmospheric, but also boring since you couldn’t see much outside.

The Trailblazer's wheels rumbled as it passed through tunnels, over bridges, and eventually arrived at the Dwarven Great Caves station after a four-hour trip. Truly a mind-blowing speed.

"Stay at the state guest house for the night. We'll march tomorrow—tonight, though, let's drink!"

"I like that idea," replied King Arvi.

"I shall join you," added the fairy king.

These three sure liked their dinner parties.

"Just give us food, please. We'll eat, take a bath, then go to bed."

"Come on, yokozuna Floortje, let's drink!" lamented Chief Jörd.

"There's no guarantee we won't have bouts during tomorrow's march. And so, we have to get some sleep, but those politically inclined can drink and make merry as much as they please."

Drinking and eating together is, at the end of the day, proper diplomacy. It's not all about benefits and logic with people, and that includes politics. However, sumo wrestlers have nothing to do with such things. If we don't sleep properly, our bodies won't move the way we want them to.

Though the dinner party surely wasn't prearranged, it was no less lavish for it. Even if "lavish" meant a table almost full of heavy meat dishes. The three leaders drank alcohol together with the mizuchi and made a lot of noise. The rest of us retreated to our bedrooms early, however, so I didn't know how their feast went afterwards.

"Let's march on the village of Hufton tomorrow." As she brushed my hair after our baths, Adela started talking military matters.

"Why there?"

"Our enemies probably don't expect us to be back so quickly. And we can mount a defense in Hufton if need be."

"You're right. I just hope we don't inconvenience the elven elders."

"They share the responsibility for these events as citizens of the country, so I

don’t think that’s something you should be concerned with.”

Perhaps. Maybe they *were* responsible, after creating a form of government typically used by short-lived races despite being a long-lived race.

“It’s probably fine, anyway. We have a high elf with us,” spoke Adela.

“That flirt—I mean, Ulupano—is a high elf, right? They’re said to be akin to demigods, possessing infinite life spans. Though he certainly doesn’t look the part.”

“Elves are a pretty complicated race.”

There were a great number of mysteries pertaining to the elven lands—but how did this maid know so much? I could never figure her out. Also, if that flirt was a high elf, why was he able to take the form of a fenrir? And why was he such a shallow flirt despite having such a long life span? Truly a mystery.

My night at the state guest house was a quiet one. It was too bad I couldn’t tell day from night in the place, although Adela woke me up in the morning. I got dressed and went to the dining hall, and found that breakfast had already been prepared. The two kings had yet to arrive.

“Chief Jörd, where are my king and that flirt of a fairy king?”

“Drank themselves unconscious, those two. King Arvi sure drinks a lot for a human.”

If he had drunk so much even a dwarf said he “drank a lot,” perhaps there was no hope of seeing him today. Or so I thought, until the king showed up—wobbling on his feet with dark circles under his eyes.

“Are you all right, father?”

“I-It was a merry occasion, so we had too much, son. But don’t worry, it’ll pass soon enough.”

“Don’t overdo it. You’re not young anymore.”

“A-As you say, Floortje.”

The flirt showed up next. He wasn’t in nearly as bad a shape—he seemed to be just a sleepyhead.

“Good morning, everyone. I see the ladies are as beautiful as ever.”

A shallow flirt as always.

The dwarven breakfast was incredible. It was the standard ham and eggs, bread, and soup—but the ham was thick. Still, it tasted great.

“This is delicious, right, Floortje? Despite how thick it is,” said the prince.

“Agreed. It’s a good ham.”

“No spilling your food, boy,” chided the mizuchi.

“Oh, give me a break!”

“Looks like you need to be taught some manners.”

Heh heh. It’s almost like she’s Phalaris’s mother. Maybe it was the sense of camaraderie they had, stemming from them both being dragons.

Yustin and Clifton had evidently both left the party early too as they looked all right. You can’t call yourself a rikishi without taking proper care of your health every day.

“I’ll give you five thousand dwarven warriors for now. That should be enough to fend off any demons or monsters who stand in your way, provided their numbers aren’t overwhelming.”

“My gratitude, Chief Jörd,” replied King Arvi.

“Those salad-munchers are an old enemy of ours, so I’m happy to help. Though I pity them now that they’ve placed themselves under demonic rule.”

“That Chancellor Mickaël is such an imbecile.”

“Indeed. And trade with the elves is important to us, so I can’t sit idly by and watch them fall to demons.”

“Chief of the Dwarven Great Caves, I express my gratitude as the head of the Elven Forest Republic. Let us try to work something out on the diplomatic front after we’ve rid my lands of the demonic presence.”

“I suppose we should,” said the chief, a smile on his face.

I knew, however, that this was nothing but lip service. A long-running

antagonism between races wouldn't end so easily. Hopefully we humans could take the edge off their poor relations.

Although the Aryakan forces were still far away, we departed from the Dwarven Great Caves with our new five thousand troops in tow. I had thought the revolutionaries would be keeping watch at the border, but there was nobody on the lookout. It didn't speak well of the order in their ranks.

Traveling in our coach in the morning sunlight felt like we were on a trip for pleasure. And this was the same coach we had used in our escape and subsequently left at the Dwarven Great Caves. Since it could only fit four, it was me, Prince Richie, Adela, and the fairy king inside. I wasn't happy about being stuck with this flirt without a good reason, but we had traveled like this as four when he was Barkus. I still wished he could go back to that form, longing for the fluffy sensation of petting him.

"The escape came with many inconveniences, but it was a most delightful trip nonetheless. I feel I have experienced a close rapport with other people in the process, and it was all thanks to you."

"We were really surprised when it turned out Barkus was actually you. Never could've imagined the adorable little Barkus was a flirt all along."

"I never saw that curse coming, so I couldn't quite lift it. Taking that beast-man form was the most I could do, and I'm glad it allowed me to help you and do sumo. It was an enjoyable experience."

"What you did wasn't sumo, but your physical ability and your spirit magic were certainly a feast for the eyes."

"We elves are beloved by spirits. Come to think of it, I should pass on some of this spirit magic to Boorman," said the fairy king with a wide grin on his face.

I didn't like his current form, but we *had* traveled a great distance together while he was Barkus.

"Once I've regained my old position, I'd like to make sumo popular in the Elven Forest Republic too. Sumo is fascinating: it's a ritual, a show, and a ceremony. All forms of life ought to discover the numerous aspects of sumo, be inspired by it, and come to love it. Even those savage demons and monsters do

sumo properly, and they were able to engage with us through it. If there was ever a sport that could bring peace to the world, then I'm certain sumo is it."

The fairy king had evidently grown rather fond of sumo. His words made me consider the extent to which sumo could bring mutual understanding between different species and races. Sumo lets you compare your strength with someone else, using easy-to-understand rules. Belligerent races could make use of their strength, races valuing intelligence could study its rituals, and technologically inclined races could work on the techniques. All kinds of species and races could enjoy sumo in their own way, and that was what made sumo so great. It could bring world peace—a "Pax Sumonara," if you will. If everyone did sumo, they would smile regardless of whether they won or lost. And as a champion of sumo, I was proud of that fact.

Suddenly, the coach came to a stop.

"Soldiers ahead!"

Looking out of the window, I saw the Aryakan officer in the driver's seat pointing to the front. About two thousand ill-bred but beautiful soldiers were blocking the highway. *Now, how do we deal with these...?* Since we had us—Aryakan rikishi of the makuuchi division—and the dwarven troops, it would be pretty easy to rout them.

"Would you let me handle this?"

"What's your plan, Ulupano?"

"You're about to find out."

With that, the flirt stripped naked in the blink of an eye. What kind of skill was that...?

"Aaaawoooo!!!"

As he howled at the skies, hair grew all over his body, and he assumed the form of an enormous wolf in an instant. Apparently there was no fixed method of beginning transformations in this world, seeing as he hadn't performed a somersault this time. The underside of his chin was fluffy, but still too rough. *Zero out of ten, Ulupano.*

The sudden appearance of a huge fenrir seemed to shake the revolutionaries quite strongly, though I couldn't understand why. I began walking along the highway together with Ulupano towards the elven troops. Even were they to attack us, there were only two thousand of them. I could handle them without any help.

"I am Fairy King Ulupano, and I have returned! Prostrate yourselves before me!"

About half of the elves quickly obeyed his command. Apparently, the plan was to make them submit through the fairy king's superior social status.

"Pardon my insolence, o mighty Fairy King! But I must ask why you are coming from the direction of the Dwarven Great Caves, and in the company of the fugitive criminal Crown Princess Candidate! Are you not the real—"

The apparent captain of the elves didn't get to finish speaking; he was interrupted by the gigantic fenrir's deafening howl.

"How dare you speak to me like that, insolent lout! Know your place!!!"

The Fairy King's howl had been amplified by magic, and the pressure of it made the elven captain fall on his backside.

"How could there be a fenrir who wasn't real?! I was placed under house arrest by Chancellor Mickaël, escaped, was rescued by the Aryakan Crown Princess Floortje, and fled to Aryaka by Magic Train. Now I'm back to reclaim the Town of Yggdrasil with the assistance of Aryakan troops! This rebellion was organized by Chancellor Mickaël. Once I reach the capital, that traitor's fate will be sealed. Those standing in my way can consider their lives forfeit!"

The elven captain shrieked in terror.

"Th-Then, what about the revolutionaries?!"

"Break up those insurgents immediately and restore the pre-rebellion hierarchy! Or resist, and be executed on the spot!"

Visibly shaken, the captain stepped back in fear of the obviously scary enormous wolf.

"Repent your sins, kneel before your legitimate king, and your punishment

shall be lightened! Or leave... Leave and prepare for my arrival, if you think you stand a chance against a fenrir's fangs!"

Despite acting like a shallow flirt most of the time, Ulupano was evidently a proper king when push came to shove. I had slightly revised my opinion of him.

Roughly one-third of the elven troops ran as fast as they could. The rest seemed to be joining Ulupano, thankfully.

"Welcome back, Your Majesty. Your swift return is a most joyful occasion."

A handsome tall elf who came across as calm and collected knelt before the fairy king. Judging by his uniform, he appeared to be a common soldier of the lowest rank.

"Cabriel... How did you end up a regular grunt?"

"The chancellor demoted me from my rank of general. There was nothing I could do."

"You're definitely lying," said the fairy king after a pause.

"Come now—why would I? Given how often Your Majesty disappears, I figured it was one of those times and used the opportunity to put myself in the shoes of a grunt. All sorts of issues come into view once you look through the eyes of someone at the bottom of the chain of command."

This handsome general seemed to be the crafty type. I guessed he had disguised himself as a grunt to avoid the chancellor's anger while the fairy king was missing.

"Well, I'm glad I ran into you right away. Gather my troops, I'm restoring you to your rank of general."

However, the captain seemed unsatisfied with this proposition.

"What is it?" asked Ulupano.

"It seems like a good opportunity to promote me to marshal, Your Majesty. All the previous generals are gone thanks to the revolutionaries, and now there's nobody blocking my way up."

This elf was really bold with his requests.

“Very well. It is true that sometimes you need luck in life, and your time has come. I promote you to the rank of marshal.”

“Thank you kindly, Your Majesty.”

After bowing to Ulupano, Marshal Cabriel turned to the troops.

“You heard your king! All those blasted superiors and comrades standing in your way are no more! You can finally earn your way up! It doesn’t get any better for us elves, with our long life spans! Let us march upon those idiotic rebels while thanking them for the opportunities they’ve given us, and put an end to them!!!”

“Yes, sir!!!” came the resounding roar from the troops.

So this was why Cabriel had made such a bold request of the fairy king in front of all the soldiers—he had wanted to demonstrate the new opportunities for promotion firsthand. It was clear that the new marshal knew how to raise morale—the common grunts were looking on with their eyes gleaming.

We resumed our march, joined by the elven troops. It was rather leisurely, however, since we were all on foot. Ulupano, meanwhile, maintained the appearance of a fenrir.

“Why do you stay in that form, Ulupano?” I asked.

“The fenrir is a sacred beast, and ordinary elves are more impressed by this form. Besides, the daggers you and Adela stare at me aren’t as sharp this way.”

“Well, I suppose I can think of you as an overgrown Barkus, maybe.”

“I plan to stay like this till we reach the Town of Yggdrasil.” Ulupano wagged his tail.

As we continued to walk, a fog set upon us, thick enough to make it difficult to see Adela and Prince Richie nearby. With a metallic ringing, a gorgeous tall woman appeared out of the fog, in her hand a sounding staff—a khakkhara.

“Heed my words, Fairy King Ulupano. The Elder Council is displeased with how close Yggdrasil came to being consumed by fire.”

“Mother! I believe it has been two thousand years since I last saw you?”

This is Ulupano’s mother?! That meant she was a high elf too.

“The Elder Council wishes for the situation to be resolved posthaste. If you are incapable of handling it yourself, we may have to step in.”

“There is no need for the council to get involved, mother. I’m leading troops to slay that rebel Mickaël right now. After that, it won’t be long until the forest grows peaceful again.”

The woman raised her staff, its metal rings emitting a pleasant sound.

“Heed my words, my son Ulupano. The Elder Council wishes not for the death of an elf. Spare his life and banish him.”

Still in fenrir form, the fairy king frowned.

“If I must. Putting him to death would be easiest, though.”

“This whole state of affairs was brought upon us by your own unworthiness. Make up for it yourself. Should this be beyond your powers, the Elder Council will unleash its magic to slay those demons and monsters in our lands.”

“I understand. I’ll do something, so please tell everyone to stay deep in the forest and not come out.”

“I cannot take your word for it, so I shall accompany you.”

“What? For real, mother?”

“I do not tell lies.”

The high elf woman came to Ulupano’s side and sounded her staff, instantly dissipating the fog.

“So the topmost organization of the Elven Forest Republic was a council of elderly high elves...”

“Yes, milady. Publicly it’s a republic with the fairy king as its ruler, but it seems there were high elves standing above them all along.”

As Adela and I whispered to each other, I noticed the high elf woman staring our way.

“Hm... What an odd spectacle... You, the servant,” she called out to Adela.

“Y-Yes, h-h-how can I help you?”

For a few moments, the high elf woman unceremoniously observed my maid without saying a word.

“Well, I suppose you must have your reasons, so I shall not bother you with questions. Would you introduce your mistress and the Aryakan prince to me?”

“C-Certainly. This is Floortje Hobbema, my mistress. And this is Crown Prince Richie of the Kingdom of Aryaka.”

“Thank you for looking after my foolish son,” she addressed us. “My name is Jomin. It is a pleasure.”

“Likewise,” I replied.

“I am most pleased to make your acquaintance, Lady Jomin,” continued the prince.

From behind us came the heavy footsteps of the mizuchi.

“Oh, Jomin! How long has it been?”

“Mizuchi! What brings you here?”

“I’ve come to see sumo. ’Tis a feast for the eyes.”

“What is ‘sumo’?”

“Why, an exciting ritual that came from another world.”

“An ‘exciting’ ritual? Rituals are supposed to be solemn ceremonies...”

“You’d best see for yourself than listen to a lengthy explanation. The world keeps moving forward while you high elves spend your whole lives deep in the forest!” said the mizuchi and laughed.

Not like she had known about sumo until two days prior, though...

As we approached the village of Hufton, the road ahead was blocked by roughly five thousand revolutionaries, apparently scraped together by the elven captain who had run away earlier. The troops led by Ulupano and Marshal Cabriel continued their march, unfazed.

“S-Stop! Stop, I said!!!” shouted the captain.

“What right have you to impede the march of the fairy king?” asked Ulupano.

“Th-The fairy king is bedridden at the Palatial Tree! Y-You’re, you’re a fake! So p-please stop, I beg you!”

“Are you so addlebrained as to claim the fairy king bedridden at the Palatial Tree can transform into a fenrir?! Know your place! Now, out of my way!”

Jomin stepped forward.

“I am Jomin of the Elder Council. Cease your pointless resistance. Before you stands none other than the fairy king himself.”

“The Elder Council! The legendary Jomin!”

“I do not mind demonstrating the magical prowess of the high elves for the first time in a thousand years, but since our numbers are few, the Elder Council wishes to avoid needless bloodshed. You would do well to clear our way.”

Marshal Cabriel stepped forward next.

“I am Marshal Cabriel. I switched sides immediately, and was bestowed a rank

higher than my former one of general! Here in the royal army, there's nobody blocking your way up, and no peers to contend with!"

"You got promoted to marshal? Seriously?" asked one of the revolutionaries.

"Of course! The revolutionary army switched everyone's ranks, putting formerly low-ranking soldiers on top, but this also means that all ranks have been reset. It's not like the fairy king has a good memory, so the sooner you make a name for yourself, the easier it'll be to secure a good spot."

The incredible agitation of the revolutionaries was palpable. After all, the problem with long-lived races such as elves was the inability of individuals to move up through the ranks, since the higher positions were constantly occupied. And those who ended up as grunts in the revolutionary army had drawn particularly short straws. The prospects advertised by the marshal were bound to be appealing.

"The rank and file of the revolutionary army may switch sides without any punishment from the fairy king. Isn't that right, Your Majesty?"

"Indeed. And now is your best opportunity to secure a good post for yourself, before the army has fully formed. Why don't you all join me?"

"Seeing how he's in the form of the sacred beast, he must be the true Ulupano..." said one of the revolutionaries.

"And there's Jomin of the Elder Council. What, are they the loyalists and we the rebels?" said another.

"Damn, we have no hopes of climbing the ranks even in the revolutionary army, so that offer of theirs sounds pretty good..." said a third.

The captain of the revolutionaries looked at his troops with an expression like he would break down in tears any moment.

"Y-You idiots!!! Have you forgotten the ideal we're pursuing, of an army where ten thousand men are equal?!"

"But Captain, we're gonna lose everything if we end up as rebels. If the fairy king is fine, then Chancellor Mickaël is clearly in the wrong."

"Damn it! Then I'll have to do this alone! Viva la revolución!!!" shouted the

captain as he unsheathed his saber, ready to come charging our way at any moment.

Meanwhile, all of the grunts tore the red armbands off their upper arms in an instant and cast them in the air.

“I’m switching sides!”

“Long live the fairy king!”

“Long live the republic!”

They began stamping their feet and singing the Elven Forest Republic’s national anthem.

“You’ve made the right choice. Grunts may join without penalty. Officers will be arrested—best run if that doesn’t suit you,” spoke the fairy king.

“W-Will you pardon us if we surrender?” tearfully asked the captain whose saber had fallen from his hands.

“If the chancellor has fooled you, I’ll pardon you should you submit to me right now. Even if you’ve broken the law, I’ll have the court-martial take your surrender into consideration.”

“Then I surrender.”

Seeing the captain kneel on the highway and start crying bitterly, I felt that his revolution had, in that very moment, become a thing of the past.

“Elves have become such lowly creatures recently...”

“We live in a different time from two thousand years ago, mother. This is how things are now.”

“What a bewildering change. The primary reason for it is humans, I’m sure.”

“Everyone changes: humans, dwarves, demons and monsters...as do we elves.”

“How utterly regrettable.”

Thus, we entered Hufton without any fighting.

“Ah, Fairy King! I’m so glad to see you back in this form. And Jomin of the Elder Council! It has been a long time.”

“It has indeed, Vivi. About a thousand years, was it?”

“Sounds about right. So the Elder Council has finally decided to act?”

“The dryads have informed us of Yggdrasil’s recent peril. We may have to intervene should worse come to worst.”

Chief Vivi flashed a smile.

“You needn’t worry—we have sumo now.”

“This ‘sumo’ again? What meaning could there possibly be in a lowly martial art that involves bringing your body in contact with another?”

“Ho ho, you will understand once you see it.”

Jomin went silent, a frown surfacing on her face. She would have to come to the Town of Yggdrasil to see sumo in person.

“Where’s Boorman?”

“He went to see an elder skilled in an ancient elven martial art. Should be back any minute now.”

Apparently even elves had their own martial arts, though I didn’t imagine they were very powerful. Perhaps they could make use of their long life spans to reach incredible mastery in them.

As Marshal Cabriel finished assembling an army and declared a march on the capital, Boorman showed up.

“Hey, yokozuna. You’re back.”

“Yes, the dwarven Magic Train helped us make the trip much quicker than expected. How has your training gone, Boorman?”

“The more I train, the more I grasp sumo’s depth. It both scares and excites me. Also, the magic-obsessed elders have started their research into magic-imbued sumo techniques.”

“Oh? I’m looking forward to the results.”

If elves skilled in magic could analyze those abilities, the mystery behind them might finally be solved. We rikishi used such techniques in a no-theory-all-practice kind of way, and they were banned in regular sumo tours regardless: showy as tornadoes and lightning were, they ran counter to the essence of sumo. True sumo involves using only your trained body and mind.

“Oh, and some of your fellow Aryakans were staying with someone I know, so I’ve brought them over.”

And in the direction Boorman pointed was...

“Prince Richie, Lady Floortje, I’m most pleased to see you back in one piece.”

It’s General Maurilio and his elite rikishi!

“General Maurilio! You’re alive!” I exclaimed.

“Indeed I am! Apologies for worrying you. Your entire retinue of five hundred warriors is safe and sound.” The general saluted us.

I had been very concerned with their fate after they’d taken on the monsters in the state guest house all on their own in order to let me and the prince escape.

“I’m glad to see you all again, and that nobody is wounded. Welcome back.”

“Glad to be back, yokozuna!” replied Maurilio’s rikishi as one, saluting me.

“How did you become acquainted with Boorman?”

“An elf who once trained me is leading the resistance against the revolutionaries,” explained Boorman. “She took in General Maurilio here too.”

“That’s very nice of her.”

“And wow, you guys even have the fairy king with you.” Boorman was smiling at Ulupano in fenrir form.

“So you’re Boorman. I am Fairy King Ulupano. Your self-driven pursuit of sumo is admirable, and I wish to reward you by teaching you techniques which make use of spirits.”

“You’re kidding! Damn, can’t believe I get to learn from the fairy king himself! Thanks a lot!”

Prince Richie approached General Maurilio.

“What’s the situation in the Elven Forest Republic, General?”

“Chaos, Your Highness, to put it mildly. Every major town is seeing uprisings against the revolutionaries. Chancellor Mickaël’s support has sunk to rock bottom due to the fact that he let demons and monsters into the Town of Yggdrasil. Leaders in all spheres of life are actively pressing the chancellor to let them see the fairy king.”

It sounded like a failed revolution already. The chancellor would soon have to resort to political purges.

“If we don’t hurry to the capital, we might end up with a Great Purge on our hands,” I warned the fairy king.

“The elven population grows so slowly that it’s not very likely, but I’m not about to expect restraint from the chancellor. Let us take the forest path to reach the capital quickly.”

“‘Take the forest path’? What does that mean?”

“It’s magic exclusive to elves that allows swift passage through the forest.”

I recalled that elves *had* somehow caught up to our coach early in our escape, around the time I’d found Barkus. *Ah, how I miss the way he used to be before he grew enormous... Wolves shouldn’t be the size of bulls.*

Jomin walked to the front of our group, her staff emitting a metallic ringing.

“I shall open the path.”

“You will, mother?”

“Yes, we must hurry to Yggdrasil.”

Phalaris stepped up next.

“Wanna fly on my back? I can carry a few people to mount an assault.”

“Hmph. As if a dragon is fast enough to move this army.”

“Whoa, shots fired by Barkus’s mom!” replied Phalaris.

“‘Barkus’?” asked Jomin as she turned to her son, who awkwardly looked

away.

She then sounded her staff and began chanting a sonorous incantation that resonated through the forest. In response, the forest rustled and creaked to life, opening a straight wide path through itself.

“What a splendid forest path!” said one of the village elders.

“I would expect no less from Jomin, the best magician among high elves,” said another.

“Why don’t we come to Yggdrasil with you?” said a third.

Jomin regarded Hufton’s elders with a quizzical expression.

“To what end? You are too old to fight, are you not?”

“What are you talking about?” replied one of them.

“I see you haven’t a clue,” continued another.

“Wherever yokozuna Floortje goes, there be sumo,” said a third.

“And *that* is what we’re going to see,” finished a fourth.

“I cannot comprehend this...” replied Jomin.

These elders were in love with sumo already. A crowd of young elves from the village tagged along as well. We were pretty much leaving a ghost town behind us.

“It’s fine, mother. Probably,” said Ulupano.

“We are going against demons and monsters with no semblance of reasoning. And has the Demon Lord himself not made an appearance?”

“It should be fine, trust me.”

Doubt was written all over Jomin’s face. For now, we would just have to hurry to the Town of Yggdrasil through this forest path opened for us. Our troops from Aryaka weren’t here yet, but it was probably fine. Probably.

After simply walking through the forest for some time, Yggdrasil came into view already. It wasn’t like we had walked extremely fast or anything, and yet

the distance traveled was staggering.

“Maybe it’s like *shukuchi*,” I wondered.

“What is ‘shukuchi’?” asked the prince.

“It refers to a means of shrinking distances. A sort of spatial magic, you might say.”

“I see. You are a well of knowledge, Floortje.”

“Oh, please, Your Highness...”

It felt so nice to be praised by my beloved prince. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

“This magic shrinks space-time with such delicacy as to be imperceptible. The word ‘shukuchi’ is a good fit,” explained Jomin.

Though it could only be used in a forest, it seemed incredibly useful for moving troops very quickly. *Such terrifying magic*, I thought.

Having come near the Town of Yggdrasil so swiftly, I looked up at its namesake. It towered over us, as magnificent as ever. The trees around the town swayed their branches as if welcoming us.

And in front of the town stood members of the Demon Lord’s army, radiating confidence. A set of their elite rikishi, with the Demon Lord himself in front.

“There you are, yokozuna!” he spoke.

“I’ve come as promised. Also, what in the world is this?”

As I poked at the bizarre object shaped like a structure’s foundation, the Demon Lord frowned.

“I told that chancellor to build me a dohyō for our showdown, and this shoddy earthwork was the best he could do. Can’t fight on this thing, can we now? Wanna summon the usual thing somewhere?”

“I would certainly feel bad for all the people who’ve come to see it.”

“Yeah, same.”

With the usual metallic ringing, Jomin thrust her staff at the shabby dohyō, causing it to crumble. Indeed, there was no way we could do sumo on

something this unstable.

“Heed my words, Demon Lord, for I speak on behalf of the Elder Council. You would do well to leave these lands at once.”

“Hah hah hah, so you’ve finally left your lair, high elf granny! Too bad your last hope is gone. We’ve finished analyzing this town’s defensive barrier, so we have nothing to fear from you elves anymore.”

“My, those are some big words, boy. And indeed, Yggdrasil’s forest barrier is currently damaged and not performing its function.”

Jomin began quietly chanting an incantation.

“Hah, no way you’re gonna fix such large-scale defenses in a matter of—Huh?!”

“Engage...” finished Jomin, sounding her staff.

As she did, something white akin to shock waves came flying out of Yggdrasil’s base and pushed all the demons and numerous monsters stationed in town outside, sending them high into the air before causing them to fall back to the ground like rain, screaming. As horrible a sight as a rain of monsters was, they were all tough, so while some blood was spilt, none looked to have perished.

“Your forces have been expelled from the town. Now return to your demonic lands,” spoke Jomin.

“You damn old hag! What the hell was that spell just now?!” complained the Demon Lord.

“You should’ve expected a large-scale magic barrier to have hidden properties. Of its five layers, you were only able to break through the first and a small part of the second. Whoever you assigned to this task is clearly skilled, but they still have a long way to go.”

With monsters having been launched into the air in every direction from the town, a great number of them had fallen near the west gate, where we stood. Many had light wounds such as bleeding noses after crashing into the ground. It was a scene straight out of hell.

“This town’s protective magic has been left unattended for roughly two

thousand years. Why don't I renovate it using the superior design which was conceived by the powerful magicians of the Elder Council with too much time on their hands? I'm about to get busy, so you demons and monsters had better leave, lest you wish to be slaughtered."

"Grrr!" grumbled the Demon Lord.

The Town of Yggdrasil had been reclaimed without us having to do any sumo at all. *Wow, high elves.*

"I'm gonna show you, old hag! Hey, you apes, get ready to fight! We're gonna kill this granny and the fairy king!"

"Feebleminded savages! Witness now the powerful magic of my race and burn it into your memory!"

The situation between the two armies was touch and go. Bloodshed seemed nigh unavoidable. I felt I had better not do or say something to set it off.

"Wh-What's going on here?! You demons and monsters keep causing trouble for me! Quit screwing around!" shouted Chancellor Mickaël, who had shown up too.

When he saw Jomin, his legs gave out.

"Ahh, aaaaaaah! Aaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!!!" He began screaming as his eyes seemed like they would pop out, his beautiful face all creased up.

"Yes, I'm Jomin of the Elder Council."

"Aaaahhh! Th-This is a misunderstanding!"

"I'm here too."

"Aaaahhh, aaaaahhh!!! Fairy King! Aaaaahhh, aaaahhh!!!"

All I'd wanted was to do some team sumo, but all the bad sorts were rapidly perishing of their own accord. It was troubling.

"Now that it's come to this, let us settle things through sumo!!!" I exclaimed.

"I don't see the logic here."

"Ugh..."

I couldn't find a good reply to Jomin's calm retort. Unconsciously, I raised a leg. Not a pose one should assume in front of a demigod that is a high elf and a keeper of the forest that is a fenrir, but I was past that. For I was a beast of a sumo wrestler!

STOMP!!! The shiko I had poured all my might into shook the ground. A sound like that of glass being smashed to pieces reached my ears as well.

"Ahhh!!! The five-layer protective barrier of the Town of Yggdrasil is in pieces! H-How, how is this possible?! What is that anti-magic power?!" wailed Jomin.

"Sumo," I replied.

"What?"

"Sumo."

"How does a martial art have such power?"

"Sumo is a ritual."

"Oh. Really?"

Yes, really.

"I am a yokozuna, an avatar of a god here in the mortal realm, and I take it upon myself to settle this dispute. Do not dare wage pointless wars in front of my eyes, wars that nobody stands to gain from! Now, Demon Lord! Let us do sumo with the Town of Yggdrasil at stake!"

"Heh heh heh, you're really pushing it, you know that? But this is my jam too! As a yokozuna of Demonic Sumo, I accept your challenge! What say you, monsters?!"

"Yeah!!!" shouted his subordinates.

All right, it worked out somehow! I wasn't about to have a war on my hands.

Jomin looked puzzled. I couldn't blame her, since even I had said what I'd said on the spur of the moment. Even I didn't believe a citizen of a different country had any right to stake one of the elven towns in sumo, but what can you do? It was a spur-of-the-moment thing.

"Mother, if it weren't for Lady Floortje, I would have perished in the forest,

which would in turn certainly have led to a bloody feud between the elves. So please, let her do sumo with this town at stake." Ulupano, still in fenrir form, lowered his head to Jomin.

Even he could say pretty good things sometimes.

"But my son, we will lose this town if she loses."

"It was our kin that let demons and monsters inside it in the first place. It's not an exaggeration to say this folly has already made us lose control of it once. So if we lose it again as a result of this competition, it will simply return things to how they were before."

Jomin shut her eyes and folded her arms in thought. It seemed the thing she was so reluctant to let go of was Yggdrasil itself, rather than the town surrounding it. I wondered why.

In the distance, I could see Yggdrasil rustle to life.

Jomin, my child... I do not mind. Had Floortje not put out the fires in the earlier battle, I would no doubt have burnt away. I have faith in her.

Did this beautiful voice coming directly into my head belong to Yggdrasil?

"But ancestral spirit, you are the pillar of support for our race. I could rout these demons and monsters all on my own..."

It turned out Yggdrasil was the elves' ancestor. Apparently, this beautiful race had been born from it.

"Shiko, eh?" spoke the Demon Lord in a madcap voice, as if he meant for us to hear it.

"Yes, sir—shiko can dispel magic!"

"I completely forgot about that, since we don't use magic. Monsters' special abilities aren't magic, after all."

"Now we have no reason to be scared of that high elf magic. We can all just do shiko together."

"Yep. Floortje really helped us out on this one."

Whoops!

Jomin had a sour look on her face.

“What a troublesome martial art... Very well. You may face off with this town at stake.”

“Thank you, Jomin!” I exclaimed.

“Naturally, I’m assuming you’re completely assured of your victory?”

“Uhh, what are you talking about? It’s the heavens who decide the victor, and we simply give it our all.”

“That is absurd!”

“Just like nobody can tell what will happen to them in the future, nobody can predict the outcome of a bout, given that it is a ritual.”

I wondered why Jomin was looking at me like I was some rare animal she had never seen before.

“All right—thanks to Floortje, we’ve avoided a boring end to this. Now let’s do this!”

Do this *where*, though? Surely the Demon Lord didn’t have the chancellor’s sorry excuse for a dohyō in mind.

“Wanna summon a dohyō? Doesn’t matter where—any dohyō of a proper size is heaven for a rikishi,” he continued.

“It would be a big letdown to do it in such a place after coming to the capital of the Elven Forest Republic. Can’t we have a building that can house ten thousand spectators?”

“How many years do you think it’s gonna take to build?” retorted the Demon Lord.

O Yggdrasil, o Yggdrasil, may I summon a martial arts hall?—I asked in my thoughts.

Heh heh, you can do such a thing? There is a square beside the Palatial Tree. You may wish to call it there.

Would you lend me your strength?—I continued.

By all means. I will assist elves, humans, demons, and monsters in coming to

understand each other better through strength, despite the differences in their appearance. What a wonderful affair it shall be!

"All right, Demon Lord, we're going to summon a building."

"Oh, like how you made a sumo hall in Aryaka? Do I need to do something too?"

"We're making a place for humans and your kind to compete in the elven lands, and I need to borrow your magical power for it."

The Demon Lord smiled. Though he was a demon who radiated beauty, smiling made him look a bit like a young boy. He may not have liked that I had such an impression of him, but he wasn't pure evil—there were shades of gray to him. He was good-humored and nice when dealing with his allies. And after being the Demon Lord for so long, he didn't strive to shine so bright as to eclipse everyone around him. I could sense humanlike depth in him.

I took position by the Demon Lord's side.

"We shall summon a building large enough to cover the space of the square near the Palatial Tree. It will be big enough to house ten thousand viewers, and will be suitable not only for sports events, but also for musical performances and shows. A sacred kind of place, like everyone's hopes and dreams taken form. On top of the roof will be an onion-like object," I explained.

"Why an onion?" asked the Demon Lord.

"That's how it goes with martial arts halls."

Or at least it did with Nippon Budokan in Japan in my past life. In my youth I had barely attended concerts and the like, though, so I couldn't be sure.

"Say the words of the spell with me: 'Summoning a Martial Arts Hall of Yggdrasil.'"

"All right!"

The two of us each raised a hand towards the square and clasped them together. It was to be the first time the yokozunas of Aryaka and the demonic realm did something together.

"Summoning a Martial Arts Hall of Yggdrasil!" we said in unison.

A wave of green, transparent magical energy flowed from the earth, entering me and the Demon Lord. At the base of Yggdrasil appeared an ivy which was a faint pastel green and another that was a deep, dark black. The two ivies intertwined and formed a shape.

“Such powerful magic!” exclaimed one of the onlookers.

“I never thought you could build something so quickly!” continued another.

The black thick ivy grew thorns while the faint green one grew leaves as the construction continued. After a while, gold-colored ivies appeared from all sides, climbed the roof, intertwined, and formed a golden onion. *All right!*

“Does the presence of such a strange building beside the Palatial Tree not bother you, o Yggdrasil?” asked Jomin, looking glum.

It brings me joy to be able to see the wonderful sight of the young competing in sports so close to me. And not many elven children have been born as of late.

I started to think I wanted to show even Yggdrasil itself how exciting sumo was.

We passed through the west gate. Chancellor Mickaël tried to escape at some point, but Ulupano caught him in his jaws.

“Where might you be going, Chancellor?”

“I-I have no taste for martial arts! I’m fleeing to the demonic realm!”

“Don’t come to my place. You’re a bother.”

“B-But Demon Lord, we agreed...!”

“No, we didn’t. I only helped you because you said you planned to take over these lands. If it didn’t work out, that was going to be that.”

“B-But it was your side who made the offer first!”

“Don’t know nothing about that.”

What a disgraceful verbal contest. Only an idiot could’ve expected things to go well after letting the Demon Lord’s army into his country’s capital. Just like how it’s a spy’s fault if he manages to get wool pulled over his eyes.

As we walked, the elven commoners happily waved to us.

“Welcome back, Your Highness! I’m glad to see you’re safe!” spoke one of them.

“Thank you. I’ve returned together with the fairy king.”

“Ah, Fairy King! You’re safe too!”

“I am, thank you for your concern. Have you all been well?”

“The revolutionaries and the monsters made a lot of noise, but they didn’t do much harm!”

“Good, good.”

Despite his disposition for cheap flattery, the fairy king was evidently beloved by his people.

Showered by cheering from all sides, we walked through the main street towards the square.

“What is that new building, Fairy King?” asked another citizen.

“It is a place to hold sumo events.”

“There’s enough seats to house every elf in this town. Bring everyone you can, would you?” I asked.

“Sumo!!! That sport you did at the west gate, right? I saw it—it was awesome!”

“Thank you. We’re starting soon, so come and don’t be late.”

“Absolutely! And I’ll bring my whole family!” joyfully replied the young-looking elf.

The Valhalla Sumo Association was no doubt involved in the operation of this new hall, so the visitors would certainly be able to buy goods and boxed lunches inside. Thinking about that made me wonder if the sumo association assisting Demonic Sumo came from Valhalla too.

“Demon Lord, does the sumo association of the demonic realm come from Valhalla?”

“Yep, they do. As I learned sumo and planned to show up in Aryaka with it, some translucent people appeared and said they’d help. Taught me all sorts of

customs and how to carry myself.”

They seemed to be working to promote sumo in this world. Or so I thought for a moment, before deciding that wasn’t accurate. They always appeared wherever someone was serious in their pursuit of sumo. For the people of Valhalla, too, were sumo wrestlers.

We stood at the entrance of the new Martial Arts Hall. It was an odd building made up of intertwined ivy, but there was something pleasantly warm about the place. A gold-colored onion sat on top of the roof. If you were to look even higher up, you would see Yggdrasil towering high above, like a mother cradling her child. The rhythmical beating of drums could be heard—the type that draws crowds to an upcoming match.

Citizens of the Town of Yggdrasil... I am speaking directly into your minds. Sumo is about to take place. You may have seen this thrilling martial art at the west gate the other day. Today, another team competition in sumo will take place at the Martial Arts Hall of Yggdrasil. Entry is free. Please invite all you can and come to spectate.

Yggdrasil had been kind enough to spread the message through psychic waves to everyone in town. It was a big help.

Beyond the entrance were translucent people of the Valhalla association, lowering their heads to us.

“Lady Floortje, yokozuna Demon Lord, welcome.”

“Do you manage this place too?” I asked.

“Yes, as it is a sumo event. It takes experienced staff to do things efficiently,” said the Shikimori elder with a smile.

“A black-and-white yin-yang-shaped dohyō has already been prepared. As before, the referee duties will be performed by a gray referee.”

“I like him. He’s fair,” I said.

“No complaints here either,” spoke the Demon Lord.

“The outcome of today’s tournament will decide which side—east or west, Aryaka or the demonic realm—has the stronger yokozuna. I am looking forward

to it,” said the Shikimori elder and smiled again.

Guided by the residents of Valhalla, we parted with the Demon Lord and entered the east retiring room.

“Wow, a tatami floor! Authentic!” exclaimed Phalaris as he dove onto the tatami flooring and rolled around.

He never changed.

“Now, time to decide who we’re fielding.” The Aryakan rikishi tensed up at my words. “What’s set in stone is that I go last, to fight the Demon Lord. Also, Clifton goes third.”

“Does Kukuri also go third?”

“Probably. If not, we’ll change it up.”

“Ah... I see...” spoke Clifton with deep emotion in his voice.

Two slots were locked in—that left three to be decided. The remaining members to choose from were Prince Richie, Phalaris, Yustin, and General Maurilio.

“I wanna fight Arima again!” spoke up Phalaris, raising his hand.

“Arima will probably go fourth. Don’t you want to try going against someone else, though?”

“Uh, well... I do! Actually, I wanna fight the Demon Lord too!”

“Okay, you’re going second, Phalaris,” I told him.

“Second, eh? Who’s their second?”

“Most likely Uta.”

“Damn! That bitch, huh? I can’t handle her type.”

“Really?”

“There’s a girl in my school who keeps bothering me all the time. It’s annoying so I yelled at her and she freaking cried. I’ve no idea what’s up with her!”

Phalaris... That girl probably has a crush on you... Prince Richie gestured at me to drop the matter, so I did. It seemed some interesting things were happening at school too. I wanted to go take a look sometime.

“Would you go fourth, Your Highness?” I asked him.

“Against Arima? Sure. He’s going to be a challenge.”

Being ōzeki, Arima outranked Prince Richie, who was maegashira. But this was a contest between Aryaka and the demonic realm, so I felt it was appropriate to field the prince.

With that, the only slot left open was the first. As I wondered whether to pick Yustin or General Maurilio, they both looked at me with expressions brimming with hope. *Let’s see...*

“Would you go first, Yustin?”

“I won’t let you down, Lady Floortje,” he replied with a broad smile.

General Maurilio, on the other hand, looked crestfallen.

“Sorry, General.”

“It’s fine. I’ll cheer for you from the ringside seats.”

“We will definitely win.”

“Please do,” replied the general with a smile.

I felt bad leaving him to spectate after he had spent time in the resistance here at the Elven Forest Republic, but I wanted to see Yustin go up against monsters. *Sorry.*

“So, our fielding order for this one will be: Yustin first, Phalaris second, Clifton third, His Highness fourth, and me last.”

“I cannot wait.”

“I’m doing sumo with a woman, huh...”

“I’ll bring Kukuri back.”

“Let’s do our best, Floortje.”

“Let us secure the win. A clean one, if possible.”

“Yeah!” replied the other four in unison.

Team competitions were nice. Moments like these were uplifting.

After the gray referee came to our room, I handed him a piece of paper with our fielding order.

“Hmm... Very interesting... This is looking to be a fun series.”

“You won’t tell us who each of us is going against?”

“I will just before the start of the first bout. I’m sure you understand that wrestlers can be stronger in some matchups and weaker in others.”

It made sense. Changing our lineup after seeing that of the opponent wouldn’t be fair.

Our side had rikishi of the ōzeki rank going first and second, and I hoped for them to secure the first two wins. We would have less to worry about afterwards if our victory in the competition was already secure.

“Now, let’s get changed.”

I transported myself to the usual dressing room and put on my mawashi over my dress. When I returned, everyone was already wearing theirs. *Rikishi really do look great in mawashi.* And Yustin had gained weight again. *I’m jealous...*

“Rikishi of the Kingdom of Aryaka, please make your way to the ring,” spoke the gray referee.

As the five of us entered the venue, we saw the spectator seats full of elves.

“Do your best, yokozuna Floortje!” shouted the elven housewife I had seen when fleeing the town through the west gate.

“That’s the leader of the resistance,” explained General Maurilio.

Though she most definitely looked merely like a beautiful housewife, she was actually the leader of the resistance? Apparently common sense wasn’t a thing with elves.

In the VIP seats were the fairy king in his fenrir form, King Arvi, and Jomin.

The Demon Lord and his rikishi entered next, looking gallant in their mawashi.

“Kukuri...”

“Coach...”

Kukuri, who hadn't shown herself at the west gate earlier, made an appearance at last. As I had thought, she was to go third. The Demon Lord was fifth, Arima was fourth, so naturally, Kukuri was third. *Read them like a book.* Kukuri kept her face downturned, looking a little sad. Upon seeing her, Clifton began to look sad as well.

"You don't need words. Tell her how you feel through sumo."

"Okay..." replied Clifton, clenching his teeth and facing forward.

That's the spirit. Sumo wrestlers are to always move forward. No matter what hardships they face, no matter how bad a hand fate deals them, they must push and thrust their way through it all with all the force they can muster. That's what defines a good rikishi.

The fairy king leapt out of the VIP seats down into the ring, still in his fenrir form. I couldn't keep myself from admiring his beautiful figure, however he may have been on the inside.

"My dear audience! Your fairy king is back! I'm sure the good people of this town had to suffer under the rule of the foolish revolutionaries and their demonic friends! I must apologize to you, for it was my unworthiness that brought this upon you!" spoke the fairy king in a clear voice. "And neither the revolutionaries nor their allies have been routed from these lands just yet. A solution to this state of affairs has been presented by Lady Floortje, a yokozuna and a crown princess candidate of our friendly nation, the Kingdom of Aryaka. We can drive the demons and monsters away through a contest in sumo rather than with blades and magic! It is an opportunity to solve an international dispute through sports rather than war!"

The entire audience of over ten thousand locals looked upon the king in silence.

"No doubt some of you may question if such a thing is even possible—never before has war been ended in such a way. But I want to ask you this! Would it not be a wonderful thing if such an outcome was achieved regardless?! As King of the Elven Forest Republic, I have accepted Floortje's proposal and will allow the Kingdom of Aryaka and the residents of the demonic realm to do team sumo here today!"

Silence enveloped the hall once more. As I began to wonder if the audience didn't like what he had to say, a faint clapping began, quickly growing into thunderous applause mixed with cheering.

"Sumo! Sumo! Sumo! Sumo!!!" wholeheartedly shouted the elves, raising their hands and stamping their feet.

"Oh yeah, if it weren't for yokozuna Floortje, Yggdrasil would've burnt down already," spoke a member of the audience.

"I saw sumo at the west gate. It was magnificent how that frail-looking princess Floortje brought down a poisonous frogman and a hellfire troll!" said another.

"If we have to go to war, there will be lots of casualties on both sides! So why not try settling things through sumo?" said a third.

"I hear Floortje saved the fairy king," said a fourth.

"A relative in Hufton told me the Demon Lord's army sent pursuers after her again and again, but Floortje beat them back every time," said a fifth.

To my relief, the reception to sumo was generally favorable.

"Now, it is time to begin team sumo!" announced the fairy king.

With that, the tournament was upon us. Both sides of the competition sat in the ringside seats. On the west side of the dohyō, amid the enemy ranks, was an odd pale-looking wrestler I had never seen before, set to go first.

Uta, an alraune, was to go second. She lacked mobility, but the fact that she could physically plant her roots into the ground made her a tenacious opponent. Pollen and ivy attacks were her other specialties.

In the third slot was Kukuri, an arachne. She was a mighty opponent due to the good balance her six spider legs provided her, as well as her high level of technique. And we had better watch out for her thread traps.

Fourth was Arima. A horned, scary-looking red demon whom I respected for his uprightness. His skill was high and well balanced in all aspects. Special ability —flight.

The Demon Lord was to go last. He had a gaudy mawashi sparkling in a golden

color around his beautiful, thin, and muscular figure. A yokozuna of the demonic realm with overwhelming ability. Since he had learned sumo from the residents of Valhalla, he was on equal footing with us. The first stage of his transformation made him big and strong. Apparently there was a stage two, but I never got to see it during our bout on the Magic Train.

While I wanted to score a clear win, our opponents were strong, so we couldn't let our guards down. Were we to lose, a town of a country that wasn't our own would be taken away, and the elves would be sad. Great responsibility rested on our shoulders.

Adela stood in the ring, spread her white fan, and began announcing.

"On the east, Yustin, Yustin... On the west, Slilene, Slilene..."

Was that its name? It looked like a human, but apparently was in fact a slime.

"Slilene. If you turn to slime form, you will lose due to a lack of identifiable legs," explained the gray referee.

"I know-lene. It works like that in the demonic realm too-lene."

"Very well."

So that was how this slime did sumo. Some monsters like the naga didn't have legs, so managing the ruleset must've been a pain.

Lumbering, Yustin climbed the dohyō.

"Even slimes do sumo, huh?" he asked.

"We do. Everyone loves sumo!"

"Ah, that's good, that's good."

Yustin regarded Slilene with a kind of parental affection in his eyes. He then threw salt on the ring and performed shiko, as did his opponent. I wondered if the salt wouldn't be a problem for the slime. It seemed to be awfully pliable, but with some kind of thin plastic-like skin. And then I realized it had no bones, making me wonder all the more what its sumo would look like.

"Face each other."

Despite the overall human appearance, Slilene had no eyes, ears, mouth, or

face in general. Around its transparent-looking body was a light blue mawashi. *What an odd wrestler...* Where did its voice even come from?

The two's breathing synchronized and they charged at each other. Yustin's impact was as glorious as always. Slilene, on the other hand, twisted its body to avoid him and wrapped around behind his back.

"What?!" exclaimed Yustin.

Because slimes had no bones, he hadn't managed to find anything to grab. Yustin had his mawashi grabbed from behind and was starting to get pushed.

"Push him out, Slilene! The longer this goes, the smaller your advantage!"

"Okay-lene! Time to push with all I have-lene!"

"Gggghhh!" grunted Yustin as he slid along the ground. It didn't look good for him. "You little...!" he shouted as he grabbed Slilene's shoulder and turned around.

But the slime slipped out of his grasp and took position behind his back once more. Such incredible flexibility without any bones... I should've expected as much from a slime.

"Grab its mawashi, Yustin!" I shouted.

Surprised by my words, Yustin stuck his hands behind him and did as I suggested, then pushed the mawashi around himself to bring the slime to his front. As pliable as Slilene's body was, the mawashi was fixed in place, and the slime couldn't simply get out of it as a sumo wrestler whose mawashi comes off instantly loses.

Maintaining a firm deep double underarm grip on his opponent's mawashi, Yustin pressed his head and shoulder against Slilene's chest.

"Not bad-lene! I see-lene why your rank is ōzeki!"

"Thanks!"

"But slime sumo isn't quite so simple!"

With that, Yustin's head ended up buried *inside* his opponent's chest. He couldn't breathe like that! What did the rules have to say about this? The gray

referee looked conflicted, but didn't seem to be stopping the bout. Which meant it was an acceptable move, apparently... Inside Slilene's transparent chest, Yustin looked to be in pain. Was he to suffocate and lose here? As that thought passed through my mind, gears appeared behind his back and began to rotate. *His spirit of sumo!*

As Yustin's veins rose to the surface looking like they were about to burst, and his muscles swelled up, he began constricting his opponent with unbelievable strength, all while still maintaining the deep double underarm grip. A *forward force down*!

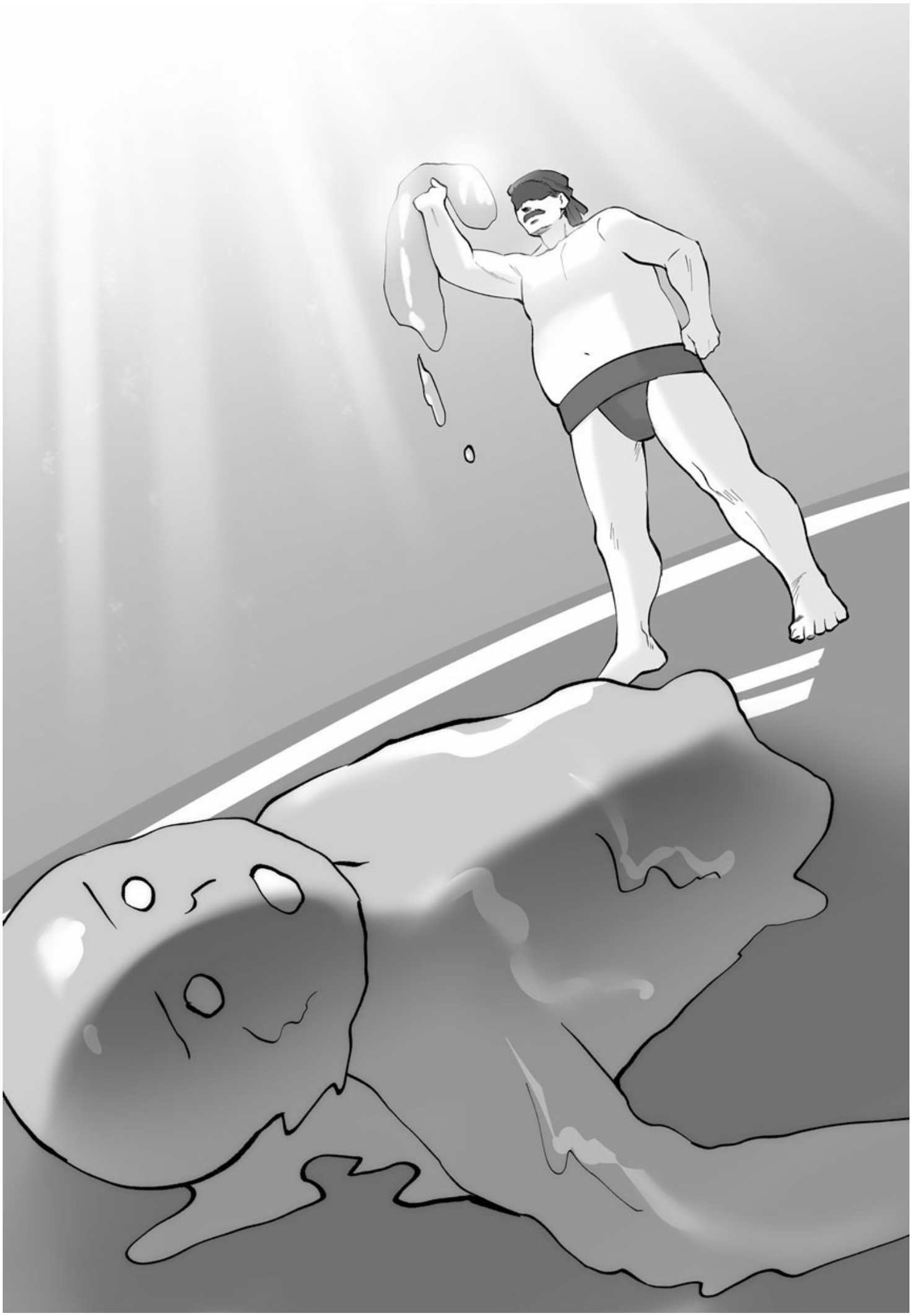
"A forward-lene force down wouldn't work on someone with no bones or muscle-lene... What?!"

SNAP!!! With Herculean strength, Yustin simply squashed Slilene's body!

"Aaaaahhh!" screamed young elven ladies in the spectator seats.

Faced with such a brutal scene without any warning, the elves were taken aback.

Slilene's top half landed on the ground with a heavy *thud*.



“Winner, Yustin!” announced the referee.

After a big huff, Yustin steadied his breathing.

“Guess I lost-lene! How are you so strong-lene?”

“Sorry, sorry, you caught me off guard since I didn’t think I’d start suffocating. You okay?”

“I’m an invertebrate-lene, so I’m fine! Just gotta pull myself together-lene!”

Slilene’s top half lost its shape, bounced back towards the lower half, and joined up with it again. *How convenient...*

“Didn’t think I’d get pressed hard enough to tear in half-lene. You’re amazing-lene!”

“You were amazing too. Never thought someone could deflect attacks with such insane flexibility.”

The two wrestlers left the ring after praising each other’s performances. *Okay, things got scary for a moment, but that’s a win for us!*

Yustin came back to our seats.

“Well done, Yustin. We’re off to a good start,” I said.

“Thanks. But I must say, Demonic Sumo is scary. Who could’ve thought they could make you choke...?”

“You’ve got that right. Their special abilities are a pain to deal with.”

Phalaris got up.

“Come on, man, why are you having so much trouble with a slime?!”

“Look at the mouth on this dragon!” replied Yustin.

“I’m gonna go teach that flower woman not to mess with me, hah hah hah!”

“You’re acting like some kind of villain, Phalaris,” I told him.

“O-Oh...”

Perhaps it really could end up being an easy win for him, given he had brought down Arima. On second thought... He couldn’t let his guard down.

There is no such thing as an “easy win” in sumo. One has to make full use of one’s body and mind in order not to score an unexpected loss.

“Good luck, Phalaris.”

“I’ve got this, Richie!” he replied with a smile and climbed the dohyō.

To my surprise, his opponent, Uta, had gotten better at walking. Her gait wasn’t unsteady anymore. Though it had only been a short time, maybe she had fixed that weakness of hers.

“Oh?” For some reason, her eyes took on the shape of hearts upon seeing Phalaris. “You’re a handsome one. ♪”

“Huh? So what if I am?”

“It’s great! Do you fancy an older lady taking you somewhere?”

“Screw that.”

“Oh, come on, don’t be so cold.”

For some reason, Uta was twisting herself up into knots.

“Ahem. Cease your whispering, wrestler Uta,” chided the referee.

“’Kay!”

Though she stopped talking, the passionate look she directed at Phalaris didn’t go away. Maybe she was a woman of many romances, due to being a flower monster.

“You’re just like those bitches from my school,” spoke Phalaris.

“Oh, you go to school? And there are girls like me?”

“Yeah, one of them kept pestering me, so I yelled at her and she freaking cried.”

“Phalaris, she...”

“Why can’t she leave me alone if she hates me so much? I don’t get why she’s gotta bother me over every little thing.”

“You’re such a dork!”

“What did you just say?!”

“Ahem. Face each other, you two.” Even the gray referee had grown weary of their lack of restraint.

Phalaris and Uta took positions behind the lines in the ground and faced each other.

“This older lady will thoroughly teach you not to make enemies out of women.”

“Yeah, good luck with that.”

Despite the unfriendly exchange, the two managed to synchronize their breathing, touched the ground with their fists, and got up. Uta rushed ahead and launched purple pollen from the flowers all over her body at Phalaris.

“Get this shit outta my face!” he shouted. He grew wings from his back, then rapidly flapped them to blow the pollen away.

Using that window of opportunity, Uta closed the distance on him and grabbed his mawashi. She really had gotten better at moving around. Phalaris quickly grabbed the left side of her mawashi, and the two became locked up.

Phalaris pressed his head against Uta’s shoulder.

“Ggghh!!!”

He rapidly flapped his wings and his muscles swelled up as he pushed, but he couldn’t make Uta budge an inch.

“To love, my little dragon...” began Uta as ivy appeared out of her back and wrapped itself around Phalaris. “...is to want to tie your loved one to yourself!”

“Kgh!!!” He couldn’t seem to get out of the tight ivy. “Damn it!”

“You can’t move, can you? An accomplished woman will push her loved one into a hopeless situation and do as she pleases with him!”

I don’t know about that, Uta...

With the two still firmly connected, Uta swept the dragon’s pivot foot and began falling forwards. She was going to make Phalaris land on the ground first!

“You’re finished!”

It was a simple but effective binding skill.

Phalaris took flight and began recovering his balance. I had almost forgotten he could fly with those wings. Uta was pulled into the air alongside him, earth falling from her roots after they left the ground.

“You better be ready to come falling down!” exclaimed Phalaris.

“Damn it, I didn’t plan for this!”

It didn’t look like sumo at all at this point...

“Meteoric...”

“‘Meteoric’...?”

“...Backward Force Down!!!”

He was going for such a bold move at such a low altitude?! Poor Uta would turn into a pancake.

Phalaris’s sumo spirit began rotating at a high speed, activating gravity-boosting magic. A Meteoric Backward Force Down was a bold move that involved using your mass as a gravity-propelled bullet, shooting vertically into the ground three times.

“Ahh!”

Uta untied her ivy out of fear and fled to the left. Phalaris, in the meantime, turned himself into a bullet boosted by gravity magic.

Ka-boom! Ka-boom! Ka-boom!!!

Leaving behind Uta who had skirted out of the way, Phalaris became a gravity-propelled bullet that smashed into the ground three times. All by himself.

“Winner, Uta!”

“Yay! Pure maidens win!”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!!!” yelled Phalaris, standing in the human-shaped hole he had made in the ring. He had brought this on himself.

“Nice one, Uta! That was a huge win!” exclaimed the Demon Lord.

“I did it, sir! We’re one to one now!”

Phalaris returned to our seats, shoulders slumped.

“Fucking great! Man, who the hell would dodge that?!”

“I told you to be careful!”

“But Yustin!”

“Relax, don’t be so angry. It’s like *isamiashi*. This way of losing is just like you.” Isamiashi is losing by dragging your opponent to the edge of the ring, but accidentally stepping outside of it first.

“Damn it—lemme at that woman again!!!”

“A loss is a loss. Have some pride.”

“*Fuck*, man!”

Phalaris’s wild nature led him to occasionally lose through isamiashi. He was still a child.

The score was now one to one.

“Why did you try to use such a daring move?” I asked.

“I still remember how you beat me with it and it pisses me off, so I wanted to use it on that bitch.”

He really was still a child. A Meteoric Backward Force Down required altitude, otherwise this would be the result.

“Remain diligent in your pursuit of sumo.”

“O-Okay, I’ll try it from a higher altitude next time.”

That wasn’t the problem here... *Oh well.* We get stronger by trying lots of things and losing over and over, and not just in sumo.

“Don’t let it get to you, Phalaris.”

“You watch out too, Richie. That red guy is a real menace.”

“I can tell. He had a good bout with Floortje.”

“For real? I can’t believe it. And the Demon Lord is so strong too... Guess the world is a huge place, huh.”

“It is. And I want to fight those using Demonic Sumo again.”

“I’m definitely gonna win next time!”

Competitiveness is a sign of a good sumo wrestler. *Do your best, Phalaris.*

“On the east, Clifton, Clifton... On the west, Kukuri, Kukuri...”

“All right!”

Clifton got up, a brooding look in his eyes.

“Relax, Clifton,” I told him.

“Oh? Oh, yeah, you’re right...”

“Just relax and think of it as practice as usual with Kukuri. You won’t be able to wield your full strength otherwise.”

“Yeah, you’re right. It’s as you say. Thanks, Floortje.”

Letting out a big puff of air, Clifton allowed the tension to drain from his shoulders. He appeared to have been on edge about bringing Kukuri back, and that excess tension would’ve prevented him from doing well in the ring. If you’re prepared to win or lose and let the heavens decide the outcome, you’ll be able to move unexpectedly well in the bout—for sumo is done with spirit.

Clifton climbed the dohyō, his impatience a thing of the past. Kukuri climbed the dohyō as well. With clarity in his eyes, Clifton gazed at her.

“Please don’t look at me.”

“Why not?”

“I am...an ugly monster, and a traitor... Don’t look at me with such clear eyes...”

“Don’t say that. You’re beautiful, and you didn’t betray anyone.”

“That’s not true...”

“It is. Your figure is well proportioned and gorgeous, and your center of mass is low. It’s the best form for making use of the fighting style Arachne has taught us. I don’t see any problems with it.”

“I’m a monster who pretended to be a human to get into your stable and steal your techniques.”

“Techniques are nobody’s property. You haven’t betrayed anyone.”

“But...”

“You were sincere about sumo, weren’t you? You trained earnestly and spared no effort trying to become the strongest. You never betrayed sumo.”

“Coach...”

As Kukuri continued to look sorrowful, Clifton smiled at her.

“Let us settle this through sumo. If I win, you’ll become my bride.”

Kukuri’s cheeks instantly flushed bright red.

“B-But...”

“And if you win, I’ll become your groom.”

“B-But that’s the same!”

“Do you not like my offer?”

“W-Well... I...don’t dislike it...”

Wow, what a crazy way to propose—even I’m starting to feel awkward!

“I noticed my feelings for the first time when you disappeared. I love you. I need you. I want to spend my life pursuing sumo together with you.”

“Ah...”

Kukuri was left speechless, her face beet red. It was every girl’s heartfelt desire to hear such words from the person she loved. And a proposal made on a dohyō was a scene straight out of a dream.

At last, she spoke. “L-Let us do sumo!”

“Yeah, let’s!”

“I-I’m not good at expressing myself, so I can’t convey my feelings for you very well verbally. But I can through sumo!”

“You can indeed!”

“So, uh... It’s time for sumo!”

“Wouldn’t have it any other way!”

“Um, may we finally begin?” asked the gray referee, his face a little red.

“Oh, yes, sorry!” replied Kukuri.

“Let us go all out, putting out feelings into our techniques, and make this one a splendid bout.”

“Yes, Coach!” replied Kukuri with a bright smile on her face. She seemed to have cast her worries away at last.

“Face each other.”

The two rikishi in love faced each other from across the lines in the ground. Though their gazes were sweet, the tension was nonetheless palpable. The sweet mood did little to hide the fierceness hanging in the air. They weren’t a species-transcending sumo couple for nothing.

As their breathing synchronized, the two touched the ground with their fists and got up, both carrying themselves in the spider stance taught in the Clifton stable—a stance that involves keeping your body very low to the ground. Their unreserved *smash* of love was a sight to behold. Neither of them gave an inch, fighting in absolute earnest.

Kukuri in her arachne form was heavier than Clifton, and her six legs made her extremely steady on her feet. Clifton relied on his own high proficiency in sumo to block Kukuri’s attempts at grabbing his mawashi.

I wondered who would be victorious. Regardless of who won, we would no doubt see a wedding in autumn. Would they like the idea of reserving the entire Aryakan Sumo Hall for a grand wedding? I was looking forward to it already.

The two lovebirds grappled each other. Their reddened cheeks made it hard to tell if this was sumo or an act of love. Though there was sweetness in the air, it didn’t feel like a love scene because of the ferocity which flowed behind it, like a sound of very low frequency. *What a curious bout*, I thought.

Kukuri had more weight, but Clifton was stronger. And their love for each other was about the same. Neither of them showed any signs of hesitation or worry.

Clifton lowered his stance and endured Kukuri’s advance, but was getting pushed nonetheless, until Kukuri’s leg hit upon the white part of the ring, bringing them to a stop. The debuff you got from being in your opponent’s side of the ring was pretty massive.

Kukuri pulled on Clifton's mawashi, threw him off-balance, and used her front left leg to perform an underarm throw. It was amazing how using her leg for a technique didn't have a significant impact on her balance because she had five more to stand on.

Clifton lowered his center of mass and stood his ground. He had grown strong through his training. Kukuri smiled at him, and he smiled in return.

"I'll bring you to the demonic realm no matter what!"

"I'll bring you back to Aryagard, and to Grand Sumo!"

I couldn't really tell anymore if their love was pure or wicked.

Since two wrestlers from the same stable were going against each other, they both had a good understanding of how their opponent moved and what techniques they favored, allowing for quick reactions. As they moved around the ring with low stances, their bout looked like a dance. It was almost like the mating dance of a peacock spider.

I caught sight of a thread as it reflected light. *Watch out!*

"Air Sumo Form!" shouted Clifton, donning an armor of wind and blowing the threads away.

Good thing I had taught him this ability on our way here, especially considering the prince had lost because of those threads.

With an armor of wind around his body, Clifton had gained speed. In an instant he moved within range and grabbed the right side of Kukuri's mawashi, lifted her left thigh, tripped the inside of her right thigh, and pressed his head against her. A triple attack force out! Indeed, with a Maglev Triple Attack Force Out it doesn't matter how many legs the opponent has because the maglev tracks of light eliminate friction!

"Not so fast!" spoke Kukuri, dodging to the side to avoid the tracks that had appeared.

The prince had used this technique to bring Uta down the other day. That might've been why Kukuri saw it coming. Without the maglev effect, the technique wasn't enough to throw the arachne off balance, and she used the

window of opportunity to trip Clifton's right leg with her front left and middle left legs. He endured with all he had, relying on his natural sense of balance and his great strength. Gears manifested behind him and began to rotate at high speed, allowing him to push aside Kukuri's two attacking legs and hoist her by her mawashi! He actually managed to lift her enormous body. However, she grabbed his mawashi as well and started trying to lift him in turn! Behind her was a rapidly rotating phantom spinning wheel.

They were both so incredibly stubborn. This bout was a splendid lead-in to them becoming a couple. They competed in strength, technique, and spirit.

"I'll bring you back to Aryagard!"

"I'll take you with me to the demonic realm!"

"I love you!"

"I love you too!"

Look at these two... They just had to keep making me feel awkward.

The way they tried to hoist each other by the mawashi looked sublime, as if they were martyrs of love. In plainer terms, though, they looked like a regular sickeningly sweet couple. With their faces beet red as neither was willing to give an inch, they continued trying to lift each other, relying on nothing but strength and the buffs of their sumo spirits.



If either of them relaxed for a moment, the bout would immediately be over. At this point, it was a contest of willpower rather than strength or endurance. A contest of their love for each other.

“You can do it, Clifton!”

“Bring her back to Aryagard!”

“Don’t let up now!”

The power of our cheers got converted into a boost for Clifton’s sumo spirit, making it rotate too fast for the eye to see.

“Kukuri! Bring your new groom back home!” shouted Uta.

“Show him...what you’ve got...!” continued Arima.

“We’re gonna hold your wedding, so don’t lose!” added the Demon Lord.

The cheering from the opponent’s side boosted Kukuri’s sumo spirit as well. Talk about a marital contest... And the elves were loving it.

“Hang in there, spider lady! Bring down that handsome guy!”

“Don’t lose, handsome guy! Follow your love!”

The audience was really charged up, cheering for the two wrestlers.

Kukuri pulled her left hand away, causing Clifton to lose balance. She then quickly stuck it under his right armpit and entered a deep double underarm grip —the more advantageous grip for hoisting one’s opponent.

“I win!”

“Not yet!”

Despite being left at a disadvantage, Clifton pulled Kukuri’s head with his right hand, triggering a forceful wind. Was it a tornado? But there was rain too.

“Cyclone Head Lock Throw!!!”

A new skill! The cyclone enveloped Kukuri, making her spin horizontally. She tried to resist it by planting her six legs in the ground, but her large frame meant having a large surface area for the cyclone to affect. The powerful wind beating against her swept her up in the air. Clifton forcefully twisted himself to

throw Kukuri away, causing her enormous body to smash into the ground and roll onto the ringside seats.

“*This* is my love!”

“I understand now,” replied Kukuri in a quiet, bashful voice.

“Winner, Clifton!”

Agitation spread through the audience. Cushions came flying through the air as the elves all congratulated the winner.

Um, Clifton... Kubinage—a head lock throw—is sumo slang for lovemaking, though you probably don’t know this. Oh well. Have a happy marriage.

Kukuri stood in front of the Demon Lord.

“I must leave your army today, sir.”

The Demon Lord folded his arms and creased up his pretty face.

“Am I due for an execution?” continued Kukuri.

“Nah...”

“I lost to Clifton in sumo, in a bout with our vows at stake. I will marry him. If that outcome doesn’t satisfy you, you’re welcome to execute me.”

“Nah...”

“Please pardon my leave, I beg you.”

“I won’t. You’re needed in my army. How long do you think you’ve been a brilliant secretary of mine? I have new orders for you.”

Unable to keep looking on in silence, Uta stepped in.

“Oh, come on, this is a happy development. Can’t you just wish her happiness and let her go? You’re so petty for a Demon Lord.”

“Nah...”

“Hey, Arima, Slilene, you tell him too!”

“It’s okay, Uta,” spoke Slilene.

“No it’s not! This is a labor dispute! A maiden has been showered with love

and is going to marry! It's her happy ending!"

Arima and Slilene both lowered their heads to the Demon Lord.

"Please...let Kukuri...leave..."

"She lost, but she fought well-lene! Can't avoid a magic-imbued skill-lene seen for the first time-lene! It wasn't Kukuri being weak-lene, it was Clifton being great-lene!"

"Nah..." The Demon Lord's frown grew even deeper. "Kukuri, I'm transferring you to Aryagard. You don't have parents, right? I'll be your witness, so invite me to your wedding."

"Sir..."

"Don't go looking all grateful now. It's standard practice to send capable diplomats to enemy states. I'm sure we're gonna end up doing sumo with Aryakans on a regular basis, so you do your best to gather intel on them."

"I will, sir!" replied Kukuri, blushing and crying.

"Sheesh, you scared the crap out of me, sir! Why'd you have to act like that?!" complained Uta.

"Never said I'm against their marriage. Sure, it would be best if that lover boy came to the demonic realm instead, but he won in sumo, so what can you do?"

Arima and Slilene ran up to Kukuri.

"Congratulations..."

"I hear-lene humans and monsters have married a few times in the past-lene, but it's almost unheard-of nowadays! Congratulations-lene!"

"Thank you, Arima, Slilene. And Uta, thank you too, for getting angry for my sake."

"Oh, that's fine, we're sumo buddies and all! Heh heh... I'll come to Aryagard for your wedding! Man, I can't wait to see the Aryakan Sumo Hall!"

It appeared we would be receiving a lot of demons and monsters for Clifton and Kukuri's wedding. We'd best be good hosts.

The fairy king leapt out of his VIP seat onto the dohyō.

“That was a splendid bout, Clifton! Congratulations on your engagement! In that regard, I would like to be your witness!”

“Is that okay, Your Majesty?”

“Yours is a bond of love that bloomed here in this Martial Arts Hall! On behalf of Yggdrasil watching over us, I wish to unite you in your eternal happiness!”

Clifton deeply lowered his head.

“Thank you so much. This honor is more than I deserve.”

I looked over to Prince Richie, and he nodded with a smile. The royal family would, of course, assist with Clifton and Kukuri’s wedding. Would it be best to hold it in the Aryakan Sumo Hall, after all? It was a love that had bloomed on the dohyō, so a dohyō wedding seemed appropriate.

“Floortje. If I win against Arima, I’ll propose to you,” spoke the prince, gazing straight at me.

“Oh? What if you lose? Will you give up on marrying me?”

“Th-That’s, well...” The prince averted his eyes.

“You should propose regardless of whether you win or lose. I’m still waiting, you know?”

“It would look better if I did it after winning.”

“You’re going against Arima. His rank is far higher than yours. Just think of it as practice with someone of higher skill.”

“Okay, you’re right. That was arrogant of me. Arima isn’t such an easy opponent.” The prince’s expression grew tense.

“Watch out for his Blinding Head Chop Down, and fight *your* way.”

“I’ll do my best. And once this bout is over, I’ll propose to you.”

“It’s a promise.”

“It is.”

Adela stood in the ring.

“On the east, Richie, Richie... On the west, Arima, Arima...” she announced

with a peculiar intonation.

“I’ll be going!”

“Good luck!”

With that, the prince climbed the dohyō. So did Arima, with lumbering steps. As the prince still had room to grow, the difference between them was like one between an adult and a child. Arima had a thin layer of fat on his body, while the prince, as a major character in an otome game, was destined to never gain any at all. Through his training, however, Prince Richie had managed to gain a well-defined musculature. His cat ears still adorned his head.

The two threw salt over the ring and performed shiko—in both wrestlers’ cases, their movements were heavy and composed. The recent journey had made the prince grow a great deal as a rikishi. He had lost to the hellfire troll Aikio, won against the alraune Uta, and had a close bout with Kukuri, losing by a narrow margin. This time, his opponent would be Arima, a wrestler who outranked him. *Good luck. Win if you can, and propose to me when the bout is over. Help him, o god of sumo. Dosukoi dosukoi!*

The prince and Arima stared at each other from across the lines in the ground. They say in seven out of ten cases the outcome of a sumo bout is decided at the initial charge, which was why both wrestlers were radiating fighting spirit. All the commoners who had come to see the tournament watched with bated breath as the prince and Arima got psyched for the bout. I liked these moments as both the wrestlers and the audience grew tenser by the second—it felt like the real thrill of sumo.

The two wrestlers psyched themselves to the fullest, synchronized their breathing, touched the ground with their fists, got up, and crashed into each other. The big difference in their weights would normally have led to the prince getting pushed back, but he relied on technique to deflect the impact. His body hadn’t fully grown yet, but his technique kept on improving.

The prince’s movements were diverse and agile. Arima’s, on the other hand, were simple, as he relied on his high level of skill. He appeared to be moving slowly when compared to the twitchy prince, but it was simply that, possessing the skill to afford moving at such a pace, he wasn’t wasting any energy.

The prince grabbed the left side of the demon's mawashi. He attempted to grab the right side next, but Arima avoided this and released his own grip on the prince. *Watch out!*

"Blinding Head Chop Down..."

Prince Richie ducked to avoid it. *Nice one!* You could dodge a magic-imbued skill if you knew about it ahead of time. The prince proceeded to pull on the left side of his opponent's mawashi and go for a hip throw. Arima endured, looking sure-footed. Such strength of the legs and the lower back... The prince would have to find a really good window of opportunity to stand any chance of upsetting Arima's balance.

The demon spread himself wide, preparing some sort of move. A flame appeared on each of his arms.

"Fiery Two-Handed Head Twist Down..."

He attempted to catch the prince's head between his burning palms.

"Air Sumo Form!"

The manifested wind armor scattered the fire while the prince slipped between and away from Arima's burning arms. The rear propulsion granted by the wind pretty much doubled Prince Richie's speed, allowing him to practically slide around the ring.

Apparently Arima's specialty was fire, just as his red body suggested. Plus, his sumo spirit was a halo of lava.

"Zoom Body Drop Throw!"

The prince's leg grew slightly longer, or so it appeared. The extension was made out of pure spirit, but was real enough to make it easier to trip the opponent. It was good at breaking their balance too, and sustaining an attack on both legs made Arima unsteady on his feet. *All right!*

To my disappointment, Arima simply flapped his wings to regain his balance. I had forgotten he had them. All these little things made it difficult to fight nonhumans.

"Kgh!"

“Ngghh!”

The two became locked up once more. Respect for his opponent appeared in the prince’s eyes, and in Arima’s, admiration. They had acknowledged each other’s skill. Seeing the prince fight that mighty Arima on equal footing made me once again realize how strong he had become. No longer was he the adorable little kitten-like prince I had once fallen in love with—in front of my eyes was a young stalwart warrior. How stirring he was! A stunning rikishi I wanted to root for with all my heart! He had become strong, and was getting ever stronger.

In the ring, the two wrestlers moved around in intricate ways as they made frantic efforts to push or pull each other, as well as use techniques and dodge them. The footprints they left looked like some kind of a magic circle. The only voice coming from the ring was that of the referee repeating “still in, still in” as the elves earnestly observed the close bout.

The prince pushed Arima. Behind him immediately appeared a set of gears which began a rapid rotation. The same went for the circle of lava which had just appeared behind Arima. This was nice—that is, the fact that they were fighting under the same conditions. There was no such a thing as an easy win. Neither wrestler was about to give up on the feelings he had poured into this. Buffs were met with buffs, debuffs were met with debuffs. In the corner of my vision, I noticed Adela offering a prayer.

Clank! A small gear with a flowery pattern connected itself to the prince’s sumo spirit! It was the level 2 sumo spirit I had enjoyed during my bout with the Demon Lord! The prince’s strength grew by an order of magnitude, allowing him to push Arima with much more success. The demon looked in pain as he struggled to resist it. But the prince’s power was too great, and Arima soon found himself at the edge of the ring. In that area was the black tail of the yin-yang symbol, and as Arima placed himself on it, it seemed as if his weight had increased sharply, allowing him to hold his ground. I realized it would be difficult to simply push him out because of this ring’s form.

After Arima inhaled deeply, flames appeared all over his body, and he once again firmly grappled with the prince.

“Fiery Dark Sumo.”

Having turned into a burning giant, he grew faster and stronger. The bout was a close one once more. The rikishi kept evolving as their strength, technique, and spirit clashed with those of the opponent. This was nice. It was a ritual, one that reminded me of life itself. Sumo was life.

“Keep it up, Your Highness!”

Hearing my cheer, the prince let out a faint smile.

Sumo doesn’t need things like logic. You fight your opponent, make your spirit clash with theirs, and grow through the process. It’s camaraderie, hard work, and victory that make up the essence of sumo.

Looking like the devil himself thanks to his cloak of flame, Arima towered over the prince as they continued grappling. Granted, he was a greater demon, so looking that way might only have been expected. However, as he was normally the courteous and mild-mannered type, this change made him extremely intimidating. The fire around him was no doubt hot, but it didn’t seem to have any effect on the prince, who was protected by an armor of wind which appeared to disperse the heat before it reached his skin.

The prince just barely endured the tall demon’s mighty push, relying on the buff of his sumo spirit and the propulsion granted by the Air Sumo Form. They were in a stalemate square in the center of the ring.

Arima made his move. He forced the prince to the left, throwing him off-balance, and attempted a hip throw, but the prince avoided it by nimbly adjusting his center of mass. Before the demon could regain his balance, the prince began pushing him and tripped his leg, but Arima was too immovable for this to work.

Arima’s breathing grew rough. His sweat evaporated the moment it reached the surface of his skin, thanks to the flames. Likewise, the prince’s sweat evaporated due to the armor of wind coursing around him. Arima seemed to be building more heat in his body than the prince, particularly because of his Fiery Dark Sumo form.

The prince closed the distance to Arima and pulled the demon’s right arm

over his own shoulder. A one-armed shoulder throw! It's a well-known move in judo, but it also exists in sumo.

The prince prepared to throw his opponent upwards using the strength of his hips. However, Arima lowered his stance and resisted, before proceeding to grab the prince's mawashi from behind. The tables had been turned! Attempting a technique leaves you unsteady if your opponent manages to avoid it, exposing you to a counterattack. Of course, you can't win without using techniques at all, so it's difficult to know when to go for one and when not to.

Holding Prince Richie's mawashi with his left hand alone, Arima was trying to throw him. The veins in the demon's arm rose to the surface. The prince, meanwhile, kept holding onto the demon's right arm and didn't let go. He then tripped Arima's pivot foot from its back side. A hooking backward counter-throw! This technique involves moving your leg directly forward from behind the opponent's leg to trip it and make your opponent fall on their back. *Well done!*

The prince was skilled with techniques, especially when it came to the speed and timing of leg techniques. The two wrestlers started falling as one. *Did he do it?!*

"S-Still in, still in!"

Arima flapped his little wings once more to avoid falling down. They were pretty powerful despite their size—enough to allow this giant to fight in midair. He was trying to switch positions with the prince—the latter would end up on the bottom!

"Take this!" shouted the prince.

He used his hips to launch himself upwards and pull the demon's right arm over his shoulder to bring him down. *Well done!* He imitated Arima's attempts to switch positions and added more spinning power to that of his one-armed shoulder throw. All of a sudden, the two wrestlers went from falling backwards to moving forwards.

"Throw him, Your Highness!"

"Nuooogh!!!" bellowed the prince in response to my voice.

Arima's large frame stood in midair—then collapsed! He flapped his bat wings and spun midair, pivoting around his right arm to land with his feet on the ground. *How tenacious!*

The prince reacted in an instant. He pulled on his held right arm of the demon, and as Arima lost balance, the prince pressed his head against his opponent's chest.

"Drilling Head Pivot Throw!!!"

A new skill! A drill-like rotational force spawned around the prince's head, sending Arima flying through the air.

"Nuooogh!!!" bellowed the prince.

"Nooooo!!!"

Arima's enormous body spun in the air. He tried to flap his wings to counter the force, but he was spinning too fast for that. And yet somehow he managed to land on his feet at the edge of the ring. He would've landed outside of it, were it not for the bales set slightly back. *So close!*

While the demon was wobbly on his feet, Prince Richie made a fierce charge at him. *All right!* The demon had landed in the white part of the ring, so the prince was at an advantage. Slipping past the demon's unsteady harite, the prince grabbed his mawashi and began to push. Arima lost his balance. *We won!*

Or so I thought for a moment, before Arima grabbed the prince by his mawashi, lifted him like in a brainbuster, and fell from the dohyō together with him.

Who had fallen first? The gray referee came running over to them.

"Winner, Arima!"

Ah...

"Huh? Didn't they fall at the same time?"

"Hard to say. That last throw had a lot of momentum behind it."

Indeed, anyone could've come out of that as the winner. Arima had won

through perseverance, never giving up despite the dire situation he found himself in at the end.

Prince Richie came back, slumping his shoulders.

“Sorry, Floortje. I lost.”

Seeing him shed bitter tears, I embraced him.

“It was a magnificent bout. Especially that head pivot throw.”

“I did amazing, and I still lost...”

“Arima was incredible for not giving up even after being on the receiving end of that technique.”

“Yeah, he’s a really amazing ōzeki.”

Arima had flapped his wings, and as luck would have it, landed in the ring and on his feet—and still managed to perform a throw on the charging prince. That throw wasn’t among the list of sumo’s winning techniques, so he must’ve thought of it on the spot. It resembled a brainbuster from professional wrestling.

“I’m proud of you, Your Highness.”

“Thank you, Floortje. That makes me happy.” He wiped his tears and smiled. “Floortje. This won’t look great since I lost, but...”

“Yes?”

“Let’s get married.”

“Yes!”

Bashful as he was, the prince had fulfilled his promise to propose to me. In an instant, I felt happiness fill me like a big blooming flower.

“Your Highness, I... I...”

I couldn’t find the words. Tears of happiness were flowing from my eyes.

“Thank you, Floortje. I promise to make you happy,” spoke the prince with his usual lovely smile. “All right, then!” He got up and raised his hand. “I, Richie Aryaka, crown prince of the Kingdom of Aryaka, hereby declare my engagement

to Floortje Hobbema, daughter of Marquis Hobbema!”

The whole building went silent for a moment. Then, cheering erupted from all directions.

“Nice one, Prince!”

“Lady Floortje, Your Highness, congratulations!”

“Hell yeah! That’s great, Richie!”

“Congratulations, Lady Floortje!”

“I’ve been waiting for this day!”

It felt a little awkward to receive everyone’s blessings.

“M-Miladyyy! C-Congratulatiooons!” spoke Adela tearfully.

“Thank you, Adela. I’ve worried you, haven’t I?”

“You’ll...finally find happiness. I’ve always dreamt of this moment! Congratulations. Congratulations!” she continued, holding my shoulders and crying.

“You’re engaged at last, eh? Congratulations,” said Yustin, all smiles.

“Thank you, Yustin.”

“Every Aryakan has been waiting for this marriage. Congratulations, Lady Floortje, Your Highness,” said General Maurilio in a solemn tone.

“Thank you, General. I’m happy to hear that.”

“I’m just surprised you two weren’t mated to each other yet. Congrats.”

“Thank you, Phalaris.”

“You’re getting married too, huh? Congratulations.”

“Thank you, Clifton. Why don’t we have a double dohyō wedding in the Aryakan Sumo Hall?”

“That sounds great. Let’s do that, Kukuri.”

“I-I agree. That would make me happy.”

Kukuri had transformed into a human and was snuggling up to Clifton.

In the VIP seats, King Arvi was clapping his hands and nodding to us. Beside him, Ulupano in fenrir form was smiling and tapping his forelegs on the floor.

The demons and monsters all clapped and smiled as well.

“Congratulations...”

“Man, that’s great! First Kukuri’s getting married, now this—I want a husband too!” spoke Uta.

As overjoyed as I was, there was still the last bout with the Demon Lord. The score was two to two, and this bout would decide the outcome of the whole competition. We had had an unfortunate draw during our previous bout on the Magic Train—I wanted a clean win this time. I would bring out his third form no matter what, and then I would defeat it. If we couldn’t win today, I would feel guilty towards the elves who had nothing to do with all this and would lose their capital to the Demon Lord’s army. I had to win even for the sake of Barkus whom I could never see again.

“Floortje.”

“Yes?”

“Relax,” said the prince and smiled like a blooming flower.

Indeed, I had forgotten something important: focusing on victory too much would make you lose. Victory depends on one’s turn of fortune, and it’s the heavens who decide the outcome. My role amounted to enjoying sumo.

“Thank you, Your Highness.”

“Good luck, Floortje.”

“Thank you!”

My fervor had dissipated without a trace. This was a team competition, and I wasn’t alone in it. The prince had taught me that important fact.

I climbed the dohyō, taking firm steps on it in my high heels. Wasn’t there any way I could be spared having to wear them in public places? Granted, I could fight freely even while wearing them, but any sumo wrestler would want to fight barefoot. *Oh well, that’s how things work around here, I guess.*

The Demon Lord had another gaudy mawashi around his muscular body—this time, it was made of lamé. He did look gallant in it, though. And his appearance was very young, despite the fact that he had a grown son like Erhard. Perhaps greater demons had very long lives.

“Yo. Today’s the day I bring you down and show the whole world that Demonic Sumo is the strongest.”

“It is strong; I can tell that by looking at Arima. You’re strong too.”

“Hah hah hah. Man, is it even possible to rile you up?”

“What need is there for that?”

A twisted smile appeared on his face, soon replaced by a distant look in his eyes.

“Sumo is great. A short scuffle tells you all you need to know about your difference in strength.”

“It really is great. It’s a ritual and a show; it’s sacred yet lowly. There’s a lot of depth to it.”

“You know, when I heard Erhard got his ass kicked—that was when I got an interest in sumo. Sent Kukuri to Aryaka to find out more about it.”

“I knew.”

“And once I learnt what it’s like, I brought it to the demonic realm, doing all sorts of things. I found demons and monsters bragging about their strength, taught them sumo. Planned to pit them against you, you know?”

I *had* known the Demon Lord was investigating sumo, but at the time I hadn’t thought he was *this* serious about it. I wondered how he had come in contact with the Valhalla Sumo Association.

“So I went about looking into all sorts of things like rules and techniques. And what do you know—the one who ended up getting the most into it was none other than myself. It was really fun. Getting stronger was fun too, and also the whole thing with using tactics in the ring and finding out who’s the more stubborn of the two of you. We did a lot of research together with my commander-in-chief, Arima.”

“So Arima did sumo from the start too?”

“Yeah. He may not look the part, but he was the biggest ruffian in the violent place that is the demonic realm. Doing sumo kind of added depth to his character—and look at him now, he’s an ōzeki.”

Sumo is life, so things like that happen.

“We held sumo tournaments in the army, and all the monsters got hooked. That was when translucent people appeared, asking if we wanted to know more about sumo.”

“Oh, you visited the demonic realm of your own accord?”

“Heh heh, that we did,” replied the gray referee with an awkward smile.

“After the Valhalla Sumo Association taught us all sorts of things, we started doing proper sumo as you know it, including sumo performances. By now, the entire demonic realm is obsessed with sumo.” The Demon Lord smiled. “I’m glad I got to discover sumo. Monsters come in various shapes and sizes, each have their own customs, and it’s difficult for them to come to understand each other. Even among demons, there’s a bunch of different races and we would disagree and fight all the time.”

Anyone could see the wide variety of monster species and sizes by looking at the Demon Lord’s sumo lineup.

“With the appearance of a common standard that is sumo, however, everyone had to look up who they were going against and their favored attacks, and come up with countermeasures for those. It deepened the mutual understanding between monsters. They became better men and better women under the influence of sumo’s character. And following rules became common sense, as well as the idea that only idiots selfishly go against them. Nothing but upsides.”

“That is simply wonderful.”

“And so, I’m grateful to you, yokozuna Floortje.”

“This isn’t something I did. That is how wonderful sumo is.”

The Demon Lord replied with a deep nod.

“I’ve gotta thank you anyway. So thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

A menacing smile appeared on the Demon Lord’s face.

“And I’m gonna bring you down here today, with gratitude!”

“Let’s see you try, yokozuna Demon Lord!”

I stared at him with a ferocious smile of my own. The mood between us was truculent enough to distort the air. *We’ve spent long enough talking—let’s do this!*

“Face each other.”

The Demon Lord and I squatted face-to-face across the lines in the ground, fighting spirit aplenty. It felt like we could end up dragging this all the way to the time limit. The threat emanating from our stares distorted the air between us.

I thought not about when to pull myself up for the initial charge. Your body would rise on its own when the time came. It felt automatic. At last, we touched the ground with our fists and got up.

“Hakkeyoi!” exclaimed the referee.

The so-called explosive power is an important factor for a sumo wrestler. It’s the ability to reach one’s top speed in the very short initial charge in order to smash into your opponent. You don’t feel pain—only a mighty impact moving towards the back of your body.

Smash!!! Both of us reached out with our hands in order to grab the opponent’s mawashi, ending up landing simple hits instead. The sound of them was quite different as I wore a dress and the Demon Lord was nearly naked. At last, I grabbed the right side of his mawashi, and he grabbed the left side of mine. With both our right hands in an underarm grip and left hands in an overarm one, we became locked up.

Not bad, Demon Lord. I could tell how serious he had been about his past bouts and how much he had trained. He had gotten better since our bout on the Magic Train. *Incredible.*

“Still in, still in!” repeated the gray referee.

Outside the ring, everyone felt distant. It felt like this world had only the Demon Lord and myself. Tranquility reigned.

We both put strength into our arms to try and throw the opponent off-balance. Our strength was equal. I felt power coming from a distant place. Enormous gears appeared behind me, feeding me great power from an unfathomable source. For a moment the Demon Lord started to lose ground, but his spirit of sumo in the shape of goat skulls appeared behind his back and began rotating rapidly. *Now show me that third form of yours!*

I pulled on the Demon Lord's mawashi, trying to sway him left and right. He resisted, juicing up his sumo spirit. Whose sumo spirit was more powerful? I felt like it was mine. Demons and monsters were strong from the beginning, and some of them had special abilities, so their sumo spirits didn't seem to give them as much as mine gave me.

I pressed my forehead against my opponent's shoulder and pushed with all I had. The Demon Lord was ever so slowly losing ground.

"Ghh!"

As he did, his muscles began twisting around and expanding. If only those thorns of his didn't snag on my dress... Regardless, the Demon Lord had entered his second form, taking on the shape of a tall, scaly demon with the commanding presence of a gorilla.

"This is my...second form..."

"Good—now show me the next one."

Though I smiled at him, I was slowly losing ground. In this form, my opponent's strength doubled, while his speed suffered slightly. When facing physically stronger opponents, it was easier to deal with them if you deflected their attacks, as I had learnt by fighting Phalaris. With grace in his movements, the Demon Lord attempted various techniques on me, but this was easy for me to handle due to how slow he was. I read what he was going for and went for a hip throw at the same time. It didn't work—of course, a yokozuna would be able to read and avoid such a simple technique. He really was extremely strong—the strongest rikishi I had ever fought, and well balanced in various aspects of his skill too.

The Demon Lord stopped going for halfhearted techniques and focused instead on pushing. It was simple but effective, given the difference in our frames and weight. A reliable strategy that, unlike throws and twists, didn't leave him open to counterattacks. At the core of my opponent's fighting style was simple and honest pushing sumo.

He managed to push me far enough into the white side of the ring that we were both standing in it. In spite of that, the power of his push remained the same. I made my sumo spirit spin as fast as it could, but it wasn't enough. In

sumo, pushing was such a simple strategy that the only way to deal with it was to push back or sidestep, but my opponent's slow movements made the latter difficult. I considered going for a beltless arm throw, but my senses warned me against this. It felt like magic-imbued techniques would be a pitfall in this bout —so whispered my sumo senses.

Suddenly, the Demon Lord's pushing grew weaker. Or it simply felt that way, because in fact another gear, one with the flower pattern I had seen before, had attached itself to my sumo spirit and begun quickly rotating with the rest. Which god's power was I borrowing with this? In the spectator seats, I noticed Adela praying with her eyes closed. Was it my imagination, or did she pray every time this flower-patterned gear appeared? Must've just been a coincidence. Adela was unrivaled in her ditziness as a maid, so there was no way she was the source of this power. Not like she was a goddess. Perhaps this girly, flower-patterned gear had come from the goddess Florence. *Thank you, Goddess!*

With my sumo spirit leveling up, strength filled me to the brim. The Demon Lord couldn't push me anymore, and it was my turn to push him back. I pushed, and pushed, and pushed some more, until my feet entered the black part of the ring and I lost some of my power. Now *we can have a proper bout, Demon Lord!*

My leveled-up sumo spirit and the Demon Lord's second form put us on roughly equal ground. We attempted techniques on each other and deflected all of them in turn. I felt our center of mass sway left and right as we moved. Anticipating the incoming move—a feint—I responded in kind. We read each other's moves on a high level, using our intuition and instincts to block the opponent's techniques and attempt to find success with our own.

I was starting to run out of breath. My body temperature was rising. It felt like walking along the edge of a cliff—as though one wrong step would send me falling down headfirst. Such a high-level competition was a first for me. The fear was oppressive. And yet, I was having fun. I had never come this far, and despite the fear pervading my mind, I was overjoyed.

"This is amazing, I've never had such a hard bout."

"Me neither," replied the Demon Lord.

I went for a throw. It didn't work and the Demon Lord tried to spin me around, but I stood firm. A throw. A twist. An attempted trip into an armlock. Opportunities for numerous techniques appeared one after another, only to vanish a moment later. In Aryakan Grand Sumo, some of those would've instantly led to a victory if performed, and yet they had to be passed over, allowed to burst and disappear like large bubbles on the surface of a soda pop in summer. *How wasteful...*

Our strength and skill were equal. The sheer volume of training the Demon Lord had done and his aptitude for sumo made him an amazing rikishi. It was no wonder he was a yokozuna of the demonic realm. He was an unbelievably formidable opponent.

"Now!" he spoke.

I was startled to see a shift in my opponent's strength. As his muscles lost volume, he assumed a slender form. Even his weight became far lower than that of his usual form.

"This is my third form. I can't believe you would make me use it for the first time in five hundred years—ever since I used it to fight gods."

I felt an electric current run through my back. The Demon Lord's strength had reached unbelievable levels. Was I destined to lose to this mobility-focused form? My opponent grabbed my mawashi and performed an overarm throw. The execution and speed of it were astonishing. It was the overarm throw of dreams.

Ramping up the speed of my sumo spirit, I braced my legs. *It's coming. It's coming. It's coming.*

...I held out!

The Demon Lord looked at me with a quizzical expression.

"How did you hold out against *that*?"

"I don't know!"

I truly didn't. There was conviction in my mind that I would be thrown. That was simply how perfect the execution and how extreme the speed of that

technique had been.

“A human can put up a fight against this form which brought down gods? You really are full of surprises, Floortje!” said the Demon Lord with a ferocious smile.

I was out of strength after resisting a god’s overarm throw. There was simply no way I could keep defending against techniques of that level—I had to go on the offensive. I lifted my knees for an inner thigh throw. *Bzzzzzt!* Lightning spawned.

But the Demon Lord moved even faster than lightning and avoided it. *He can move* that *fast? What a fierce opponent!*

“Blinding Head Chop Down!”

He raised his arm with the speed of light and brought it down towards my neck. Things were dire—I couldn’t afford to be blinded now of all times.

Smack! I received the technique with my forehead.

“What?”

A look of confusion appeared on the Demon Lord’s face, and he separated from our grapple so quickly as though he had used teleportation. Then, he pulled his hand back.

“Harite...”

A midrange skill?!

“...Cannon.”

Not a catapult?! His magic-imbued harite was powerful enough to be classified as a cannon!

“Harite Catapult!”

I responded with a harite of my own. The shock wave of my harite collided with that of his Harite Cannon and broke up. But I didn’t mind. What was important was that it redirected the cannon’s shock wave, causing it to smash a walkway and demolish the nearby passage. This power was of a different dimension—no wonder this was the Demon Lord’s third form. He was the ruler

of the demonic realm for a reason. It probably wasn't an overstatement to call him a god.

"Heh heh heh, not bad! You humans keep surprising me, and I wouldn't have it any other way!"

"Let's settle this, Demon Lord!" I bellowed and charged at him with all I had.

My opponent launched a series of slaps at me with the speed of a machine gun. Being hit by even one of them would no doubt smash my body into pieces and send it flying outside the ring. But so what? This wasn't the first time I'd faced an unbeatable opponent. I would step forth and fight with my life on the line, for that was what made us sumo wrestlers!

I rerouted the entire output of my sumo spirit into my intuition and dodged all of the slaps. Step by step, I drew ever closer, running with the highest speed I could muster.

"Nuoooooogh!!!"

At some point, my mouth had taken on the shape of a smile. *This was my kind of sumo.* The tension that made your soul tingle. The urgency of putting your life on the line. And the exaltation of facing a mighty foe!

Boosting my level 2 sumo spirit to its highest possible speed, I shuffled my feet across the ring, making a swift approach.

"Demon Lord!!!"

"Floortje!!!"

We crashed into each other once more. My opponent immediately went for a hip throw. It was a perfect hip throw—its timing and speed were flawless. The kind of technique I could never hope to resist. And yet I did.

"What?!"

"You can throw your godlike techniques at me all you want—you think I would do sumo if I was scared of perfection?!"

"Kgghhh!!! This is why you never fail to hold my attention!"

Even with my unrefined moves, I was able to put up a fight against his perfect

techniques. *I can do this.* Somehow I could endure perfection on the level of microns. In my head, I had zero understanding of *how* I was doing it, but still I was able to snatch those momentary openings to deflect the incoming techniques. Overwhelming fear and delight had seized me and were moving my body. *I could still fight!*

Floortje, my child... This is Florence... I am speaking directly into your mind...

Shut up, useless goddess! Can't you see I'm busy?!—I replied in my head.

The Demon Lord's third form is dangerous... Abandon the fight... Taking even a single hit could end your life...

Hah hah! You're making me laugh!

Sad though it may be, humans can only grow so strong... Think what the future would hold if you were to continue... The people who love you would be stricken with grief...

I've already taken that into consideration—now shut up! I don't need the future or glory—all I want is to fight the mighty opponent in front of me! Nothing else!

Floortje, you must reconsider...

I could feel the sorrow of the useless goddess. The words she uttered came from her pure love. I knew that full well. But I had no presence of mind to spare on considering such facts. Being endlessly preoccupied with catching the millisecond-long openings to block the Demon Lord's attacks which could kill me in a single hit, I was clueless on how I could possibly bring him down. For now, I had to hold out. With all I had. It was the only way to put up a fight against my opponent's strength.

"What *are* you? No human could avoid these."

"Forget limits and common sense, forget gods and demons! I am a sumo wrestler!"

I grappled him, and in the next moment he grappled me back. Sensing a perfect technique with godlike speed on the way, I found a few nanoseconds of opportunity to avoid it. My sumo spirit was rotating at its fastest. The additional

gear was spinning so fast, its flower pattern blurred and looked like a simple pink circle.

My breathing was rough, my muscles feeling ready to snap. I was only able to stay in the fight through sheer willpower and grit. Losing courage for but a moment would spell my defeat. Whether I would live or die, whether I would win or lose—I threw it all to the heavens.

Crack! The Demon Lord's harite grazed me, breaking one of my ribs into pieces. Perhaps it was the adrenaline that made me feel so little pain. I could still fight. *Overcome your limits. Overcome the Demon Lord. Overcome the demon god in front of your eyes.*

Crack! Snap! Blood came spurting forth. My bones had cracked. *Yeah? So what?!*

"You can do this, Floortje!!!"

A sound reached my ears. The voice of my loved one. Even now, when all my five senses were entirely dedicated to the fight, I could still hear his voice.

"Keep up the fight, Lady Floortje!"

"Don't you lose on me!"

"Fight on, Floortje!"

"Don't you dare lose this, Floortje!"

I heard everyone cheering too.

"Floortje! Floortje! Floortje!" came the vigorous shouting of all the elves who had gathered in the Martial Arts Hall.

Power... I could feel everyone's sumo power flowing into me.

"Don't let up now, sir!"

"Keep it up..."

"Show her what's for-lene!"

"Fight on, sir!"

"Demon Lord! Demon Lord! Demon Lord!"

I could see sumo power flowing into my opponent as well. He smiled.

“You’re going down, Floortje!!!”

“Make me!!!”

As the two of us crashed together for the third time, my opponent executed a captivating underarm throw. Its speed and timing were flawless. And yet, I managed to resist it through the kind of strength of hips I didn’t know I possessed. The audience grew excited.

Something slipped out of the depths of my body. I analyzed it with my sumo senses. Something that was the stuff of legends had surfaced after passing through the center of my tailbone. I didn’t know where this power had come from, but what I did know was how tremendous it was. It instilled enough dread in me to make the hairs on the back of my head stand on end.

Using this skill will kill me.

This power was simply too great. It was too great for humans to use without consequence. I finally realized that this was what Florence had been trying to warn me about. Perhaps this power would allow me to defeat the Demon Lord. However, the cost of it would be my life. The human body could not endure the toll this skill placed on the user.

I could use it only once. *Should I...?*

I have someone I love. We’ve only just become engaged. Even Adela would cry. Waiting for me is a happy future with everyone.

I don’t even need to think about this.

I’ll use it.

For I am...

A rugged sumo wrestler whose spirit’s flame burns constantly!

And if I get to use the skill of a god, then I’ll gladly die for it!!!

I twisted my left hand counterclockwise, my right one—clockwise.

“What?!”

A spinning force lingered in the air. What I was about to perform...was a skill

of the gods.

“Divine skill! Takemikazuchi!!!”

A chill poured from the lingering spinning force of my left hand, and hellfire from that of my right. Water and fire collided with force between my hands, launching a massive explosion towards the Demon Lord.

KA-BOOM!!!

“What the—?!”

My opponent tried to stop the explosion by grabbing my right hand with godlike speed. I twisted my hand and grabbed hold of his. His arm was crushed like a reed stalk and twisted away in an impossible direction. Enveloped in the explosion, the Demon Lord went flying.

“Guoooogh!!!”

He desperately flailed about in the air, but went smashing into the edge of the dohyō, then bounced off and landed amid the ringside seats. Arima instantly caught him.

The whole building went silent.

“Winner!!! Floortje!!!” announced the gray referee, raising his hand high to the east.

As the audience exploded in cheers, cushions came flying through the air.

Haah... Haah...

Using a divine skill as a human had exacted a terrifying toll on me. The muscles all over my body had been ripped to shreds and were the source of intense pain. I was only able to keep standing in the ring through sheer willpower. It was a little different from the events described in *Records of Ancient Matters*, but this skill had probably been the one used to secure control of a country.

I’m so tired...

“Floortje!!!”

The prince came running over, tears in his eyes. *Don't you cry now.*

I collapsed on the dohyō, caught by the prince in his arms. They were so warm.

"Adela! Get a potion, quick!!!"

"Yes, Your Highness!"

Tears in her eyes, Adela tried to make me drink the potion. But it wouldn't have helped. Alchemy could never fix the impact a god's skill had left on my body. *Sorry.*

"I'm sorry, Your Highness... I've brought you grief."

"Forget about that, Floortje—you were amazing! You were just incredible!"

"Milady..."

"I've made a lot of trouble for you too, Adela. Thank you for everything..."

"Milady! You can't die on me!"

I sensed a pleasant smell. Was it the smell of sumo Valhalla? I wondered if going there would let me fight the splendid rikishi of old.

On the ceiling of the Martial Arts Hall, a gold flower bloomed. Countless other flowers followed it, and the venue was filled with gold pollen.

Oh.

I got up. All of my pain was gone.

"Holy shit, my broken arm fixed itself!!!" shouted the Demon Lord, surrounded by his team.

"That's Yggdrasil's healing pollen! Amazing!"

"You know of it, Uta?" asked Kukuri.

"Yes. Once in a thousand years, Yggdrasil pollinates to make flowers bloom. If that pollen lands on you, it will heal any illness or injury. Isn't that great, sir?"

"Like hell it is! I wanted to take pride in the scar left by that awesome skill."

"Heh heh, I know you're happy yokozuna Floortje didn't die."

“Eh, guess I’d be up for another bout.”

“Your third form is really against the rules, though.”

“Y-Yeah, even I thought bringing it out was immature.”

I could feel my body healing. My torn muscles and overloaded nerves were returning to their normal state. It appeared I would live to do sumo another day. I would get to walk by the prince’s side.

“Thank goodness! Thank goodness!”

“Milady! Milady!”

“Thank you, both of you.”

I hugged the two of them.

Thank you, Yggdrasil.

You’re welcome,—came the reply.

I looked up from the dohyō. The glittering pollen dancing in the air made the whole scene feel like a dream. It fell seemingly without end on the black-and-white dohyō, the walkway smashed by the Demon Lord, and the excited elves cheering with hands raised, painting the world in gold.

“It’s beautiful, Floortje.”

“It is, Your Highness.”

We sat in the ring with our shoulders touching and looked upon the gold Martial Arts Hall.

Still in his fenrir form, Ulupano leapt from the VIP seats onto the dohyō.

“I am Fairy King Ulupano!”

“Hey, Fairy King!”

“The thousand-dorell star!”

Incidentally, the dorell was the currency of the Elven Forest Republic. One dorell was roughly equal to thirty thousand yen.

“We have witnessed a magnificent bout. It was a ferocious contest during

which both the victorious yokozuna Floortje and the defeated Demon Lord surpassed the limits of their existence. Let us celebrate their valiant efforts!" Enthusiastic applause enveloped the hall. "The sumo team competition with this town at stake, held between the Aryakan rikishi and those of the Demon Lord's army, has concluded in the former's favor. You will uphold your end of the deal, won't you, Demon Lord?"

"Yeah, I've got no choice after a human risked her life to use a divine skill on me. We'll be leaving these lands, for now."

"I appreciate that. Also, I have a proposition."

"What? You want reparations?"

"Would you be interested in holding sumo tournaments here once every four years?"

"Heh. With you elves?"

"Between Aryaka, the Dwarven Great Caves, us, and you. A world cup in sumo featuring four teams."

The Demon Lord fell into thought.

"That does sound fun. Let's do it! We'll cover the operating costs and hire the staff."

"The dwarves are in favor as well! We will show you the secrets of Dwarven Sumo!" shouted Chief Jörd, getting up from his VIP seat.

"Aryaka has no objections either. Chief, let us lay the rail tracks all the way to this town," added King Arvi.

"That is a splendid idea! We'll lay them both to Aryagard and here!"

How wonderful it was that the four capitals would be connected by the magic railway, allowing easy travel to each other's countries. We could do Grand Sumo in each of the four towns. Frequent travel would boost trade and bring people of different nations together. With the help of the Magic Train, the entire eastern side of the continent could become one large trading area.

"Looks like we're entering a Pax Sumonara, Floortje."

“Indeed, Your Highness. Let us win friendship between nations through sumo.”

It probably wouldn’t be all sunshine and roses. There would surely be disputes born from mistrust for each other, and all sorts of vices would develop in the process of cultural exchange. But it was still far preferable to being merely connected by rail and not having any cultural exchange at all. It would be fine—sumo would make everyone friends and put smiles on everyone’s faces. That was the mysterious power of sumo, and I had faith in it.

Carrying a trophy made out of a large tree, Jomin descended from the VIP seats.

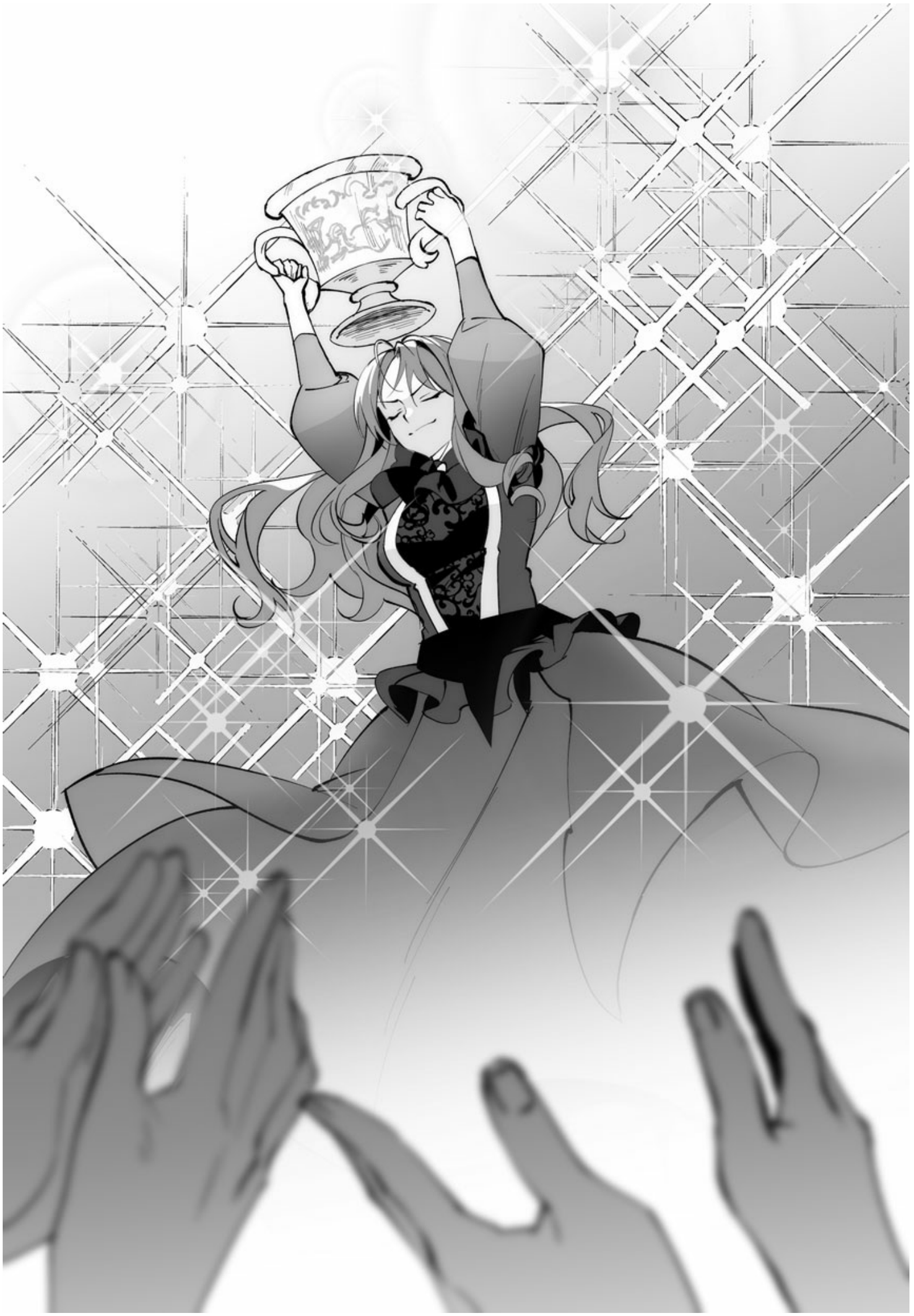
“Bravo, Floortje. I was wrong. Sumo truly is incredible.”

“Thank you, Jomin.”

“This trophy was made by Yggdrasil. Take it.”

“I am most grateful.”

I accepted the large wooden trophy. Made out of a tree with bright bark, it was carved with images of humans, elves, dwarves, and monsters all doing sumo. It was a wonderful trophy indeed. As I raised it overhead, a storm of applause erupted from the audience.



What a fun sumo journey it had been.

“Well then, with a promise to hold a Yggdrasil Cup in Grand Sumo in this place every four years, it is time to wrap up the very first of them!” announced the fairy king.

Surrounded by everyone’s cheering, I was happy. The friends who had fought together with me were my treasure.

As we descended the dohyō, only Jomin was left standing on top of it.

“Now, though this comes after such a splendid performance, we must judge a criminal today.”

As I wondered what this was about, a tied-up Chancellor Mickaël was brought onto the dohyō.

“Mickaël,” she continued. “Your discontent with the government of the Elven Forest Republic led you to usurp the country with the aid of the revolutionary elements and your allies in the face of the Demon Lord’s army. Any objections?”

“I... Though it caused me great pain, I started this revolution for the sake of everyone’s happiness. This government that had grown so rigid over a thousand years was in need of progress.”

“Uh-huh.”

“The blame lies entirely with this system of government not ever having any vacancies! It wasn’t my fault! I am the savior of the elven race!”

“Uh-huh.”

“It is not too late! Why, if you untie this rope around my hands and entrust the government to me, I shall ensure the human nations, the demonic realm, and those blasted dwarves’ caves all come under elven control. We shall impose our will upon the entire eastern part of the continent.”

“How interesting. If you do not seal those blabbering lips of yours this instant, I shall place a curse on you such that you may never speak again.”

“O Jomin! Please don’t, I beg of you!”

“Silence. I have no interest in what you have to say. Elves are not shameless

enough to seek to reign over other races.” Jomin took a scroll out of her pocket and spread it out. “You have brought suffering to the elves. You have led an army of demons and monsters into this town and set fire to it—in addition, you almost burnt down our ancestor Yggdrasil. For your crimes, you deserve to die a thousand times over.”

“It’s all a misunderstanding!”

“Here in this place, the Elder Council sentences Mickaël to banishment from the elven forest! No water in this forest shall flow for you, no tree in it shall give you its fruit. The elven forest rejects you!”

“Ahh, but what am I to do?!”

“Leave the forest, for you are banished for a thousand years.”

“I wonder what happens when an elf gets rejected by the forest.”

“It’s only the elven forest, milady. Things won’t be any different outside of this country.”

“I see.”

“This does mean he won’t be able to make use of the special treatment elves get from the elven forest. Other forests don’t have as many spirits as this one.”

“So he won’t be able to use spirit magic, right?”

“Yes. For a thousand years he will be forced to roam other parts of the world.”

I wondered how far an elf rejected by the forest could wander. Would such an elf end up like the half-elves in human towns? *How pitiful.*

Epilogue: The Towns That Would Come to Be Known as the Four Capitals of Sumo

Aryagard, the demonic capital, the Dwarven Great Caves, and the Town of Yggdrasil had become known as the four capitals of sumo, holding frequent sumo performances. What spurred the expansion of the Age of Grand Sumo to nations other than Aryaka was Chancellor Mickaël's rebellion which began in the elven capital. During her escape, Crown Princess Floortje brought four peoples together and taught everyone the joys and depth of sumo. It was none other than this journey that caused sumo to spread all over the continent.

Let us take a small peek at each of the four capitals of sumo at the time, shall we?

Since it was an elven town, the Town of Yggdrasil saw extremely slow changes. But they were definitely starting to happen.

"Why are you always in that fenrir form, Your Majesty?" asked Marshal Cabriel.

"Oh, let me be. This form is more popular with the ladies because it's so fluffy."

"That attitude of yours is what brought on the revolution, you know. You should think about how you act."

"Yeah, yeah..."

The fairy king's flirty side had remained unchanged, but as far as the government was concerned, a mandatory retirement system had been established. Regardless of how capable an elf was, they were now obligated to change their post after fifty years in any single one. It appeared to have slightly alleviated the discontent of low-ranking elves.

Sumo fever had reached the Elven Forest Republic, and with the assistance of the Valhalla Sumo Association a new form of sumo, Elven Forest Grand Sumo,

was born. Boorman took up the post of the first yokozuna. Elves had little weight and strength to speak of, but their agility and spirit magic gave them a chance in the ring. During sumo events in the Martial Arts Hall of Yggdrasil, all seats were sold out every day.

The Dwarven Great Caves had evolved into a central transit town for the Magic Train line. Tracks had been laid to Aryagard, the demonic capital, and the Town of Yggdrasil, and the great caves became a hub for logistics and travel. Many sumo stables appeared, and sumo events were held in the local gymnasium.

"We have to win the next joint tournament with the elves!" spoke Mamiana.

"Yes, Coach!"

Mamiana had become the first yokozuna of Dwarven Grand Sumo. During the joint tournaments between elves and dwarves held every season, her bouts with the elven yokozuna Boorman always became the talk of both towns.

The dwarves became so engrossed in sumo that, in everyone else's eyes, smithing and sumo were the two main things dwarves were known for.

On the other end of the mountain range from the great caves, rail tracks led to the demonic realm, directly into its capital. Another Magic Train—one designed by the goblin professor—ran in these lands. This capital had been obsessed with sumo even before the elven uprising, but the Demon Lord's defeat at the Town of Yggdrasil stirred the monsters' determination not to share the same fate, leading to ever greater enthusiasm for sumo.

While the Demon Lord had remained a yokozuna, Arima had joined him in this rank as the yokozuna of the west side, a slightly less prestigious status.

"We've got great strength and special abilities. Sometimes, though, it can hold us back. It's your intrinsic strength that matters in sumo. You gotta focus on the basic techniques of a proper rikishi rather than rely on those special abilities of yours."

Through the guidance of the Demon Lord, the nation had come to be known

as a sumo superpower, with all of its people said to be sumo wrestlers. It would be some time before Erhard made his debut in Demonic Sumo and shook up the rankings.

The rail tracks had been laid directly to Aryagard as well, and were actively used for logistics, travel, and commuting. The entirety of Aryaka became even crazier about sumo after seeing it save a friendly nation and bring down the Demon Lord's army. As everybody trained hard and competed in Grand Sumo, numerous unforgettable matches were held in the Aryakan Sumo Hall.

Sweeping the backyard of the sumo hall, Adela paused to look up at the sky and take a breath.

"Things sure have taken a wild turn. But oh well. The important thing is that milady and His Highness are happy."

Lady Floortje and Prince Richie were planning to have their nuptials come autumn on the dohyō of the Aryakan Sumo Hall, together with Clifton and Kukuri.

"Kukuri, what was 'nuptials' again?"

"Maybe a banquet where they give you lots of food."

Hearing the silly exchange between Clifton and Kukuri, Edgar frowned.

"Seriously, you guys... 'Nuptials' is a more sophisticated word for marriage."

"Oh..."

"Ah..."

Incidentally, a dohyō wedding became the dream of every girl in Aryaka, and it became extremely popular to have your wedding in the Aryakan Sumo Hall.

Lady Floortje continued her training in her stable without a word. She couldn't remain a yokozuna if she let herself become giddy about the upcoming occasion. Which was why she trained, quietly and fervently. Sometimes her eyes would meet those of the prince and the mood would grow sweet for a while, but we'll look the other way on that matter. The two of them appeared to be very happy.

Now, where might the man responsible for the rebellion be? Around this time, Chancellor Mickaël lay collapsed on the ground of the Climaco Forest to the south. He couldn't effortlessly get fruit from trees like he previously had in the elven forest, and he had to look for water. The thought of now being in this state despite once making it all the way to the post of chancellor tormented him.

"Oh? Check this out—there's some guy lying over there."

"It's not every day you see someone collapsed in these parts!"

"Wow, he's got pointy ears and a pretty face! We've got an elf on our hands."

A noisy group of halflings had surrounded the chancellor.

"What brings you so close to a halfling village, elf?"

"Are you feral? Are you?"

"Here, have some water."

The halflings looked after the chancellor.

"Th-Thank you..."

"Don't worry about it. You would've done the same for us."

"We don't get a lot of elves. You're so pretty!"

"You look sad. What happened?"

The chancellor told his rescuers the whole story of how he had attempted a revolution and failed. He was hoping for sympathy, but the halflings burst into laughter.

"Aha ha ha! Man, you're dumb!"

"You lost to that sumo people have been talking about, huh?"

"What are you laughing at?!"

"You weren't trying to improve someone's lot in life—you just wanted to become a bigwig yourself!"

The halflings' simple intuition rattled the Chancellor.

“So it was a total fiasco, eh? What can I say? These things happen.”

“Come to our village. We’ve never had an elf.”

“Yeah, you should come!”

“B-But I have nothing to give you in return... My pockets are empty...”

“You’re alive, dude!”

“Tell us about sumo.”

“Don’t worry about it. Things will work out!”

The chancellor was touched by the simplistic, childlike way of thinking demonstrated by the halflings—a big difference from what he was accustomed to. Was it all right not to overthink things? Was it just fine to live a simple, unsophisticated life? Was it acceptable not to strive for greatness or be cunning? As he began to suspect he had placed too much value in things that held no meaning whatsoever, doubts perturbed his mind, and tears started flowing from his eyes.

“Don’t cry!”

“Hey, you’re alive and that’s what matters!”

“Now come on, let’s go to our village. You can stay as long as you like.”

“Yeah, it’d be good to have someone bright around! Or someone who can tell us about sumo!”

His hands pulled by the noisy halflings, Chancellor Mickaël took his first step on the road leading to the halflings’ village. It would be some time before the halflings adapted the sumo from the elf’s stories into a martial art of their own —Halfling Sumo. *Dosukoi dosukoi!*

This Time, a Normal Afterword

And that was the sequel to Grand Sumo Villainess. Thank you very much for reading to the end.

This time around, the setting introduced several new regions: the story began in the elven Town of Yggdrasil, passed through the Dwarven Great Caves, and continued on a Magic Train. In the role of the adversaries were demons and monsters.

It was fun to write a story in the style of proper fantasy. I like the elves in particular, as they remain beautiful regardless of how obese or insufferable they are. Chancellor Mickaël for example always talks like a pathetic villain, but he's meant to be physically beautiful, so that created a contradiction in my mind.

Also, it was fun to write all kinds of monsters. I liked the earnest Kukuri but also the frivolous Uta. Oh, and the punk-like Demon Lord is simply marvelous. He comes across as younger than his son Erhard due to his personality, but, well, he's apparently something of a demigod so what can you do.

I've had the help of all sorts of people in writing this volume as well. It was the constant support of the sumo enthusiast Sanbon, the cheerful support of Tomori Rinko, the helpful Let's Read streams by Ikagaya Saito, the emphatic thoughts regarding this novel left by Rikudo Shūichiro, the special illustrations and written introductions to the work by Tosei, as well as my editor Imai, Murakami Yuichi who has drawn wonderful illustrations for the book, and everyone at Earth Star that brought Grand Sumo Villainess to completion. You have my heartfelt gratitude. *Thank you.*

Extra Story: Uta Tours Aryagard Before the Double Dohyō Wedding

I got out of the Magic Train and left the Aryagard central station. The size of this city was overwhelming, and people were everywhere.

“Look at that flower in her hair! It’s so pretty!”

“I’ve never seen such a flower before.”

Those Aryagard ladies had a keen eye. Me being an alraune—a flower monster—the flowers in my hair were the real thing. Also, my body was made of ivy and wood, but you couldn’t tell from over my clothes.

Today marked the second day of my trip from the demonic capital on a Magic Train, and I was exhausted. But without the train I would’ve been forced to walk for a whole two months, so the world had definitely gotten smaller. And coming here on a Magic Train from the demonic capital to see sumo had become a popular trend.

I saw a few monsters here and there near the central station, all in gorgeous and formal attire.

“Aikio, wait for me, ribbit!”

“Can’t you go any faster, Givun? I can’t wait to see the Aryakan Sumo Hall.”

I spotted Aikio and Givun—it turned out they had taken the same train as me. They looked handsome in their formal suits.

The central station had been newly built after the rail tracks were laid from the border station to Aryagard. Today was the day of the wedding between Lady Floortje and Prince Richie, so numerous well-dressed elves and dwarves could be seen near the station. Lady Floortje had been the key figure in creating a sumo fever in every nation, and so many guests of honor were coming for her wedding, while lots of other people simply came as tourists.

My best friend Kukuri was marrying Clifton today in the same double wedding in the Aryakan Sumo Hall—I was really looking forward to it.

Looking up at the large, newly made station clock, I saw I had about half a day before the ceremony. I had some time for a little sightseeing. For now, the plan was to leave my luggage at the hotel and go for a stroll.

I checked into the classy hotel I had reserved ahead of time. In the lobby, they gave me a map. The size of the city was astonishing. *Now, where do I go first...?*

Rustle rustle! Ah, my map flew away in the wind!

Some gaudy-looking elf caught it in midair and returned it to me.

“Hey there, pretty lady. You should be careful,” said the elf and flashed his teeth in a flirty way.

What a fine man!

“Thank you...”

“You must be a tourist. I’ve just come here today myself, but it’s not my first visit, so I know the place well. Would you like a tour?”

High elves were so gorgeous... And he was obviously very accustomed to women and was awfully flirty.

“A tour? Forget it. The Demon Lord has strictly forbidden me from coming anywhere near you, Ulupano.”

“Oh, how terrible of him. Come on—why not just go for it once in a while? Let’s have tea together, Uta.”

“Should the head of the Elven Forest Republic really be hanging around this place?”

“I’m on the guest list for the wedding, so I have nothing to do at the moment.”

“Then go hit on someone else, because I don’t waste my time on flirts like you.”

“Tsk, how cold of you.”

Ulupano pouted and went after a different woman. He really never changed. It was surely unheard-of for a head of state to be picking up women on the street. *We alraune are monsters of many romances, but a flirty elf? Spare me.*

I wondered if there was a single, wild, thin, muscular, tanned, white-haired dragon boy somewhere... *There he is.*

“Phalariiiiis!”

“Ah, you’re the flower monster.”

He was wearing a neat uniform and carrying a school bag. Walking beside him was a female student in glasses.

“Hey, Phalaris, who is she?”

“Heh heh, someone close enough to touch him and be touched by him in all sorts of places with our clothes off.”

“Hey! That’s not wrong, but you’re making it sound wrong.”

“You do sumo, then.”

She seemed to be pretty smart, fitting the stereotype of someone wearing glasses.

“Are you busy, Phalaris? This older lady is on her first visit to Aryagard. Would you show her around?”

“Eh, screw that—sounds like a pain in the ass. Go ask that elf over there.”

“Him? No way.”

“School’s finally over, I’m going to training now, then I have to change into some kinda crested ceremonial clothes and attend Floortje’s wedding. I’m busy.”

“I see you’re very earnest in your training. Good on you.”

“Oh, right! If you give me a rematch, then sure, I’ll show you around.”

“Eh, I can’t be bothered right now. And I’d be late for the wedding.”

“Then that’s a no. Go ask Yustin for a tour or something.”

“Yustin got himself a really big belly recently...”

“Man, you’re hard to please.”

“We alraune like beautiful people.”

The handsome dragon with an indifferent attitude left together with the girl in glasses. *Damn it!* Also, that girl had a crush on him. I could see it in her eyes, as my alraune nature made me an expert in romance.

Sigh... Maybe I'll walk around alone. I could go for a cup of tea in a café.

I strolled through the main street, seeing plenty of restaurants around. There were also stores selling fashionable clothes, precious stones, accessories, flowers, mawashi, watches... They had pretty much everything here.

"Hey there, lady. You're so pretty. Wanna do sumo with us?"

"We hold pretty good spots in the amateur table of rankings."

"And if we win, you'll do anything we ask. Sound good?"

Three ill-bred rikishi who didn't seem to belong to any stable stood in my way. Surprised to discover that even such a thriving capital had types like these roaming around, I wondered what to do. Teaching them a lesson didn't seem like such a bad idea.

"Stop right there! You're a disgrace to Aryakan rikishi for harassing foreign guests!"

As I contemplated my course of action, a handsome man in a snappy military uniform showed up.

"Gah! General Maurilio!"

"W-We're sorry."

"Please let us go!"

The three rikishi ran away.

"Th-Thank you, General..."

"It's nothing. Oh, wait, you're..."

His observant eye pierced my chest. It was that lovely leader of the elite unit of rikishi who had protected the Town of Yggdrasil.

"You're Uta of the Demon Lord's army, if memory serves me right. I apologize you had to deal with those delinquents here in Aryaka."

“Don’t worry about it. Those types are worse in our lands. I’m used to it.”

“Oh, if you say so.”

“It’s my first time in Aryagard. I know it’s presumptuous of me to ask, but would you mind giving me a tour of the city?”

The general smiled.

“Gladly, if you’re okay with me. I have time until the wedding. Would you like to visit one of the city’s scenic spots?”

“By all means!”

Yay, got myself a handsome guy!

General Maurilio led me to the central park. It was a nice place with lovely gardens. I was thrilled to be walking through a park on a date with a handsome officer.

“Are you appearing in tomorrow’s friendly match?” he asked.

“Yes, I was chosen since Kukuri won’t be appearing.”

“I’ve been chosen too. Hopefully we get to go against each other.”

It really would be nice if I got to do sumo with the general, I thought. I wondered what his style was. Regardless, I was looking forward to the following day. And since I was quick to fall in love, I was crazy about the general already.

After he saw me off to the hotel, I took a shower, put on a traditional alraune outfit, and headed to the sumo hall in a coach.

“You’re late, Uta,” spoke the Demon Lord.

“Sorry, sir!”

“Now...everyone’s here...”

“All right, team, time to show up to this double wedding!” spoke our leader once more.

“Yeah!” we replied.

Those who would be participating in the following day’s friendly match had been allotted the ringside seats for this ceremony. The sumo hall was simply an

amazing place for doing sumo. It was dazzling, and I found myself trembling with excitement. In the ringside seats across the dohyō sat General Maurilio. He returned my light wave with a smile.

After a round of drumming, Floortje ceremoniously entered the ring, wearing a white horizontal rope—a *yokozuna*—and carrying herself in a dignified manner.

Thus began the double dohyō wedding of Lady Floortje and Prince Richie, as well as of Kukuri and Clifton.

(The End.)