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HELL MODE
The Hardcore Gamer Dominates in Another World with Garbage Balancing
STORY HAMUO
ART MO


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"MY GOAL IS TO DEFEAT THE DEMON LORD,"
ALLEN REPLIED FIRMLY TO THE GIAMUTAN EMPEROR'S QUESTION.









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Chapter 1: The Allen Army Accepts Applicants

Allen and his party were in Fortenia, the capital of Rohzenheim. The coronation in the Holy Land of Elmahl had ended, and the No-life Gamers had joined the Five Continent Alliance to clash against the Demon Lord Army, which had been invading the Central Continent. The commander of the enemy troops had been a Demonic Deity, and upon its defeat, Allen had reached Lvl. 93.

Allen had then gone straight to the naval battle in the Baukis Empire, but he had learned that the Demon Lord Army had already retreated. Unfortunately, he had been unable to slay the Demonic Deity there.

And so, he was now in Fortenia. However, rather than the throne room, where the queen resided, he was in a much larger hall where two thousand elves had been gathered. A ceremony would be held to welcome them into the Allen Army.

Honestly fitting for them since the elves seem to respect customs and traditions, Allen thought.

“Lord Allen, I thank you for your patience,” the queen of the elves, Lenoatiil, said, entering the venue. “We shall now begin the arrival ceremony.”

The queen had gone out of her way to greet Allen before the ceremony commenced. His reputation with her had skyrocketed and continued to rise as they spoke, due in no small part to the island in the sky that he had obtained recently, dubbed “Hardcore User Island.” This apparently fulfilled the prophecy that the God of Spirits had made when he was still a Sovereign. Allen and his party had once again reaffirmed that among them was the man of light who would shake off the darkness and save the world. That was precisely why they were being loaned two thousand troops with two-star Talents despite the elves having just returned from a war.

While Rohzenheim had suffered minimal damages from the Demon Lord Army’s invasion compared to their prior clashes, the elves had still lost several thousand troops. Furthermore, there

was no time limit in place—these two thousand soldiers were being lent to Allen for as long as he needed them. And that was not all. Though Field Marshal Lukdraal would take direct command of this brigade, the elven queen had personally claimed that Allen would have the final say and ultimately take control. It mattered not if Allen's plan became a suicide mission; these two thousand soldiers had been ordered to follow him until the very end.

There was a good chance that the Allen Army would continue its campaign for a good few years. Soldiers who could not bear to part with their families were allowed to move to Hardcore User Island with their loved ones, which was big enough to house several thousand immigrants. However, one could not forget that the island would be used on the front lines against the Demon Lord Army.

"I'm terribly sorry for borrowing two thousand of your troops with excellent Talents during such a precarious time," Allen apologized. "Have you already confirmed whether these soldiers have the resolve?"

These elves would not have dared to go against an order from their queen, but Allen wanted to make sure that each and every one of them was prepared to fight until the bitter end.

"Of course," the queen answered. "We elves perceive death differently from humans, after all."

To the elves, death implied that they would return to the roots of the World Tree. Many of them thus did not fear the concept of death. They did not need to cling to life if they could protect their queen, who deified Rohzen and the World Tree. By sticking with the God of Spirits, they could also be close to the highly anticipated future queen, Sophie, and the man of light who would shake off the darkness. The queen was about to touch on the fact that the elves had no reason to refuse.

"And we shall begin the ceremony shortly…" she started when she spotted something in the crowd. Her legs trembled, and she fell to her knees. "Huh?! I… I don't believe it…"

"Your Majesty?! Are you all right?!" an elf cried, hastily rushing to her side.

The queen was not staring at Allen but at his party behind him.

"I-It's nothing at all," the queen stammered. "H-Has my daughter done something to upset you somehow?"

“Huh? Who, Sophie?” Allen asked.

Far from it. Allen hastily explained how much of a huge help Sophie was to his party—she was the one who came up with the idea of forming an Allen Army as well.

“I see… If nothing is amiss, then that’s all that matters,” Lenoatiil replied, clearly struggling to gather herself.

She glanced at the Holy Orb of Macris on Cecil’s arm before staring at the Holy Orb of Rubanka worn by Krena. Though she had doubted her eyes at first, there was no mistaking the glimmer of a Holy Orb. The elves knew of the Prostia Empire and the custom of its king presenting the Holy Orb of Macris to his queen. Any Holy Orb would do, but the implication of providing this gift was clear, as there was a custom in this world to gift such a precious item as an indication of romantic interest. Of course, as this was a custom among kings, nations ruled by queens, such as Rohzenheim, did not practice it. But Lenoatiil could not help but notice that Cecil and Krena were equipped with these Holy Orbs while her daughter, Sophie, had nothing of the sort.

Unfortunately, Allen could not read minds, so he failed to grasp the queen’s worries. His reason for giving the Holy Orb of Rubanka, which he had taken from Bask, was rather simple: Dogora, who put his all into a single blow, could not use it effectively. Instead, Allen had thought it far wiser to equip Krena with the precious item, for she was more skilled and useful during combat. Sophie, however, had seemingly picked up on her mother’s woes.

“Um, Y-Your Majesty? I deeply apologize,” Sophie said with a deep bow.

Huh?

“No, never you mind it,” the queen replied. “We must get on with the ceremony. Let us discuss this issue afterward.”

Sophie stayed back, claiming that she wanted to catch up a little with her mother, and promised to follow the rest of the No-life Gamers later.

The ceremony promptly began and ended without a hitch. Allen needed to transport two thousand elves as well as several government officials to Hardcore User Island. He Summoned his Bird A and used its Awakened Ability, Homing Instinct, to teleport everyone to the island in the sky. This Ability could teleport things from one point to another within a one-kilometer

radius. Aside from houses with firm bases or objects inside boulders or underground, almost anything could be transported.

The island had been rather useful as of late, having provided a temporary sanctuary for those who sought aid from the Daemonism invasion and proven its use during the battle against the Demonic Deity and the Pontiff of Daemonism. When the elves were transported to it, almost everyone expressed their shock, including Lukdraal.

"Where are we?"

"As we've been told, there really is nothing here."

"That seems like an understatement. Can people really settle here?"

They were greeted by the scenery on the outskirts of Hardcore User Island, a location where not even a single blade of grass grew. This was no place for filthy casuals to settle down and thrive.

"Welcome to the garden in the sky," Allen said with a smile, trying his best to quell the anxiety of Lukdraal and the other elves.

The leader of the No-life Gamers was determined to keep each and every elf on board, as they would be chiefly in charge of developing this area. It looked as though a submarine volcano had recently erupted, giving birth to this new land. Rocks of various sizes, from as big as one's fist to several meters tall, were scattered across the island. There were no signs of life.

Was it some kind of sick joke to call such a barren wasteland a "garden in the sky"? The elves all jolted and gulped nervously. For Dogora's sake, Allen needed the former followers of Daemonism to pray like mad to Goddess Freyja. Since Dogora was now the disciple of the Goddess of Fire, he would grow stronger if Freyja's divine power increased. To heighten her power, she needed fervent prayers from numerous followers, translating to Dogora's might.

The rocky terrain on Hardcore User Island would require the elves to use their Spirit Magic to summon trees, dirt, and water. Allen had told the Holy Land of Elmahl that once the land was developed, the former followers of Daemonism—now followers of Freyja—who were living in the dark elven village of Fabraaze, the Kingdom of Calvarna, and the Kingdom of Crevelle could move to Hardcore User Island. Needless to say, he already had a rough estimate of how many people would move to the island.

The number he had come up with was around fifteen thousand.

If the merfolk of Crevelle were willing to immigrate, a lake would need to be created to serve as their humble abode. Further testing was required, such as placing a layer of water all around the island. Would it float too, or would it fall to the earth?

"You're finally here," Beast Princess Shia said. "Will this spot do for a village?"

She and her beastkin army of two thousand were already stationed at the island, waiting for the elves.

"Thank you for your patience, Princess Shia," Allen replied. "I think that's a fine idea. I plan on creating a river farther up the mountain, so I believe it's best to form a village around the flowing water."

The Allen Army had myriad tasks to accomplish, but Allen wanted to prioritize making the island habitable. Ultimately, there would be a population of over ten thousand mingling and settling in the place. The beastkin squad would use their powers to create a town. The elves could use their Spirit Magic to create trees—though they could not be tasked with cutting those trees down to create structures. While there were carpenters and artisans among the elves, the beastkin were more adept at erecting bridges and walls. Allen believed that it would be best to leave the building to them.

"Allen, you're the chief of this village," Shia said, vocalizing the thoughts that she had had for a while. "No need for you to be so polite with me."

She felt that this was the perfect time to broach the topic. For a good while now, she had wanted them to have a friendlier and more casual relationship, much like the bond that Sophie and Allen shared. She did not want Allen to maintain his formal tone. She might have been royalty, but this island belonged to him. She was also set to join the No-life Gamers, and surely it made no sense for her party leader and the owner of this island to be so formal with her.

"Huh. Yeah, all right," Allen said. "I'm counting on you, Shia."

"O-Of course…" the Beast Princess replied, unable to hide her surprise at his abrupt change in attitude. "It seems I was not worthy to receive much of your respect."

"It's like I'm having déjà vu," Cecil muttered. Back during their Academy days, the very moment their instructor had claimed that there was no need to be overly formal with nobles, Allen's

attitude had changed. It had been like the flip of a switch.

Once everyone was safely transported to the island, Allen had the elves who could use earth Spirit Magic get to work. Of the thousand Spirit Wizards he had been entrusted with, more than half of them could use the earth element. Massive boulders were covered with dirt and reduced to sand, as level ground was required to build a civilization. The island was slated to house over ten thousand people and their living quarters, and that would require several square kilometers of flat ground.

"This much manpower is nothing to sneeze at. We can develop this land in no time," Cecil muttered beside Allen.

"Yeah," Allen agreed. "The selection process for the residents is going smoothly, so I don't want to make them wait too long."

Yeah, this is going really well. Everyone's maxed out their levels and stats, and we don't need to make any walls or moats. I think we can create a habitable environment in ten days' time. Whoops, gotta use Creation.

With the help of Merus, his Angel A and the former First Angel, he used Blessing of Heaven on everyone. Allen's suspicions rang true—the two thousand beastkin and elves on the island had max levels and skills. They were on Normal Mode, of course. The Spirit Wizards were leveling the ground at an alarming rate, while those who could use tree Spirit Magic were planting trees all around. The trees, created by magic, required water for growth, and those who could use water Spirit Magic chipped in to help, displaying excellent teamwork. Thanks to this brilliant combined effort, the trees grew to over ten meters tall in almost no time.

The beastkin, who were also at max level, were plucking those trees from the ground like one would pick a radish. They used long hatchets to slice off the unnecessary branches and leaves, quickly transforming the trees into logs for houses that would need to be built on the evened ground. Thanks to Spirit Magic, a mountain of logs was created in a flash.

Since we don't need to build walls for this town, we can use the entirety of the land efficiently.

The island in the sky was unique in that it was out of reach of most enemies. This allowed Allen to forgo the idea of building walls and digging moats, freeing up plenty of space for housing, agriculture, or other farming purposes. But though this land was high in the air, it was still vulnerable to flying monsters. To

remedy that, Allen decided to use the Awakened Ability of his Grass A, Gold Bean, to secure the perimeter of the island. The trees it created would set up a barrier with a radius of one kilometer, defending the island against Rank A monsters for a decade.

As he watched the elves and beastkin busily toil away, Allen used Seed of Magic. Ever since he had received an SOS signal from the Holy Land of Elmahl, the No-life Gamers had been in nonstop consecutive battles. He had obtained quite a bit of Skill XP while he was traveling or taking a rest, but he was still a good ways away from Summoning Lvl. 9. He was eager to raise his skill level as soon as possible.

Seed of Magic could restore 1,000 MP to anyone within a fifty-meter radius. It was most effective to use it while patrolling the area, healing as many elves and beastkin as he could. He was currently equipped with an MP Recovery Ring, a ring that gave him +5,000 MP, and the Holy Orb of Macris. As a side note, whenever he asked to borrow the precious item from Cecil, she would reply with, “You better return it to me!” She would never refuse a request from him, however, and whenever he finally gave it back to her, she would accept it with a grin.

Sophie’s late. Will she be here tomorrow? Once the ceremony had ended, she had been called to a room by her mother, the queen. Allen had no idea what the two of them were up to, but perhaps they were celebrating their long-awaited reunion. He did not mind if Sophie met up with him the following day.

He continued to walk around and restore everyone’s MP when an elf approached him. “Um, L-Lord Allen? Should we level the ground until we reach those mountains?” they inquired. It seemed this person was in charge of creating an even area.

“Yeah, that would be great,” Allen replied.

“Understood!”

You don’t have to work too *hard. Using this island to attack the Demon Lord Army’s base isn’t completely off the table yet.* His development plans and diagrams had been handed out to the elves and beastkin, and they were working exactly as they had been told. The island was ten kilometers long and eight kilometers wide. Within that space, Allen planned on building a few towns, along with farms and ranches to make them self-sufficient, a river to supply water to everyone, and a lake for the merfolk.

The temple in the mountains also had to be renovated into an altar to worship Freyja. Naturally, this altar would have to be visible to the people residing in the forthcoming towns. Allen intended to have the offering of fire glow brightly within the altar, in plain view for everyone to see, especially at night. Customs were important, and Allen hoped that the residents would pray to Freyja every night before they headed for bed.

He also wanted the soldiers to switch jobs. *I have to find work for the former followers of Daemonism too. Pelomas should still be in the royal capital.* An industry had to flourish on this island. Allen decided to consult the merchant Pelomas, a fellow former resident of Krena Village, about the issue. Allen had countless plans for the island, but if he had to take care of every single one on his own, it would be a problem.

Back on Earth, he had played games where he was given his own home or had to build a town that resembled a miniature of sorts. Other games had allowed players to buy a home or a base so that they could arrange it to their liking. When Allen was still Kenichi and had played such games, he had mostly used his virtual house as a storage to keep items and gear that he obtained from enemies. He had had very little interest in making his space look cool or cute. *I guess I'm maturing in my own way.*

This entire time, Allen had been using his knowledge from his previous life to its fullest extent. There were many instances where this knowledge had saved him. However, if he wanted to establish industries, he decided that he would need to enlist the help of Pelomas, as merchant was a job type that Allen was not familiar with from his previous life. He had held this train of thought ever since Rosetta, a Phantom Thief, had proven herself extremely useful in the battle against Goldino, the boss of the final floor of the Rank S dungeon. Allen had become painfully aware that some things he had deemed unnecessary in his previous life actually had use. He might have tossed aside useful and necessary items without having recognized their full potential.

I should help develop this island as much as I can, but not so much that I end up being stuck here.

Just then, Merus arrived with Sophie in tow.

"Huh? That was quick. You sure you don't wanna spend the night with your mother?" Allen asked. "I don't mind."

"No, I shall do what I can to help," Sophie replied.

While Allen was not sure what had happened, the elf princess sounded a touch gloomy. But at the same time, endless passion seemed to well up from deep within her heart. Perhaps she would be just fine.

"All right," Allen replied. "I know you just got back, so I'm sorry, but could you come with me? The dark elves have finished their preparations."

"Then I shall tag along, of course," Sophie replied.

Her presence was not necessary, but Allen felt that it would be best for her to be around when he was welcoming the dark elves onto Hardcore User Island. Thus, he took the slightly glum Sophie and headed to Fabraaze.

"They all look…kinda young," Allen observed.

"Indeed," Sophie replied.

He had received a letter from Fabraaze stating that a thousand dark elves would be joining the Allen Army. Their arrival ceremony had finished, and they had gathered in the halls, awaiting dispatch. These dark elves were comparatively younger than the elves sent from Rohzenheim. A majority of the ones who were currently developing the land had served in the military and fought against the Demon Lord Army for at least three years. Their levels and skills were almost maxed. They appeared to be in their twenties or thirties, but they were actually older than that.

In comparison, the thousand dark elves who had gathered looked to be in their early to late teens. Allen had heard that elves and dark elves reached adulthood at thirty, and that high elves and high dark elves became adults when they turned fifty. Hence, while Sophie was fifty, she looked about as old as Cecil and Krena. Allen was able to conclude that most of these dark elves were around thirty or so years of age.

I specified that I required a thousand people with two-star Talents, but that was my only condition. I get it now… These dark elves' levels and skills were likely nowhere near max. However, since they had been completely uninvolved in the battle against the Demon Lord Army, one could assume that it took far more effort for them to gain levels than the elves. Monsters must have lurked on the outskirts of the village, and these dark elves had presumably been dispatched to get rid of the beasts. They were not Lvl. 1 newbies, but they were also not hardened veterans like the elves. As Allen and Sophie observed them, Olbaas, an Elder,

and a female dark elf approached the pair.

"They're ready to go," Olbaas said to Allen. "I ask that you bring their belongings along with them."

The king was probably referring to the stack of items piled high, taking up half of the hall. *I should bring* all *that stuff, right?* The dark elves had apparently gathered the things they would need for life on Hardcore User Island.

"You're here too, Luke?" Allen remarked.

"Of course," the little boy replied. "We're friends, aren't we?"

Standing in front of the dark elf lady was a dark elf boy who looked to be around eight. The boy's name was Luketod, and he was the son of King Olbaas. After Allen and his party had defeated Gushara, the Pontiff of Daemonism, they had decided to return one of the spirits to the village of the dark elves. It was then that they had run into Luke, and after a game of ogre in which Allen had been victorious, the two had become friends. The boy was determined to join Allen's party, but he needed to make some preparations before tagging along—he had timed his party joining with the dark elves who had gathered today. Luke seemed to be pouting, no doubt because he was trying to collect himself before he parted ways with his mother.

"Luke, I'm counting on you," Allen said.

"You're in good hands!" Luke replied energetically.

The two exchanged a fist bump before Allen turned to Olbaas, who was patiently waiting.

"I see that you've chosen those who are rather young," Allen said, referring to the dark elves who had gathered. "Thank you for your kindness and consideration."

"Ah, so you thank me," Olbaas replied awkwardly, not expecting such a response. "You're more difficult to deal with than the elves."

Allen chose to ignore that comment, instead focusing on the pros and cons of receiving a thousand young dark elves who likely had no combat experience from Fabraaze. The cons were that they needed to be trained by the Allen Army so that they would be useful on the battlefield. Perhaps they had been chosen precisely because the village did not want to lose the protection of its seasoned fighters. Meanwhile, the pros were that the dark elves would be cohabitating with the elves on the island. The two races had been at odds for several millennia, and them living together was unheard of until now. There was a

good chance that their numbers, combat experience, and age could lead to some sort of bitter rivalry, but these dark elves were young with no such experience. They were more flexible and less conservative, perhaps willing to accept other ideas. Every decision had a pro and a con.

"Luke, don't you worry about a thing," said Faable, a jet-black weasel with glossy fur. The Sovereign of Spirits brought her nose close to the boy. "I'll be by your side."

"Y-You're right. Thanks," Luke replied.

Huh, I just heard Faable speak. She sounds rather feminine. The queenly dark elf woman watched Luketod worriedly as she handed him a bag with his belongings. Allen thought that it might have been a bit too early for Luke to become independent, but upon asking about it, he learned that the dark elf was fifteen, just like him.

Once the dark elves were ready to go, they were transported to Hardcore User Island. The floating plot of land now had two thousand beastkin, two thousand elves, and one thousand dark elves, forming the Allen Army. With everyone assembled, it was time for a briefing, but Allen was not willing to speak to thousands of people at once. He called for those who held the rank of captain or above, each with at least a hundred troops under their command.

After placing a request to have a conference room built in the future, Allen gathered everyone into a large building. This structure would be the home of the future mayor. Allen took the top seat, and Sophie and Shia sat on either side of him. Beside those two sat Luke, along with the rest of the No-life Gamers.

Ten generals sat on a mat on the floor, and another ten sat atop pillows, forming a circle around Allen and his party. Captains who had at least a hundred under their command lined up and sat behind the generals. All had been in the military, and they treated those of higher rank with the utmost respect and sincerity.

This meeting would be a casual affair that included food. An elf lady approached Allen to pour him a glass of liquor.

"I don't need any alcohol, thank you," Allen said. He almost never touched the stuff. "Could you please pour me a glass of juice?"

Once Shia confirmed that everyone had gathered, she had everyone focus their gaze on Allen and await his words.

“I see that everyone is here,” Shia said. “Allen, would you please begin?”

Everyone present was aware of what Allen had done. They knew that he was a Rank S adventurer, a rank that was only granted once every two decades, and that he had cleared a Rank S dungeon. Indeed, it was Allen who had swooped in to save Rohzenheim from being invaded by the Demon Lord Army the year prior, and he had also put an end to the Daemonism debacle. No one cared if he was a commoner born in the small nation of Ratash. His results outweighed his birth. There were even a few elves who had personally seen him fight in Rohzenheim and several beastkin who had witnessed the boy’s valor against the followers of Daemonism. The highly ranked elves and beastkin all sat up straight to heed the words of their leader.

“I’d like to thank everyone for gathering here today. My name is Allen, and I’ll be your commander. This army may seem like a hodgepodge of various people and species, each person with their own rank and motives, but I hope we can all work together to defeat the Demon Lord Army.”

“Hmm, perhaps ranks don’t matter so much here,” Shia said.

“Perhaps not,” Allen replied. “But I’m simply saying that we all don’t need to hold the same resolve. Everyone has their own thoughts, values, and beliefs, and that’s just fine. I ask that you all keep what you find so dear close to your heart.”

Surely, the dark elves and beastkin had joined the army to fulfill their own goals. If they had noble ideals like protecting the world from the Demon Lord Army, they would have joined the army of the Five Continent Alliance rather than the Allen Army. However, both species had vehemently refused to join the efforts against the Demon Lord Army until now. They must have had motives other than simply wanting to protect the world from evil, though one of those reasons might have been having seen Allen fight with their own eyes.

The dark elves and beastkin had personally witnessed Allen and his party defeat a Demonic Deity. Both species might have completely given up on fighting back, but Allen had become their sliver of hope at clinching victory.

There was another important factor at play. Before the Daemonism debacle, where the Holy Land of Elmahl had let out a cry for help, the Five Continent Alliance had held a meeting.

“Militaries willing to join the Five Continent Alliance will be prioritized for the class promotion dungeon,” the Giamutan emperor had declared. *“This is a miracle bestowed upon by Lord Elmea so that we may fight the Demon Lord Army.”*

When Freyja’s divine vessel had been stolen from her, thereby increasing the power of the Demon Lord Army, a class promotion dungeon had been deemed necessary for people to build more power than ever before. Only one such dungeon existed within the world, and naturally, there were arguments over who was allowed to be first in line. If this dungeon had been created solely for the purpose of class promotions, then those who could use it, the Giamutan emperor claimed, should be nations that were actively fighting against the Demon Lord Army. Why else would Elmea have created such a dungeon in Academy City, under the control of the Five Continent Alliance?

A class promotion dungeon allowed those who cleared it to increase their Talent level by one star. It was extremely rare for a person with a three-star Talent to be born, but there were plenty of people with two-star Talents. They could be promoted, and the nation would teem with Sword Lords and Saintesses. This would lead to an increase in national strength. Nations that were shut out of utilizing this dungeon would fall greatly behind, leading them down a path of decay and ruin.

For example, the dark elves, who had a long-standing feud with the elves, would feel utterly powerless if the other race were allowed to use the class promotion dungeon and they were not. For that reason, there was a good chance that the dark elves had hastily joined the Allen Army to prove their intention to fight and get a chance at the dungeon.

Currently, Allen and his friends were trying to pull some strings to make it so that joining the Allen Army would allow the beastkin and dark elves to have an equal shot at the class promotion dungeon. The queen of Rohzenheim and the Adventurer’s Guild needed to accept their proposal. The dungeon was under the jurisdiction of the Adventurer’s Guild, but a Rank S adventurer like Allen had the power of a Vice-Chief of Directors. He had been told that his friends could be prioritized, but perhaps asking for the priority of five thousand friends was a touch too excessive. Not to mention that he had to ensure that the dark elves, who generally kept to themselves, could enter the Rank S dungeons of Academy City and the

Baukis Empire.

Right, I have to attend a conference with the Five Continent Alliance too. With the Daemonism debacle cleared away and the Demon Lord Army's invasion stopped for now, the Five Continent Alliance had decided to host a meeting with Allen as their guest. The queen of Rohzenheim had mentioned that he had been requested to speak at the council.

"Now then, we have three tasks at hand," Allen said. "We have to develop this island, strengthen our army, and clear a Rank S dungeon."

As it was everyone's first day on this barren island, Allen had them all work together to develop the area. However, this was not a large plot of land, and there was no need for five thousand of them to focus solely on working the soil. Of the thousand dark elves, there were quite a few who were low-level and could not even enter a Rank S dungeon if they wished. Allen decided to have his army split up into their own species and form smaller squads, rotating the tasks of developing the land and strengthening their skills so that everyone could gain levels equally.

"There are some who aren't max level and have low skill levels," Allen explained. "Some can't even enter a Rank S dungeon. As we are now, there's a clear difference in power among us. I've also thought of a plan for each step of our training."

How to Strengthen the Army

Those who haven't maxed their levels and skill levels will do so, prioritizing levels over skills.

Those who are unable to enter a Rank S dungeon will aim to clear five Rank A dungeons.

Following both steps, the Allen Army would slowly increase its overall power. Those who had maxed out their levels and skills would head to the class promotion dungeon. Once one had successfully added another star to their Talent, they would obtain a permit to enter a Rank S dungeon and clear it.

One of Allen's goals was to, within a year, have everyone max out their levels and skills, finish their class promotion, and equip two rings that would increase stats by 5,000. He chose his words carefully, refusing to use the words "Trial of the Gods" to refer to

the act of leveling up. While the people of this world were more familiar with that phrase, he wanted everyone to get used to how he worded things. He made sure to carefully explain every new word that he used.

“Then I should head off to the Rank S dungeon too,” Dogora said.

“Exactly,” Allen replied. “I want you, Krena, Keel, and Merus to hole yourselves up in the Rank S dungeon. Once things have calmed down here, I’ll head there and meet up with you guys.”

Their tasks were to raise their skill levels, find rings that increased stats by 5,000, and find a slate for a hihiirokane golem. Since it made little sense for Dogora to stay and develop the island, Allen wanted his party members to find out the limits of Extra Mode. Cecil, Sophie, and Volmaar would stay to help improve the island and assist in solidifying the Allen Army. Shia was tasked with clearing a Rank A dungeon and heading to the final floors of a Rank S dungeon to level up her skills. She was at max level, but her skills were only at Lvl. 4 or 5, and there was much room for improvement.

“I see. That works just fine for me,” Shia said, actively pushing the conference forward. She was a reliable ally during times like these, able to utilize her ample experience as a commander of an army to its fullest extent.

The meeting went on smoothly, with Allen touching upon the Rank S dungeons and the class promotion dungeon. The Allen Army would be deeply involved with these facilities to become stronger. He had every species create an adventurer party for the Allen Army.

The Adventurer’s Guild had a clan system to gather several adventurer parties under a single clan to prevent confusion. Allen decided to form the No-life Gamer Clan with four parties under his jurisdiction.

The No-life Gamer Clan

Includes Allen’s party, the No-life Gamers

Includes a party under the command of Field Marshal Lukdraal, the No-life Gamer Elves

Includes a party under the command of Captain Rudo, the No-Life Gamer Beasts

Includes a party under the command of General Bunzenberg, the No-life Gamer Dark Elves

Since Allen belonged to the No-life Gamers and served as the party's leader, his party would become the head of the No-life Gamer Clan. As a gamer, he was quick to make decisions and act on them. *All right, things look pretty good. We're deciding on our future direction with no issues. Speaking of, I should check Luke's Talent.*

"Luke, what's your Talent?" Allen asked.

"Black Mage," the dark elf replied.

"Uh, what?" Allen inquired as he turned to his Summons. "Merus, what's a Black Mage?"

"A Spirit Magic user who specializes in attacks and debuffs," Merus replied. "It's a one-star Talent."

"L-Lord Merus?!" General Bunzenberg shouted from beside Luke. The man looked as though his soul had left his body.

While everyone knew that Allen had the power to Summon Merus, seeing the angel so up close and personal shocked them to the core. *One-star, huh? Even if he undergoes a class promotion, he'd only have two stars... Well, he won't be totally useless since he's got the Sovereign of Spirits with him. Isn't she a Minor Deity or something?*

Allen had become friends with Luke in the village of the dark elves and had expected the boy to join his party. As the party leader, he was using his gamer knowledge as much as he could to help Luke grow stronger. The boy was inexperienced when it came to combat and only had a one-star Talent. However, he also could use debuffs, an enticing power that the No-life Gamers had not had until now, and he even came with the Sovereign of Spirits, a Minor Deity. If Luke managed to clear a class promotion dungeon, he would gain another star as well.

"All right, I'll have you go with Mr. Bunzenberg to level up within the dungeons," Allen said.

"Dungeons? Sweet! Sounds like fun!" Luke said with sparkling eyes. Perhaps the village truly was too small to contain an energetic boy like him; he was eager to tackle a dungeon with others.

Allen spoke of a few other goals that he had for his army before he drew the meeting to a close. The next day, he visited a certain village in the Baukis Empire. He had visited this place before. As he walked down a street lined with blacksmith forges, he spotted freshly made vases and pots decorating the storefront.

“Excuse me. Is Master Habarak here?” Allen called upon knocking on the door to the smith’s forge.

“Y-Yes,” the apprentice said, opening the door and immediately recognizing the visitor. “Ah, hello, Mr. Allen.”

Allen was guided into the living room, and the apprentice brought out some tea. Suddenly, a set of frantic footsteps came racing down the hallway.

“G-Good to see you here,” Habarak stammered, out of breath. He went straight to the point. “D-Did you really retrieve Lady Freyja’s divine vessel?”

“I did indeed,” Allen replied. “Has the information already made its rounds?”

Wait, the divine vessel being stolen hasn’t been publicized at all. Allen clearly looked puzzled, and the blacksmith could not hold himself back.

“‘Course I can tell! The fire! The fire’s grown hotter!” Habarak cried, angrily shouting for some reason. “The fire in my forge became weaker and weaker—I thought I was done for! But one day, the fire just started burnin’ without becomin’ feeble. In fact, the flames didn’t lose hope and burned bright and warm. I knew that Lady Freyja was overjoyed at getting her divine vessel back! The fire told me so!”

Are master blacksmiths always thinking about the fire? Maybe they’re trying to get closer to the Goddess of Fire. This old man with scruffy hair who was no taller than an elementary schooler felt like some sort of shaman. The fire temporarily growing weaker was likely the moment when Freyja had used her powers to help Dogora defeat Bask.

“We’ve got the divine vessel, Kagutsuchi, with us,” Allen said. “Dogora, why don’t you show him?”

Dogora grabbed Kagutsuchi, which was leaning against the wall, and handed it to the blacksmith.

“What? A divine vessel?” Habarak asked.

“In her utmost display of warmth and kindness, Freyja, the Goddess of Fire, has provided Dogora with a divine vessel. I’m convinced that this is proof of her benevolence,” Allen said.

“K-Kid!” Habarak gasped. “You were bestowed a divine vessel by Lady Freyja?!”

Allen provided a quick summation of the Daemonism debacle back in the Holy Land of Elmahl and how Dogora had become Freyja’s disciple along the way. He had been entrusted with the

lifelong task of gathering as many followers for her as he could manage.

"I-I had no idea. Color me surprised," Habarak replied. "But it's only been a day or so since the fire started roarin' again. Still not good enough to work on orichalcum, I'm afraid."

Freyja was not back to her full power just yet, and the power of fire around the world was still weak. It would take a good while before the smith could start working on either of the two chunks of orichalcum they had obtained from the dungeon or Bask's greatswords.

"Oh, we're actually here for a different request, Master Habarak," Allen replied. "I'd like for you to join us on Hardcore User Island, which I just told you about."

"Wh-What?!" Habarak yelped quizzically.

Allen was not about to give up just yet. One of the primary causes of the theft of Freyja's divine vessel was that Dygragni had started gathering more followers. This had, in turn, decreased the number of people who believed in other deities, thereby causing their divine power to weaken. To restore the balance of the world, it was imperative that Freyja gathered more followers.

Allen had decided to repurpose the shrine and altar on Hardcore User Island as a place of worship for Freyja—the people residing there were supposed to become followers of the goddess of fire anyway. Dogora, her disciple, would be around as well. Ultimately, Allen's goal was to spread Freyja's religion across the globe so that she could return to her former glory. His first step was to invite Habarak to the island.

Currently, the island housed the five thousand members of the Allen Army; it was essential that they had a remarkable blacksmith who could forge and fix all the weapons and armor. No one would complain if the smith in charge was Habarak, one of the best blacksmiths in the world.

Habarak listened to Allen's story as he gazed at Kagutsuchi, clutched in Dogora's hand. Everyone waited for the smith's answer with bated breath, and he slowly closed his eyes.

"Sure," he finally said. "I'll gather up my things and go with you. I've got a few energetic artisans with me. Can I take 'em along too? I can vouch for their skills."

"Yes, that'd be a huge help!" Allen replied.

"All right, then. Let's not dawdle. Get a move on! Pack up your

things!”

“Oh, that won’t be necessary,” Allen said, turning to his friends. “Krena, Dogora, come on.”

“All righty! I’m up!” Krena exclaimed.

“Right here,” Dogora added.

“Hmm? What are you up to?” Habarak asked.

“Just watch and see,” Allen replied. “It won’t take long, I assure you.”

The No-life Gamers headed outside. Krena used her orichalcum greatsword while Dogora used his Kagutsuchi as shovels to dig a deep trench all around Habarak’s forge. Allen and Merus joined in as the four of them took a deep breath and cleanly lifted the entire forge from the ground.

CRACK!

“Huh?!” Habarak gasped. It looked as though his eyes were about to pop out of his head from shock.

All right, we can do this. With our combined Attack, a task like this is small potatoes.

“Okay, we’re teleporting!” Allen shouted, using Bird A’s Homing Instinct.

Now that the forge was in their hands, the structure was treated as a tool, and it was immediately transported to Hardcore User Island. It landed at the foot of the mountains that housed Freyja’s temple, in a place that had already been leveled and dug out. Since blacksmiths were devout believers of the Fire Goddess, Allen figured that it would be best to have them near the altar instead of in the town.

“I…don’t even know what to say,” Habarak murmured.

“This is where you’ll be,” Allen said. “We’re still in the process of developing this island, and we need you to create tools for us. If you need anything for your work, please let us know.”

Probably best to teleport the other forges too. I should ask the development team to make more space later. Initially, Allen had only planned on taking Habarak with him, but the smith had made the excellent suggestion of bringing more artisans along. The Summoner had been more than happy to agree to that, though for it, he would need to create more space to build an artisan district of sorts.

“I’ll need some clean water and lava stones that burn well,” Habarak started. “Oh, and I’d also like…”

Allen’s nonchalant offer had earned him a couple of requests

from the blacksmith. Some items seemed to be specialized for smithing, and Allen had never heard of them before. He jotted them all down in his grimoire to purchase later.

"Oh, and one more thing," Habarak said. "Once I can start smithing, I'll produce whatever's needed. If you have somethin' you want made, you better tell me now. And don't forget to add *who's* gonna be usin' each item."

Since Allen and his party would not be stationed on the island forever, Habarak offered to forge them some gear while they were out. To do that, he required precise measurements of each person's body. Allen was grateful to have a smith who understood how busy they were. For materials, Allen had the two chunks of orichalcum and two of Bask's greatswords. One of the swords had been snapped in half. He planned on having Krena use the greatsword that was still intact, but the grip, hilt, and blade needed to be adjusted for her personal use.

"Since we've got two orichalcum chunks, I'd like one made into a sword and one into a shield," Allen said. "I'll be using the sword, so it can be small. If there are any leftovers from my chunk, I would like for you to use them on the shield for Dogora."

"Wait, Allen," Dogora said, chiming in.

"Yeah? What's up?"

"I'll be using two two-handed axes."

His firm words implied that he had been thinking about this for a while. *Was he influenced by Bask?* The Demonic Deity had wielded two greatswords despite each sword normally requiring two hands to use.

"Hmm? All right. Let's go with that, then," Allen said. For the first time, Dogora had offered a suggestion of his own, and Allen wanted to respect his friend's wishes. The Summoner turned back to the blacksmith. "As for the shattered greatsword, could you use it for Shia's knuckles and breastplate?"

"Hmm?" Shia chimed in. "Are you sure about using it on me?"

"Well, I guess you might not need them if you become the Beast King."

"Mm, but that might be difficult."

The Albahal royal family had three secret treasures that were passed down to anyone who became Beast King: orichalcum knuckles, an orichalcum breastplate, and the Holy Orb of Yellow. Were Shia to obtain the Beast King Talent and go on to inherit

the title of Albahal’s Beast King, she would be granted a second set of orichalcum items.

Since Dogora would use a pair of two-handed axes, he could no longer be a reliable shield for the party. Allen considered forging some armor for Krena so that she could still stand at the front and defend.

Orichalcum Priorities

First, use a chunk to forge Dogora’s greataxe.

Second, use a chunk to forge Allen’s sword.

Third, use the broken orichalcum greatsword to either make knuckles and a breastplate for Shia or armor for Krena.

Fourth, adjust Bask’s greatsword for Krena.

“Aye, gotcha,” Habarak replied. “I’ll figure out the rest while observin’ the fire.”

Once he was done, he would report back to a Spirit A Summon that would be lurking around the town. And so, Allen welcomed a blacksmith onto his island and managed to plan out how the orichalcum would be used.

Chapter 2: Princess Leilana, Thomas, and the Class Promotion Dungeon

A few days had passed since Allen had gone to meet Habarak. With a clear direction in mind, the Allen Army was working hard toward its goal. As planned, Krena, Dogora, Keel, and Merus had gone ahead to hunt iron golems in the Rank S dungeon. The four also had brought along a certain species for support. First up to train in the dungeon was the beastkin. The soldiers had already gained quite a few levels and skill levels.

Most members of the beastkin squad under Shia's command had cleared a dungeon before. Once they were strong enough to tackle the class promotion dungeon, they would do just that. Much like how Rohzen had promoted Allen's friends in the past, the class promotion dungeon would allow one to receive a new class that was along the lines of their former one. Considering the formation of the army, however, Allen determined that each person should select a class that was a direct upgrade—he saw no need for them to change classes entirely.

For example, a Swordsman *could* be promoted into a Swordsman Mage, but Allen would have preferred that they choose the straightforward upgrade and become a Sword Master.

The elves, on the other hand, had maxed out their level and skill levels, but almost none of them had ever set foot in a dungeon before. To enter the class promotion dungeon, one had to clear a Rank A dungeon first, so the elves would need to get around to that sooner or later.

The dark elves were the trickiest. They had not maxed their levels or skill levels, nor had they tackled a dungeon before. They would need to clear dungeons while slowly raising their levels. Though Allen had wanted to create an army of various species, he had not imagined that each would differ so much in their needs. He had no choice but to play to their strengths while covering for their weaknesses, so he would simply have each race do what was required of them.

For the Allen Army to truly operate like a unified military unit,

it would take at least a year. Allen also did not want anyone to take their sweet time when clearing dungeons. He prioritized clearing them over earning XP and made sure to create parties of forty-eight where he could. Each party was well-balanced with Scouts, so there was little chance of them being wiped out because of an unfortunate trap.

The amount of XP each party member gained was based on the number of members in each party.

Party Members and XP Gain

1 person receives 100% of the XP.
2-8 people receive 80% of the XP.
9-16 people receive 60% of the XP.
17-48 people receive 40% of the XP.
49-252 people receive 20% of the XP.
253 or more people receive 10% of the XP.

Allen, Meruru, Cecil, Sophie, and Volmaar took a trip to Ratash's Academy City. They stepped off the magic train and onto the platform, where they were greeted by a large crowd bustling about.

"Look at this crowd..." Allen mumbled to himself.

"Y-Yeah," Meruru replied. "It's way busier than when we lived here."

Glad we came early, Allen thought. It had not been too long since the Demon Lord Army's invasion had been stopped, but people were already pouring into the city. There were more of them now than there had been when Allen had attended the Academy, likely due in no small part to the lucrative class promotion dungeon. He had heard that the Giamutan emperor was trying to restrict the use of the class promotion dungeon, and he could see why. Rumors were bound to spread like wildfire—those who knew just how much worth the dungeon held would surely tell others about it, leading to even more people crowding the city.

This scene reminded Allen of when he had been Kenichi. Every time a new dungeon or field had dropped in a game, people had immediately logged on and camped the area in hopes of getting there first. Sometimes, the number of players had overloaded the servers, and the character avatars had not displayed correctly. At worst, the server had needed to be shut down, and the game had forced players to log off.

“Lord Allen, this is our base,” an elf said, approaching them. They were a part of the Allen Army.

Allen and his friends were guided to a massive building.

“Here?” Allen said in awe. “Wow! I’m surprised you guys were able to buy this place.”

“This entire plot of land was well within our budget, so we decided to purchase it,” the elf replied.

There was no news of more class promotion dungeons popping up in the future. In other words, real estate prices in Academy City were bound to skyrocket. The Allen Army would be active at Hardcore User Island, the Tower of Tribulation Rank S dungeon, and Academy City, and each location required a base that could house hundreds of people at once. Thus, since Allen had a million gold coins in funds, along with rings and weapons that were worth even more, he had handed the elves a hundred thousand gold coins and asked them to purchase a location that they could use as their base. Since Allen was prepared to use the place for a while, he had decided that purchasing land and building on it was better than renting a place somewhere.

The elves in charge of the base of Academy City had managed to purchase a plot of land large enough for six houses. *Hmm, okay. If we use the land to its fullest extent, we can have up to five hundred people here at once. I guess most of our efforts on land would be funneled into clearing the Rank S dungeon.*

Allen had Summoned his Bird E and examined the land that had been purchased from above. He was aware that they had a sizable plot. The elves had apparently already gone to the Real Estate Guild and had residents who had been living here relocate in exchange for a handsome sum of money. There were six houses that could hold at least fifty people each, but each one had fences that took up quite a bit of space. If they were all broken down and the buildings combined, a house for around five hundred people could be made.

Allen planned on having around five hundred troops act as a group within Academy City. To make his plan a reality, it was imperative that the six houses be demolished and one large housing complex built.

He also wanted to make a base for the Rank S dungeon and was determined to purchase some land nearby. To that end, just as he had done with the elves, he had given the beastkin a hundred thousand gold to purchase a large plot of land in the

city of the first floor of the Rank S dungeon. If that was not enough money, he planned to provide more.

He did not mind if the land they bought was a bit farther away from the dungeon entrance, located in the middle of the city; he only wanted a plot twice the size of the spot that the elves had purchased. If class promotions became more widespread, there would be more people trying to clear the Rank S dungeon, and there was a good chance that the city on its first floor would be teeming with people. It was better to act quickly before prices rose. *I never thought that I'd save money and use it to buy land in another world.*

As Allen was inside one of the buildings and receiving an explanation of the land purchase, there was a knock on the door.

"It seems someone has arrived. I shall go take a look," the elf said, leaving to greet the new guest.

It was Sunday. Allen had scheduled a meeting with a certain someone for the afternoon.

"Hi, Allen. Am I in the right place?" Thomas asked as he was brought inside by the elf. He noticed his younger sister beside Allen. "Oh, hey, Cecil. Long time no see."

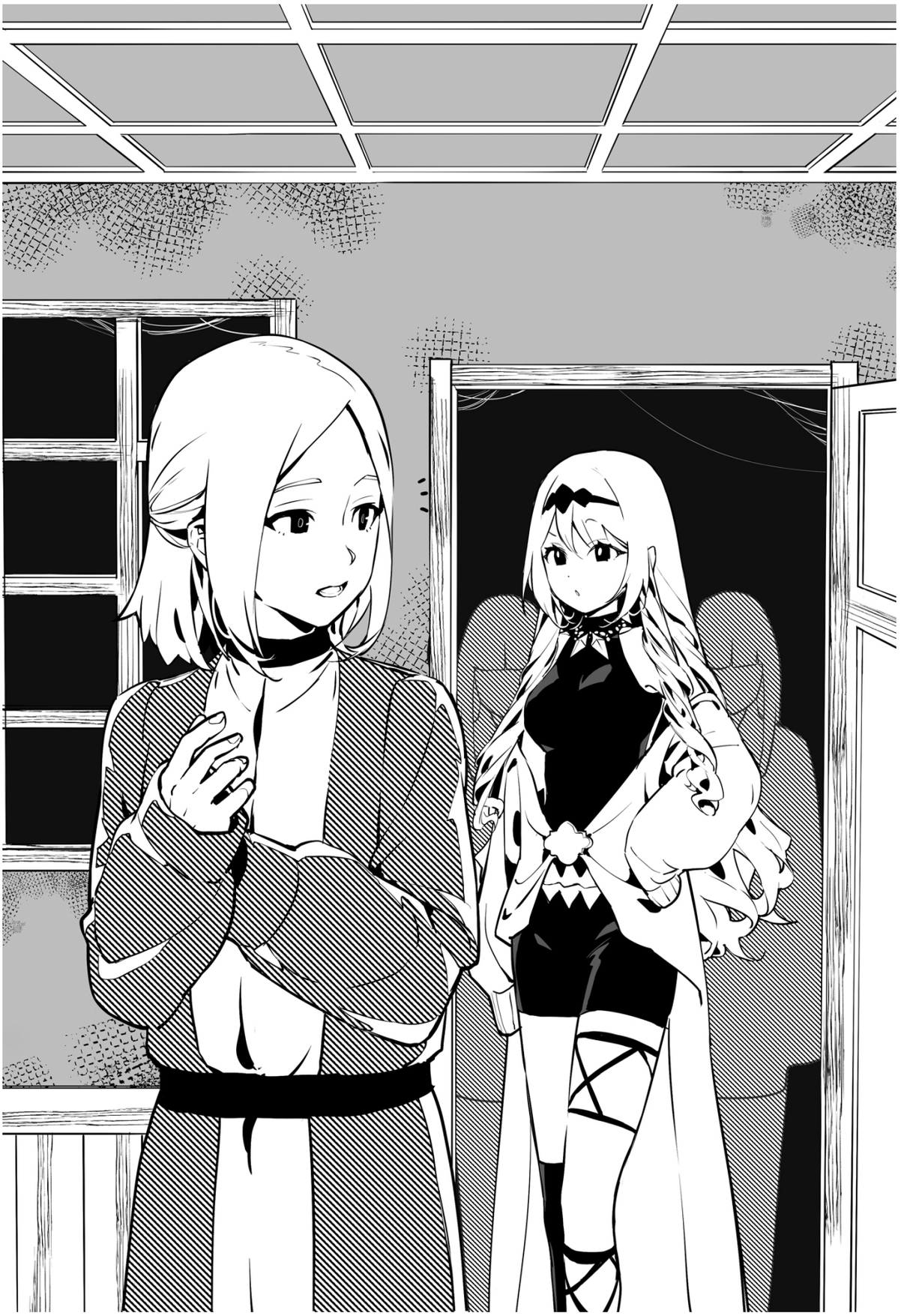
"It certainly has been a while, Thomas," Cecil replied.

Thomas had been poking Allen in hopes of receiving help with gaining levels. Since the Allen Army finally had a base in Academy City, Allen figured that he could discuss Thomas's future.

"Thomas, is this the place? There's nothing here," a young lady grumbled, emerging from behind him. She was the real reason behind Thomas requesting help to level up. The lady pompously stomped into the room and glanced around.

"Y-Your Highness Leilana," Allen said. "I'm afraid the building hasn't been cleaned yet."

This lady was none other than the Ratashian princess. Her curly blonde hair bounced about with every movement of her head. She had two female students behind her, likely her attendant and guard. They were nervous, fearing for their princess's safety.



“Huh?!” Thomas gasped in surprise. “P-Princess Leila, I…”

It seemed the princess had been requested to wait at the entrance until discussions were over, but she had completely ignored that and marched on inside. *“Princess Leila,” huh?*

“Oh, Thomas. I keep telling you that you may call me ‘Leila,’” the princess, whose emotions were quick to show on her face, replied with a frown. She then shifted her gaze to Cecil, who stood behind Allen. “Ah, you must be…”

“I’m Cecil, Thomas’s younger sister. I’m incredibly grateful, as I know my brother is always in your care.” Cecil greeted the royal politely.

“Thomas, your younger sister is rather adorable, isn’t she? I heard that she was quite the energetic lady, but perhaps rumors aren’t meant to be trusted.”

Cecil slowly turned toward her brother. The princess was unable to make out the noblewoman’s expression, but Allen saw it clear as day. Cecil was determined to corner Thomas about this; he could not weasel his way out.

“W-Wait, Cecil!” Thomas stammered. “You’ve got it all wrong! It’s all a huge misunderstanding!”

Don’t do it, Cecil. If you try that here, Thomas’ll be decimated. Cecil was a Wizardess King who had maxed her level. A man without a Talent would be no match for her.

“Since everyone’s gathered, why don’t we sit down and chat about our future?” Allen suggested. “I apologize about the untidy room, Princess Leilana.”

“Oh? Very well. You’re rather considerate, aren’t you?” Leilana replied. “You must be Allen.”

“That’s correct. I’m very pleased to meet you.”

“That’ll be perfect,” Thomas replied, eager to get out of this situation. “Let’s go somewhere we can chat.”

The elves had just bought the land and buildings, leaving the structures sparsely furnished, but there was apparently a hall perfect for gatherings. The elf in charge of the purchase guided the group to it. Needless to say, the main subject of the discussion would be assisting Thomas with clearing dungeons.

“How is your schedule, Thomas?” Allen asked. “How many vacation days do you receive from the castle?”

Allen was a guest of House Granvelle. Since Thomas lacked a rank, there was no need to call him “Lord.” Allen recalled that Thomas worked in the royal castle as part of his studies to

someday succeed House Granvelle, but the Summoner had no idea about the number of vacation days that an employee of the castle was given.

"Oh, you don't need to worry about that," the princess assured him. "I saw to it that he received a year off."

A year? Sounds like a noble pursuing a hobby or something. Though this was limited only to the nobility, it was not uncommon for the son of a noble to suddenly feel compelled to pursue music or the arts one day. As a result, they would end up holing themself up in their room, honing their craft. Clearing a dungeon could be seen as one such hobby.

"I'm glad to hear it," Allen said.

"Hey…" Cecil started before she stopped herself.

As she knew that Thomas would be the successor of House Granvelle, she was unsure if clearing dungeons was worth taking an entire year off studies. However, she was also aware that she was in the presence of a princess, hence she decided to hold her tongue. Though Cecil was friends with Sophie, the princess of a large nation, the noblewoman hesitated in the face of a royal from her home nation.

"Then why don't I provide a simple explanation of your schedule?" Allen suggested, taking into account the information that he had heard.

Thomas would enter the elf squad and toil away through the dungeon. Since he did not have a Talent, there was no need for him to worry about using skills. Instead, he simply needed to max his level. All he would need to do, then, was clear a Rank A dungeon before he would be allowed access to the class promotion dungeon. Upon doing so, the Talentless Thomas would finally receive a Talent.

"Can we enter the dungeon with Thomas?" the princess asked.

Ooh, does she wanna clear it with him?

"Princess Leilana, I believe you should be attending the Academy, so you may only visit a dungeon twice a week," Allen replied. "However, I'll do my best so that those days overlap with Thomas's. I must remind you that he's Talentless, and he's trying to receive a Talent as soon as he possibly can. I hope I'm not misunderstanding anything here."

"No, you're right," Leilana replied. "I think Thomas is best suited to becoming a healer."

“I see. I’ll keep that in mind.”

With Thomas’s class decided upon, Allen ended up thinking of a training regimen for the princess and her attendants as well. The Allen Army might one day require the assistance of the Kingdom of Ratash, and it would not hurt to have the princess owe him one here. Of course, King Invel would be the one to repay the debt.

Currently, there were several possible factors that could hinder the Allen Army’s activities. For example, the Academy City with the class promotion dungeon was located in Ratash, a nation that had no connections with Albahal. However, Academy City was under the jurisdiction of the Five Continent Alliance, and with its new base, the Allen Army would swiftly class promote as many beastkin as necessary.

Ratash was also responsible for maintaining law and order, as well as facilities and personnel, within its Academy City. And so, the beastkin, who had no friendly ties with Ratash, could run into some trouble with the military police patrolling Academy City. There were plenty of other inconvenient factors that could pop up too. Allen was willing to do the princess a favor so that he could use it to clear away any problems in the future.

Allen thought about scheduling class promotions as he spoke with Thomas and Leilana about their training. *This should do it for now. I have no idea what the Academy gives out as homework, but I’m sure they’ll be fine.* Leilana would attend the Academy with the elves. If it had not changed since Allen graduated, there would surely be an assignment to clear dungeons. *If memory serves, you need to form a party with students in the same grade to clear dungeons over the summer, but I’m sure she can handle that on her own.*

Once Allen was done, he made to leave. He still had a ton of things to do in Academy City with his new base, so he had no time to spare.

“Thomas, I think you’ll find it easier to act with our army,” Allen said. “Please use this building for whatever you need. There are plenty of rooms to spare.”

“Yeah? That’ll be a huge help. Thanks,” Thomas replied.

“Oh? Are we allowed to stay too?” Leilana inquired.

Huh? Well, this place is *close to the magic train, so I guess she can get to the Academy from here. She wants to live with him, huh? I’ll be charging the king her rent.* Allen suspected that Thomas had

told Leilana that he was going to ask the Summoner for help clearing dungeons. The princess had likely insisted on tagging along. She hid it quite well, but she was surely worried about a slender, Talentless man like Thomas tackling dungeons.

"Well, this building will welcome various people and species from several nations," Allen replied. "If you don't mind that, please feel free. However, I do ask that you use as few rooms as possible."

Leilana did not seem at all fazed by Meruru the dwarf and Sophie the elf. The Ratashian princess likely knew about other species and proper etiquette when greeting them. Even she was not allowed the luxury of having multiple rooms to herself, however. While this building was large, each person could not have a room to themself.

"Oh dear, Thomas," Leilana grinned. "It seems we must share a room, lest we trouble Allen."

Precocious kid. The princess was no older than twelve or thirteen, but she was already interested in rather adult situations.

"H-Huh?! Allen, we can't share a room," Thomas said, turning red as he pleaded with Allen.

"My dear brother, I believe you two may stay in separate rooms," Cecil butted in. "In fact, you both may stay in separate buildings. As the future lord of House Granvelle, I ask that you refrain from any sort of insolence toward the princess."

"Th-Thanks, Cecil. B-But don't misunderstand. That's not really what I'm implying."

"Oh, that's a pity," Leilana said coolly.

I don't think Cecil actually hates Leilana or anything. Allen harbored no resentment toward the princess for what happened to Mihai either. He felt like he was carrying over his values from his previous life, but he strongly believed that it was not the responsibility of the children to bear the sins of their parents. The parents had to shoulder their own burdens.

Though he was aware that there had been people back on Earth who had disagreed with that view, he was determined to stick to it. The royalty of this world basked in glory or shouldered crimes because of their bloodline. It was their duty. Still, Allen could sympathize with Cecil. If she held a grudge against the royals because her brother Mihai had been sent on a treacherous mission that had led to his death, he could not

blame her.

“Cecil, why don’t we head out,” Allen suggested.

“Let’s,” she agreed.

They proceeded to introduce Thomas and Leilana to several members of the Allen Army. Going forward, the troops would handle the task of taking care of them. Allen had also dispatched some Spirit As that would notify him if something went awry.

Allen left his residence with several comrades and headed to the class promotion dungeon. It was a short walk away, and they soon spotted a line that seemingly went on for miles. Clearly, they were lined up to enter the dungeon. Allen joined them. *Information about this dungeon should be common knowledge within the Five Continent Alliance, though the Adventurer’s Guild got a head start.*

There were quite a few who were not lining up but gathering around. They obviously knew about the class promotion dungeon and had started collecting more information. The Five Continent Alliance had carefully considered how to advertise the class promotion dungeon while Great Pope Istahl’s well-being had been up in the air, and the conclusion that had been reached was that the Alliance would take the initiative. However, some sharp-eared adventurers had heard the news of the oracle in January and knew that the class promotion dungeon would open in April.

Dygragni, the creator of the dungeon in question, had not been requested to keep it a secret either. He had told all the clergymen who worked under him, and from there, the information had begun leaking. As a result, various rumors had spread among the adventurers, some truths mixed with fiction. Still, power was king for adventurers, so word of a dungeon that would give them more power once it was cleared was the type of thing that was bound to spread like wildfire. It certainly had not helped that the leaders of the Five Continent Alliance were busy commanding battles against the Demon Lord Army or cleaning up the aftermath of those clashes. They had no time to spare for adventurers.

The Adventurer’s Guild in Academy City had concluded that keeping the class promotion dungeon a secret for much longer would only invite further confusion from the public. They had then chosen to advertise that a class promotion dungeon had been created and open it early to the public.

Even so, only the Guild within Academy City had publicly advertised the dungeon, and those from other cities and continents only had unofficial information making the rounds. The Five Continent Alliance planned on making it public in the future so that everyone could have access to accurate information.

Meruru spotted the building at the end of the long line and clenched her fist. “Whoo! The class promotion dungeon must be at the end of this line! I can finally get stronger!” When Thomas and Princess Leilana had received an explanation about the class promotion dungeon, Meruru had been itching to go.

The line slowly crept forward, and Allen was finally able to see the entire dungeon in all its glory.

“This must be the entrance,” he observed. “It’s a larger building than I thought. And you can finally get a class promotion, Meruru.”

“Yep, yep!” Meruru replied.

The entrance to the dungeon looked to be a building around ten stories high. The line spilled out from the structure and onto the street. Meruru excitedly looked up at the building that was gradually growing nearer. She was the only No-life Gamer with a three-star Talent, that being Talos General. This dungeon would finally promote her to a Talos King.

Allen had not come to this dungeon for the sole purpose of promoting Meruru. He wanted to scope out the dungeon and check any dangerous spots too, as the Allen Army would be heavily utilizing it in the future. *Hmm?* When Allen and his party were about to enter, the person in front of him tried to step inside while pulling a cart. An argument with the gate guard ensued.

“You over there!” the guard barked. “You can’t bring that inside!”

“I-I can’t?” the person inquired.

“Of course not! You’re only allowed to bring your weapons, armor, food supplies, and healing potions into this dungeon!”

The guard, perhaps an employee of the Adventurer’s Guild, refused the person entry, and the poor adventurer plodded away with their cart. Allen scribbled down what he had just seen in his grimoire as the line moved again—it was finally their turn.

“We’re here to enter the class promotion dungeon,” Allen said.

“Very well,” the guard said, glancing at Allen’s adventurer card

before freezing in place. “Huh?!”

Another guard approached the pair, perplexed by the situation, and also looked stunned upon seeing the card. They recognized Allen’s name and the gold, glimmering “S” emblem that was displayed alongside it.

“Are there any conditions for me to enter the dungeon?” Allen asked.

He actually had many questions, but simply standing here would just cause trouble. He would only be holding up the line and delaying the people behind him.

“Um, i-it seems you have no other belongings with you, Sir Allen,” the guard said, finally able to process that the dark-haired young man was the first Rank S adventurer to appear in two decades. The guard immediately took on a polite tone and explained the requirements to enter the dungeon.

Requirements to Challenge the Class Promotion Dungeon

Only 8 people can be in a party.

Every person who enters the dungeon must present an adventurer card.

Every person who enters the dungeon must have cleared at least one Rank A dungeon.

Only the bare minimum of items can be brought along. Carriages and carts are forbidden.

Allen nodded along, making mental notes of any differences and additions to what he had heard. All the while, his friends showed their adventurer cards to the other guard.

“The five of you are in a party, correct?” the guard asked. “You may enter the building. There’s a magic elevator right inside. Please take it to the eighth floor and head to Room 802.”

“Got it. Thank you,” Allen replied.

The group headed into the building and followed the guard’s directions before finding themselves at a reception desk and a hall with numerous doors.

“These doors will open automatically when you approach them,” the receptionist called loudly. “You may use whichever you’d like.”

Fair enough. Allen approached one set of doors, and they did indeed open when he drew near. He ignored his surprised party members and casually walked into the small room deeper

within. The doors closed once they were all inside. Allen spotted the button for the eighth floor on the wall and pushed it without hesitation.

“You really act like you know this place,” Cecil remarked.

“I had stuff like this in my previous world,” Allen said. To him, this was just a regular elevator.

“Why don’t you tell us more about your past?”

“Eh, the past is in the past.”

Allen could go on and on about games, but he did not speak much about the time when he had been Kenichi. For some reason, Cecil was always eager to hear about those days.

Vwoom. Shunk. The magic elevator transported the party and opened. The doors gave way to reveal a hallway with doors lining both sides, much like the apartment complex Kenichi had once lived in. As he walked down the hallway, Allen thought back to the small room he just stepped out of. *Huh. I guess that was a device to teleport people.*

The “magic elevator” was nothing like the elevators that Allen was familiar with in his previous life. Rather than going up and down to carry people, it teleported whoever and whatever was inside once a destination was designated via a button. He walked along and finally found Room 802.

“Pardon the intrusion,” Allen said, opening the door.

No one caught his joke, so they failed to call him out on it as they entered the room. He wished that Krena was present during times like these, but the girl in question was on a hunting frenzy within the Rank S dungeon, destroying the poor iron golems. The room was small, with an area of about six tatami mats, and a cube was floating in its center.

“Welcome, No-life Gamers. I am Class Promotion Dungeon Information System 0802. Please close the doors once you have entered.”

This is a pretty small room. It was no wonder that the adventurer pulling the cart had been chased away at the door. If eight people squeezed into this small space with weapons, armor, and a few belongings, it would be extremely cramped. *I guess the room’s small to encourage as many people as possible to challenge the dungeon.* There were going to be many more adventurers and soldiers looking to get their classes promoted in the future, so there needed to be as many rooms as possible

to give everyone a chance.

"Um, could I ask a few questions?" Allen asked.

"I cannot guarantee that I can answer all your questions."

"How many floors does this dungeon have?"

"There are no floors, only three tasks. Once you clear all three tasks, you are allowed a class promotion."

Makes sense. Not too many, not too few. Since this dungeon allowed even Talentless people to enter, it could not present too many tasks to accomplish.

"Is there a boss on the final layer of the place?"

"There is not."

The Summoner was making sure to jot everything down. "What kind of monsters will appear?"

"Rank A, B, and C monsters will appear."

"Rank As, huh? The difficulty level is pretty high."

Huh? Wait, even those who've maxed out their Talents will probably get wiped out if they face a dragon or something. Even with a party of eight capable people, it was extremely tricky to defeat a dragon. Allen himself had struggled during his Academy days when the final floor's boss was a dragon.

"Difficulty is relative to the people entering the dungeon. I am not sure if everyone will agree with you regarding difficulty."

The cube made it clear that it could not provide any further information.

"Got it," Allen replied, satisfied with the information he had received. "Please send us inside."

"Sending you to the class promotion dungeon."

In a flash, the scenery changed, and Allen and his party found themselves in a relatively large room.

"Spacious," Allen commented.

"I agree. Look, there's something over there," Cecil said, pointing to a new floating cube.

They approached it, figuring that it must have something to do with the aforementioned tasks.

"Hello, No-life Gamers. I am Class Promotion Dungeon Task Enforcement System T10235. I shall

`provide everyone with a question.”`

Does the “T” stand for “task”? Allen thought, but he decided to focus on the issue at hand.

“Wait, a question? What do you mean?” he asked.

`“Yes. Please choose the numbered door you think is correct.”`

As the cube spoke, five doors appeared behind it.

“Whoa! Doors!” Meruru squealed excitedly. “There’s stuff written on them!”

Looks like Dygragni’s hard work was worth it. Meruru pointed at the set of doors, each with a number between one and five glowing on it.

`“Please answer this question: Which of the following classes cannot use Healing Magic?”`

Glowing letters appeared in the space in front of Allen.

“Whoa! Glowing letters!” Meruru cried excitedly.

`Question 1 of the Class Promotion Dungeon`

`Holy Knight`

`Paladin`

`Cleric`

`Swordsman Mage`

`Saint`

“Um, the answer is the fourth one, right? The Swordsman Mage?” Cecil asked.

“I agree,” Sophie added.

Allen also agreed with that answer. Swordsman Mage derived from Mage and Swordsman, and was the only listed class that could not use Healing Magic. *I see… This is easy for us, but if you haven’t studied class promotions and stuff, I can see this being a tricky question.* Information was not valued very highly in this world, and not everyone had the knowledge to determine the correct answer.

He scribbled the correct answer in his grimoire, hoping to share it with the rest of the Allen Army later. Once he was done, they all headed toward the five doors.

“Okay, I’ll go through the third door, so I want everyone else to go through the fourth one,” Allen said. He was going to intentionally head through the incorrect door because he wanted to see what would happen.

“Huh? Are you sure?” Cecil asked.

“I don’t think there are any insta-death traps,” Allen replied.

Hopefully. None of the others could deny that they believed Allen would be fine by himself, so he turned away from his party members and headed for the third door. When he opened it, he saw a long corridor. He summoned a Beast A behind him and Spirit A beside him before he walked down it.

After walking for a good while, he came across a door. *Wait? Is this it?* The next moment, there was a blinding glow.

“Huh?” Allen asked.

“*Graaar!*” roared a tigerlike beast. It appeared out of nowhere and pounced at him.

“Hayate.”

“*Rah!*” the silver Beast A replied, and it jumped over Allen to defend him by attacking the enemy.

As the two beasts fought, Spirit A joined the fray, making the battle two of Allen’s Summons against the monster. *Hmm… My Strengthening is Lvl. 9, but this monster is stubborn. I’m guessing it’s Rank A.* Allen’s Summons were launching a barrage of attacks and had the tiger monster on the defensive, but it refused to fall, attesting to its strength. Neither of the Summons had been King Me’d, as King Me could only be used on one Rank A Summon of each type, and Allen had already King Me’d Merus and sent him to hunt iron golems in the Rank S dungeon.

Ever since Gushara, the Pontiff of Daemonism, had been defeated, Allen had focused solely on gaining skill experience and had recently managed to reach Strengthening Lvl. 9, which buffed two stats by +5,000. He had provided advice and led the Allen Army, but his party had been understanding and was allowing him to spend time gaining XP for his Summoning skill. His party was keenly aware that doing so was the key to victory against the Demon Lord Army, not strengthening the Allen Army.

While he was lost in his thoughts, his Summons defeated the monster.

Over a million XP? Then it must at least be a Rank A monster, and on the stronger side at that. Talentless people would not stand a chance against it even if there was an army of them, and even those with Talents would struggle against such a dangerous monster. One wrong move and the entire party might be wiped out.

I don’t think I stepped on any traps… If you choose the wrong answer, there’s just a monster waiting for you in the middle of the

hallway, I guess. Allen walked ahead and arrived at a large room. Another cube was floating in the air, and Cecil and the others were standing there.

"Huh. I guess we end up in the same place," Allen noted.

"Oh, you're finally here. How was it?" Cecil asked.

"I ran into a monster. I guess you get attacked if you pick the wrong answer." But even if one chose an incorrect answer, they could proceed as long as they could brute-force their way past the monster.

Allen explained the Rank A monster that he had run into. Cecil wanted to press on, but Allen ignored her request and went through all the other incorrect doors.

Monster Ranks Behind Each Door for Question 1 of the Class Promotion Dungeon

Rank C

Rank C

Rank A

None (correct answer)

Rank B

Like the cube said, only monsters between Ranks A and C are here. The third choice was "Cleric," and the fifth choice was "Saint." There was likely some sort of penalty for choosing an obviously wrong answer. Conversely, the closer to the correct answer one was, the weaker the monsters were. "Cleric" was the most clearly wrong choice by far, thus it had led to a stronger monster as punishment.

After Allen's tests were done, he finally returned to the hall where Cecil and everyone were waiting. They then spoke to the cube.

"Congratulations on completing the first task. Do you wish to advance to the next task? Or will you withdraw from the class promotion dungeon?"

"If we leave, can we pick up where we left off?" Allen asked.

"No. You will start from the beginning."

There were no save states allowed. *Not everyone might make it through the first question. I guess this is some sort of safety measure.*

"Will the tasks be the same for whoever tackles this dungeon?" Allen asked.

"It will not. The format and content of the

tasks will differ every time, with an almost infinite number of variations.”

Makes sense. The tasks don’t change according to a person’s class either, so the next party might not get this multiple-choice question. There being an unlimited number of tasks with varying questions and content meant that it would be difficult to come up with any sort of universal solution. *They’ve thought this through.*

Allen jotted it all down in his grimoire and tried to think of a plan as he decided to proceed with this dungeon.

“May we please have the next task?” he asked.

“You will be transported to the next task.”

The scenery shifted once more as the party was transported to another spacious room. It seemed to go on forever in every direction, and Allen spotted bumpy obstacles dotting the landscape.

“Is this our next task?” he inquired.

“Correct. I am Class Promotion Dungeon Task Enforcement System T20235. There is a teleportation system somewhere within this area. If you manage to speak to it, you will clear this task.”

Allen Summoned a Bird E and had it fly around while using its Awakened Ability, Farsight, to search for cubes. He spotted several of them floating a few kilometers from their current location, each one about a kilometer away from any of the others. It seemed that the Gamers had options.

“There’s a cube over there,” Allen said, walking toward a random cube from among the candidates. His party followed close behind.

“When you’re with us, you end up finding the correct answer before we can even think about it,” Cecil said behind him. “It honestly feels like we’re just running a couple of light errands.”

As the cube grew nearer, he realized that the obstacles he had seen in the distance were boulders. They walked past the boulders and saw a long waterway a few meters wide barring their path. When they peered into it, they spotted the shadow of a fish, a couple of meters long, swimming in the water. Aquatic monsters were lurking about.

Allen glanced around and spotted a lever near the waterway.

He pulled it, and the water started to drain, allowing them to cross.

"I'm guessing we have to either find levers like these or use one of the boulders lying around to stop the water and press forward," Allen explained, finally understanding the reason these rocks were scattered throughout the area.

"I see. A wonderful observation, Lord Allen," Sophie praised, clutching her hands in front of her chest.

"But does this have anything to do with class promotions?" Cecil wondered.

The first task was a question about classes, which pertained to the promotion at hand, but pulling levers and solving puzzles to move forward seemed completely unrelated to class promotions.

Allen could not understand what she was on about. "Huh? If you don't clear it, you can't get a promotion."

In his previous life, Allen had played games where one would receive various tasks and side quests that had nothing to do with the main story. He found this all to be common sense and did not even question the apparently absurd second task. In fact, he was so used to fetching items or buying objects for a quest that it felt natural to him to run an unrelated set of errands.

"Yeah, but why do we have to do *this*?" Cecil grumbled.

"Because that's our task," Allen replied.

"Argh! Never mind!"

She figured that arguing further would get her nowhere, as she would occasionally get into such conversations with Allen and had learned that it was meaningless to get bothered by every little thing. She would grow mad.

Allen was so wrapped up in his task that he failed to recognize how his conversation was not clicking with Cecil. *A Talentless person with low Attack would probably struggle to move a boulder like that. I could probably clear this task in minutes if I rode Bird B, but future parties of the Allen Army won't have that luxury. I guess I'll just keep going slow and steady.*

Upon closer inspection, he spotted a few chests in the water. He dropped a boulder to stop the water completely, then had his Summons open the chests. Almost all of them were monsters—there were not just Rank B mimics but Rank A abyss boxes as well. His Summons made short work of them, and Allen guessed that some people would perish upon trying to open these

chests. He jotted it down in his grimoire.

Since Bird E had already found the party's goal, Allen was working backward, trying to use the solution to solve any problem that stood in their way. He came up with the most efficient route, and the party reached its target in less than an hour.

"There wasn't any fighting this time," Meruru said as they approached the cube. She had simply tagged along and had finished the second task without breaking a sweat.

"Yeah," Allen agreed.

"Congratulations on completing the second task. Do you wish to advance to the next task? Or will you withdraw from the class promotion dungeon?"

"Hmm?" Allen thought aloud in response to the cube's question. "Could I ask if you're the only teleportation system around?"

"I cannot answer that."

What?

"I'm gonna go talk to another cube," Allen said to his party.

"You're experimenting again?" Cecil asked wearily. "Do as you like."

Allen rode a Bird B with the rest of his party and spoke to another cube. Up through the fourth cube, they received the same response. However, when they approached the fifth and final cube, there was a loud *vwoom*. The scenery immediately shifted, and a pack of massive wolf monsters growled at them and pounced.

"*Grr!*"

"Looks like we were sent to a pack of monsters," Allen said.

"Looks like it," Cecil replied.

These monsters were the same rank as the final boss of the Rank A dungeon, but the No-life Gamers had already cleared a Rank S dungeon—in fact, it had become an XP farm for them. These monsters proved little trouble, with Allen and his party taking care of them in a flash.

"There weren't too many," Meruru remarked as she piloted Tam-Tam, clearing the monsters away.

"When you compare it to the death zone, yeah," Allen replied.

Unlike the death zones in the Rank S dungeon, the class promotion dungeon did not have locations where hundreds of

Rank A monsters attacked at once. Their numbers here were nothing to sneeze at, though. And given how the Gamers had been immediately teleported in the middle of the group of monsters, any unwary victims would have little time to get into formation and defend. *If their formation is sloppy, I can see a party of eight being wiped out. We were surrounded in the middle of a room with nowhere to escape to, after all.*

Allen had to think of ways to react to these precarious situations so that his army could follow his lead, but he could come up with no such plan at the moment. There were five floating cubes scattered throughout this space, and one was a dud that transported anyone who got close into an area with monsters. Unfortunately, there was no way to discern which cube was the dud. Luck was a part of clearing the class promotion dungeon, it seemed.

With the monsters dealt with, Allen approached the cube. He had been aware of the floating object ever since he had been teleported to this space, but the monsters that had barred his path had prevented him from getting close until now.

"Congratulations on completing the second task. Do you wish to advance to the next task? Or will you withdraw from the class promotion dungeon?"

It did not matter if one unluckily picked the dud. Much like with the previous task, as long as the monsters were defeated, the party was allowed to press on.

Since Allen had no further questions, he requested to head to the final task. The Gamers were once again teleported to a spacious room, though this one was a bit smaller than the previous area. Walls surrounded them, each of which featured a hallway that led to a different place. The usual cube floated in the central space.

"I am Class Promotion Dungeon Task Enforcement System T30235. There is a teleportation system somewhere within this area. If you manage to speak to it within the next twenty-four hours, you will clear this task."

"Huh, there's a time limit on this one," Allen said. "What happens if we go over that time?"

"You will fail this task and be teleported outside of the class promotion dungeon. If you

would like to try again, you must restart from the first task.”

“All right, should we start by taking the hallway in front of us?” Allen suggested to his party.

“I’m in!” Meruru replied excitedly.

She was eager to get class promoted as soon as possible, but she was also aware that Allen wanted to do his usual testing. The No-life Gamers went through the corridor in front of them, and Allen sent his Summons down the other three routes, hoping to maximize efficiency.

“This is a labyrinth, isn’t it?” Cecil asked.

“Yeah,” Allen replied. “Seems like the other routes branch off a bunch of times.”

“Really?”

The other three paths had many twists, turns, and forks, but for some inexplicable reason, the path that Allen and his party had taken did not. Their route had only a large curve, and at the end of it stood a dragon.

“Ah, so you foolish humans came straight here like moths to a flame,” the dragon said.

A cube floated behind the monster, implying that it needed to be defeated to clear this task.

“Get ’em, Orochi,” Allen ordered, Summoning his Dragon A.

“Aye, Master Allen,” three heads roared in response. The Strengthened Orochi had an Attack of 15,000.

“Ngh?! Graaar!” the dragon roared back.

The Dragon A’s five heads chomped at the monster, and the haughty dragon that proudly guarded the cube was ripped to shreds within a matter of moments. All the while, the Strengthened Bird As with 15,000 Agility were flying through the labyrinth, relaying the layout of the place and any information they gathered.

There were four routes in total, and each route differed in straightforwardness, length, and the monster that guarded the cube. The path in the front had no branches and was only a short distance away from their goal, which was guarded by a Rank A monster. If monsters were not an issue, it would take around an hour to clear this final task.

The path to the left had several forks, one coming every few kilometers, and required a moderate amount of time to reach

the cube. Quite a few Rank B monsters popped out along it. Even if the party got lost along the way, it would take around four to five hours to defeat the monsters and press on. The route to the right was also teeming with Rank B monsters. There were fewer forks in the road than there were in the left path, but it was far longer.

The path behind the room was by far the longest and most confusing. One had to make a choice every few hundred meters, and the lengthy road made it a perfect spot for numerous Rank C monsters to lie in wait for an ambush. Even if one made the correct choice every time and did not get lost, it would take over ten hours to clear that path.

Much like during the second task, there were monsters disguised as chests; in fact, the number of such monsters had increased. Allen had Spirit A check each chest, but almost all of them were monsters. He made sure to jot that down in his grimoire, noting that it was better to farm items in other dungeons. Class promotions were not good for that.

Allen read over the notes he had taken as the party had cleared the three tasks of the class promotion dungeon. *This dungeon can definitely be cleared by Talentless people.* The second task required a bit of luck, as those who got unlucky would be forced to fight against a horde of monsters. The third task would also be tricky for a party of Talentless people, especially if they chose the route to the right or left. They could easily be wiped out.

If a party of Talentless people with no Talented guards challenged this dungeon, the probability of clearing all three tasks was quite low—at best, their chances would be below twenty percent. Allen decided to come up with a few ideas of his own and share his findings with the Adventurer’s Guild, which had just opened the dungeon to the public.

Having someone who was Talentless max out their level without any help would be a tall task, as they would need to gather two and a half million XP. There were many people born without Talents hoping to use this dungeon to finally receive one. Allen wanted to make sure that every challenger fully understood the risks of the class promotion dungeon before attempting to enter it. He wrote down all his thoughts as he approached the cube.

“Congratulations on completing the third task,

No-life Gamers. You have cleared this dungeon. You will be transported to a room for class promotion.”

Vwoom. The party was once again teleported to another room with a floating cube.

“Will you allow us a class promotion?” Allen asked.

“Correct. Greetings, No-life Gamers. I am Class Promotion System T0235. The only one in this party eligible for a class promotion is Miss Meruru. Do you wish to receive a class promotion?”

Allen, Cecil, and Sophie were excluded—only those with Talents below four-star were qualified, and a class promotion could only be done once.

“Yep, I do!” Meruru shouted eagerly.

“You currently have the Talent of Talos General. You will receive a class promotion to Talos King. Please note that once you receive a class promotion, you will carry over half of the power you gained from overcoming a Trial of the Gods. You will then start over and have to face the Trial of the Gods once more. Do you still wish to receive a class promotion?”

“Got it!” Meruru replied. “I’m still on board!”

Speaking of which, when the Hero Analyzed my Status, he didn’t touch on my levels. It seemed Helmios had the power to Analyze another’s Status, but perhaps he had been unable to see Allen’s level. Another possibility was that those who reincarnated into this world had the same numbers as those who were of this world, but some numbers and stats had been replaced with illegible symbols. Maybe Helmios had seen those symbols and understood the implication.

The levels that were displayed in Allen’s grimoire meant that he had overcome a Trial of the Gods. This turn of phrase had been popularized by the Church of Elmea, hinting that one’s faith was closely related to leveling up.

“Miss Meruru, you will receive a class promotion.”

“Ooh! You became a Talos King, Meruru! Congrats!” Allen said.

“R-Really?!” Meruru asked hopefully. She had felt something change within her, but she was dying to figure out more concrete

details about that change. The entire party peered into Allen's grimoire.

Status after Meruru's Class Promotion
Name: Meruru
Age: 15
Class: Talos King
Level: 1
HP: 839
MP: 1,210
Attack: 391
Endurance: 659
Agility: 391
Intelligence: 1,210
Luck: 752
Skills: Talos King {1}, Flying Arm {1}, Spear Mastery {3}, Shield Mastery {3}
Extra Skill: Union (Right Arm)

Skills Levels
Talos King: 1
Flying Arm: 1

Skill Experience
Flying Arm: 0/10

"Can I summon a hihiirokane golem now?" Meruru wondered.

"We've got plenty of room. Why don't you try it out?" Allen suggested.

"Right!"

She took out her magic disc and removed the mithril slate, replacing it with a hihiirokane one.

"Tam-Tam, come forth!" she yelled.

A massive, vermilion golem made of hihiirokane towered over the Gamers. It boasted a height of a hundred meters.

"Okay, this is pretty epic!" Allen shouted excitedly.

Status of Hihiirokane Grade Tam-Tam
Name: Tam-Tam
Pilot: Meruru
Rank: Hihiirokane Grade
HP: 25,000 + 15,000
MP: 25,000
Attack: 25,000 + 10,000
Endurance: 25,000 + 15,000
Agility: 25,000 + 10,000
Intelligence: 25,000
Luck: 25,000

“I feel omnipotent!” Meruru cried. “Mwa ha ha ha! I-I’m overflowing with raw power!”

She spoke like a boss from a video game as she had Tam-Tam strike one of her cool poses.

Its stats went way up. The buffs she got when she reached skill levels 3 and 6 are here too. Wait, isn’t she stronger than a Demonic Deity? A Hihiirokane Grade golem would gain 5,000 stat points per slate. As a reward for being the first of her kind to clear a Rank S dungeon, she had increased the number of slots in her magic disc, making it able to house twenty slates.

Even if she used a basic slate, a Gigantify slate, and a Supergigantify slate, she would still have ten slots to spare. If she fitted them all with stat-boosting slates, she would have overwhelming power like never before. Realistically, she would need to use special forms like Eagle Mode, which took five slots, and her long-distance attacks took another slot, so she could not use all the empty space to boost its stats.

“If you become stronger, you can fight Goldino again,” Allen said.

The class promotion had allowed the dwarf to keep half of her prior stats, so she was plenty strong already, but she no longer had access to all her previous skills.

“Then we’ll be holing ourselves up in that dungeon again,” Cecil said with a thousand-yard stare. She feared that the days of beating a hundred iron golems per day were back.

“Yeah. We’d probably do that until we get the gear that we want,” Allen replied.

Currently, they did not have many hihiirokane slates, but he

wanted special and Large Multibarrel Cannon ones for Tam-Tam. While the iron golems of the Rank S dungeon were perfect training monsters for the Allen Army, they were not the final boss. The No-life Gamers were too strong for them and knew that the items they dropped were not great. If Meruru worked hard to strengthen her golem, she might be able to farm the final floor boss of the Rank S dungeon.

Allen gazed up at Meruru, who was having Tam-Tam cycle through her cool poses, with even greater heights already on his mind.

Chapter 3: Moving Residents to Hardcore User Island

A few days had passed since Meruru's class promotion, and it was now May. The dwarf had diligently farmed the Rank S dungeon and maxed out her level as a Talos King. Shia, who had yet to receive her class promotion, was already at max level, so she was working hard to raise her skill level in dungeons near the Rank S one. Other beastkin who were aiming to receive a class promotion were doing the same alongside her. Allen had dispatched his Summons and offered his full cooperation to help them clear the dungeons.

Unlike the other beastkin, Shia had barely cleared a dungeon at all. She had had to work her way up from the bottom, but due to her high level, she had blown through them, having already cleared every Rank C dungeon and two Rank B dungeons.

Luke, the prince of the dark elves, was raising his level and skill levels in dungeons near the Rank S one as well. The boy had not raised either until now, and when he had finally rendezvoused with the Allen Army, he was Lvl. 30. Luke had no experience clearing dungeons, and he had started with Rank C ones, working his way up. He had received help from seasoned beastkin as well as Allen's Summons. He had also brought a private tutor of sorts from his village and was studying in tandem with his dungeon clearing.

The dark elves had a bit of an issue entering the Empire of Baukis, which was home to the Rank S dungeon. The empire worshipped money, shamelessly prioritizing profits above all else, and did not hide it. Those allowed entry first were merchants who had trading permits, followed by adventurers who had received a Rank S dungeon invitation card. Everyone else was delayed. Many people would wait for what seemed like an eternity unless they managed to bribe someone in charge.

Naturally, the dark elves, who were cooped up in the desert of the Galiatan Continent and refused to mingle with other species, were nothing but troublesome to the Baukis officials. There was no incentive for them to allow the dark elves to enter the empire.

However, Luke was a proud member of the Allen Army, and this army was extremely beneficial to Baukis. Specifically, the iron golems that Allen and his party farmed were an excellent source of slates for mithril and hihiirokane golems.

In a war against the Demon Lord Army, Baukis's national defense relied heavily on golem users, a line of classes only dwarves could have. Slates were required to buff the massive living weapons golem users piloted, and among them, mithril and hihiirokane slates were so rare and highly valued that everyone was desperate to get their hands on them. Currently, the only party capable of providing a steady supply of those slates was the No-life Gamers. When Allen had hinted at this fact, anyone related to the Allen Army had practically received a free pass to enter the empire.

Members of the Allen Army were all registered adventurers with issued adventurer cards, a process that was handled entirely by the Adventurer's Guild in Elmahl. Since Allen wielded quite a bit of power as a Rank S adventurer, he had used it to prioritize his army being issued adventurer cards. And so, elves leveled up in dungeons within the Academy while beastkin and dark elves trained at the Rank S dungeon.

Two-thirds of each race from the Allen Army were challenging dungeons, and the rest were hard at work developing Hardcore User Island. Today, five thousand immigrants had arrived from Elmahl to live on the island. They would call Élan Town their home. The name of the town was derived from "Elmahl," as many people had lost their homes due to their religion. Allen had named this town himself in the hope that immigrants would one day find pride in their roots.

"I-Is this our new home?"

"No one else seems to be here."

"I-Is that mountain where Fire Goddess Freyja resides?"

The residents were taken to a clearing in the middle of the town, where their faces filled with hope and anxiety as they curiously glanced around. Hardcore User Island was an elliptical plot of land ten kilometers long and eight kilometers wide. It quite literally looked like a giant boulder floating in the air, and since some ten thousand people would be living alongside the Allen Army, the small plot of land had to be used to maximum efficiency.

The town's residential spaces had three-story buildings with

multiple options for living quarters. There were rooms that could fit families of ten, five, three, or one depending on their needs. Buildings along the main street and in the center of the town had the first floor reserved for commercial facilities.

"I'll be giving a rundown of the island at 3 p.m. I ask that the Élan Town's mayor, deputy mayor, and everyone else gather at the mayor's residence then," Allen said. "Until then, please follow the numbers that were given to you and begin moving in to the town."

"O-Of course. I understand," the mayor said with a nod.

The man had been selected for the role by Allen solely because he had looked perfect for it. There were five thousand people in total with a thousand homes, and they needed to be efficiently organized. Before they had all arrived on the island, they had held a lottery to determine the building and room everyone would be staying in. The residents took their lottery numbers in their hands and checked the dozens of boards that had been put up to tell them where to go. Each one received a map as they exited the clearing and headed to their designated buildings in twos and threes.

Members of the Allen Army who had helped develop the land used their high stats to assist people with moving their belongings and settling in. As the clock struck noon, food was brought into the town square and a bell was rung to signal everyone to gather. A massive clock tower—a magic tool—also stood above the square, but the bell was especially useful in helping the residents keep track of time.

Fearing that Freyja might find the bell too noisy, Allen asked for her permission first, and she happily gave her blessing. "This is what humans do," she had said. She was in high spirits, delighted to learn that the humans had first gone to her for permission.

Once lunch was cleared away, the residents went back to moving in to their new homes. Two and a half hours later, people who had finished moving gathered at the mayor's manor. The mayor and deputy mayor were already there, as was Habarak, who had been diligently smithing away. Other smiths had also dropped in, and since Allen planned on reporting today's discussion back to the army, he had generals and captains in attendance as well. While everyone was settling into their seats, a young man glanced around awkwardly as he and three

adventurers approached Allen.

“Are you sure I can sit here?” Pelomas the merchant asked.

“You’re in the middle, so you can just listen from there,” Allen replied.

“All right.”

“Huh? And what about us?” Raven inquired.

“Since you’re the captains of the mercenaries, you guys can sit next to Pelomas,” Allen answered.

Pelomas had gotten acquainted with Allen during their Academy days, and the merchant, the proud owner of the Pelomas Whaling Company, sat down next to Allen, who was at the center of the table that stood at the head of the crowd. Raven, Rita, and Milci, the captains of the Pelomas Whaling Company Mercenaries, sat beside the merchant. Allen had introduced the three mercenaries to Pelomas’s company, figuring that the young merchant would require help when starting out, and the Pelomas Whaling Company had blossomed into an organization with around two hundred employees.

The rest of the No-life Gamers took their seats opposite Allen and Pelomas. Those in the dungeons had been allowed to skip this meeting, but the Summoner had specifically requested that Shia and Luke return. Once everyone had gathered, Allen spoke.

“I ask that the governor of the island say a few words first,” Allen said.

“Th-That’s me, right? Hi, everyone. Nice to meet you. I’m Pelomas, owner of the Pelomas Whaling Company, which is headquartered in the Kingdom of Ratash. Hardcore User Island is planned to have four towns, and I’ll be overseeing them all as this island’s governor. I would greatly appreciate your support.”



Pelomas spoke politely and bowed to the people, with Raven and the other mercenaries following suit. The mayor and deputy mayor still looked confused, but hastily bowed in response. The residents began chattering to one another.

"A merchant? He looks pretty young."

"The Pelomas Whaling Company? Isn't that company getting rich through trading these days?"

"What even *is* a governor?"

Oh? Is that person a merchant too? They sound like they recognize Pelomas's company. The organization is ranked eighty-seventh in the world, so I'm not surprised that it's famous.

"Ahem," Allen cleared his throat. "Now that Governor Pelomas has finished his greeting, I'd like to first explain how this island will be run. Please take a look at the documents in front of you."

He gestured to the documents that he and the elves on the development team had created. Each resident had their own copy, and they all glanced down to see a map of the vertically elliptical island. At its center was a mountain with a shrine housing an altar dedicated to Goddess Freyja. Residents were requested not to climb the mountain. Only Dogora, the official disciple of the goddess, was allowed a degree of freedom to act without fear of the deity. Anyone else would incur the Fire Goddess's wrath.

"W-We won't approach the mountain. You have my word," the mayor stammered.

"There's also a white dragon in the center of the mountain," Allen added. "Please be careful of it too."

He was referring to Haku, the white dragon hatchling that called the White Dragon Mountains its home. Haku was growing up under the close watch of a Dragon A and Dragon B that had been Summoned by Allen. By bringing the hatchling here, Allen figured that he would no longer need to keep his two dragons Summoned.

"A white dragon?! Is such a beast really in the mountains?!" the mayor gasped.

"It's just a hatchling, so it's still growing," Allen replied. "Perhaps because it's so young, it has a tendency to approach humans when it spots one. If you ever run into the dragon, please don't turn your back to it. Keep your eyes on it while slowly backing away."

If Haku ever decided to climb down the mountain, the mayor

was to notify a stationed Spirit A, which would take care of the matter. Thanks to the two Summons diligently raising the hatchling, Haku was yet to attack a person. Rather, it was a friendly beast that would run toward humans like a young puppy wanting to play, causing the ground to quake.

Haku was not hostile, but the residents who did not know any better might attack if they saw it charge at them. Such a situation would only have an unfortunate end. The best way to avoid that was by instilling a fear of Freyja into the hearts of the residents, thus ensuring that the hatchling could be kept a safe distance away from them. Once Haku grew into a full-fledged dragon and learned how to keep its distance from humans, Allen hoped the beast would become the island's mascot.

"If possible, I would also like each and every one of you to pray to Goddess Freyja every day and night," Allen said. At night, the flames in the east and west would glow brighter, and all four towns would be able to see them quite well.

"Of course," the mayor replied, bowing his head. "We are moved by her benevolence and shall pray to her daily without fail."

"Goddess Freyja's altar will be manned by Master Habarak here, along with other artisans who can use fire," Allen explained.

The master blacksmith and the other dwarf smiths he had brought along all bowed as part of their introduction. Each of them ran their own forge with about ten of their apprentices, and they had agreed to take turns cleaning the altar and providing offerings every day. The dwarves were all former residents of the Kingdom of Melka, and Freyja was apparently ecstatic to have them caring for her. She was in good hands.

Allen had not felt that there was any need for him to get permission from Baukis before bringing all these dwarves to the island. They followed Habarak and had requested to move to the island of their own accord, or so he would claim. Not wanting to cut corners, though, he would at least tell some of Baukis's officials that Hardcore User Island had recently taken in several smiths.

"Next, please take a look at the diagram of the towns on this island," Allen said. "As the map shows, we're planning to build four towns, each with commercial and residential facilities. There'll also be some farms and fields a short distance away."

“I see,” the mayor said. “This is why you asked what jobs we were seeking.”

“Correct. We may rely on outside support at first, but I’d like for this island to ultimately have its own economy.”

The five thousand residents worked in a myriad of industries, with the most popular sector being agriculture. There were many farmers, butchers, and produce merchants. As there were no serfs in Elmahl, Allen planned on having this island free of serfs and slaves as well. He asked about the residents’ jobs and what they hoped to do on the island before dividing them into groups based on their wishes.

“So will more towns be built soon?” the mayor asked.

“Correct. Élan Town was the first, hence we invited you all here,” Allen replied. “Once the other towns are ready, we plan on accepting residents there. When everyone arrives on this island, I’d like to hold a Conference of Mayors. I’d like you and the deputy mayor to attend.”

The mountain with Freyja’s altar would be right in the middle of the island, and the four towns would surround it.

The Pontiff of Daemonism had erected a Church of Gushara in each of the four corners of the Galiatan Continent to spread the teachings of Daemonism. It had taken quite a bit of time for the religion to become widely known, but once it was, Freyja’s divine vessel was stolen, the four pillars of light were created, and the followers of Daemonism were transformed into daemonic incarnations that attacked people. Because of that ordeal, the followers of Daemonism, who had already been subject to persecution by the masses, had received harsher treatment from various nations. Those poor followers now had nowhere to go and were hoping to escape their desperate situation—a convenient coincidence for Allen, who was searching for people to worship Freyja.

Allen wanted the Goddess of Fire to regain her former glory. Her power had weakened considerably due to her loss of followers. The island would thus have four towns: Élan, Muha, Carl, and Crey.

General Layout of Hardcore User Island and the Number of Residents

Élan Town: 5,000 people from the Holy Land of Elmahl

Muha Town: 2,000 people from the oasis town in the Muharino Desert

Carl Town: 5,000 people from the Republic of Carlonea

Crey Town: 3,000 people from the Kingdom of Crevelle

The center of the island will have a mountain with Freyja's altar

Haku will be raised in the middle of the mountain

Habarak and the other smiths will live at the foot of the mountain

The four towns would surround the mountain, sandwiched by Élan and Carl on one plane and Muha and Crey on the other. Muha would have buildings made with mud bricks, and Crey would have a lake. Today, people were moving to Élan from Elmahl, and Allen planned to welcome new residents every ten days. The towns would cover the bulk of the island, and three military bases were planned to be set up around them.

"So you plan on dividing the army by race and creating a base for each one," Shia said. She had been holed up in the dungeon and thus completely uninvolved with the land development; only now did she learn of this plan.

"Yep," Allen replied. "We'll have some group training sessions, but the bases will divide our army based on their species."

He had created four separate towns this time around, separating residents based on their species and their origin. The intent was to prevent any clashes that might occur, as if people with differing values were all herded into one large city, there were bound to be skirmishes here and there. He had provided the same consideration for his army.

"I heard that Mr. Pelomas is the island's governor, but what exactly is his role?" the mayor inquired. Though he had been chosen by Allen on a whim, the man wanted to know where Pelomas stood within the organization.

"It's a system that many republics use, but he'll be in charge of the town mayors. He's not a noble or a royal, which is why I decided to give *him* the role."

"I see. So am I correct in assuming that he's suitable for it?"

This guy's really fired up.

“Correct,” Allen replied. “You may not be aware, but the Pelomas Whaling Company makes around 1.8 million gold annually.”

“D-Did you say 1.8 *million*?!”

He sounds surprised by that number. I’ve heard it’s difficult to reach a million gold coins in annual sales. I think Pelomas’s annual sales are around 180 billion yen in my previous world. Using his knowledge of his time as Kenichi, Allen had valued one gold coin at a hundred thousand yen. Obviously, though, that was only by his own estimation.

“Not to sound conceited, but it’s true,” Pelomas said.

He proceeded to discuss his work experience and education. During the summer of his first year at a commercial school, he had founded the Pelomas Whaling Company in the Kingdom of Ratash. Allen provided ideas and products to the company through his memories of his previous life, as well as investing in it through money earned in dungeons. Pelomas had also been blessed by Elmea with an Extra Skill: Libra. This allowed him to compare and appraise goods. With it, he could instantly find the value of items on the market without the need to scope them out.

Pelomas had learned to use his Extra Skill as he pleased, and in a few years, the Pelomas Whaling Company had grown exponentially. The merchant had followed Allen’s advice and decided to enter the trading industry as well. And with Sophie’s help, Pelomas had become the middleman for trade between her nation of Rohzenheim and Ratash. It was then that he had discovered that his Extra Skill could be used for trade as well.

Pelomas was able to instantly know just how much money was needed to import certain items and how much he could sell them for when they were exported. He could determine what items would not sell well and focused on handling only a select few that turned a high profit. The only problem he had was that he could not accurately gauge demand. If he bought too much of one product, his stock would end up collecting dust in his warehouse.

However, that issue was easily resolved by the knowledge he had accumulated from his school along with two years of experience and hard work that had allowed him to gain a keen eye for such matters. He had continued to keep losses at a minimum while maximizing his profits. His efforts were

rewarded, and in the year following his acquisition of middleman duties with Rohzenheim, he had managed to form solid relationships with the Empires of Baukis and Giamut. Thanks to his diligence, Ratash had become a central figure in trade with ties to Rohzenheim, Baukis, and Giamut.

The influence of the Pelomas Whaling Company greatly chagrined Baukisian and Giamutan merchants, and petitions protesting its oligopoly began making the rounds. Pelomas had grown too strong.

In any case, the Pelomas Whaling Company was the second-largest firm in Ratash, boasting annual sales of 1.8 million gold coins. The largest firm was a nationally owned one run by Ratashian royalty. Pelomas had also ranked eighty-seventh in terms of sales within the Five Continent Alliance; the first thirty spots had been taken by dwarves headquartered in Baukis.

Pelomas actually had a reason for having developed an interest in trade. That reason was that he was hopelessly in love with Fiona, the daughter of the wealthy Chester, who owned the largest inn within Granvelle City. Pelomas had desperately begged for the hand of Chester's daughter and received the response, *"If you show me your worth as a merchant, I'll consider allowing you to date my daughter."*

Pelomas had received three years to prove himself, but as he had been unsure of how to show his worth, he had rushed to Allen for help.

"Why don't you, as a merchant, purchase Chester's inn?" the Summoner had suggested.

And so, Pelomas had taken that piece of advice to heart and begun to dip his toes into the lodging industry alongside his trade business. Just last year, he had finally secured enough funds to purchase an existing lodge and take it under his wing, and since then, he had purchased several lodgings that had once belonged to Chester. When only the expensive inn within Granvelle City had remained, Chester had finally given Pelomas his blessing.

"Please marry Fiona," Chester had said. *"My eyes as a merchant were not wrong."*

However, Pelomas had ultimately been rejected by Fiona, leaving only Chester's former inns to show for his efforts.

And so, the Pelomas Whaling Company now controlled both the flow of the market within the nation and international trade.

It had also become a big name within the lodging industry that constantly employed over a thousand people, making it one of the largest businesses in Granvelle City.

The ones protecting the trade routes while also helping Pelomas control his empire were Raven and his comrades. The adventurers had once been monster hunters who operated within Granvelle, but they had lost their jobs when Allen had hunted the fief dry. The Summoner had introduced the jobless adventurers to Pelomas, and the rest was history.

“Right. In any case, here I am,” Pelomas said. “I plan on moving the Pelomas Whaling Company’s headquarters to this island while I serve as the island’s governor. I’ll run my business with this island as its central hub.”

Pelomas hid the story about Fiona as he explained his work experience and what his company did to the mayor, deputy mayor, and everyone else who had gathered. As for his true reason for being here, he had actually gone back to Allen in hopes of receiving more advice. Pelomas had not given up; he was going to tell Fiona how he felt once more.

Allen also wanted Pelomas’s help to develop this island. Their goals might have differed, but the two wanted to maintain their friendly relationships and work together. *So, Fiona likes strong men, huh? Pelomas seems interested in the class promotion dungeon, so why don’t I have him get stronger through a promotion?* As Allen heard his friend out, he thought of ways he could help.

“I see. So this island will become a base for trade. An excellent idea,” Shia said. “Pelomas, was it? If you ever decide you want to do business with Albahal, we’ll gladly oblige. Of course, I ask that you don’t create a monopoly on our trade.”

The Beast Princess had listened quietly, wondering if Pelomas would be useful to them, but upon hearing his story, she had come to view him in a more positive light. This was a small island that was going to start with a population of over ten thousand people. The land was still being developed and Allen hoped for the place to become self-sufficient one day, but this was a floating island that belonged to no country. In other words, it had no ties or relations. In its current state, it was nigh impossible to have a fully functioning economy. With an excellent merchant on the island, however, the residents’ goods could be sold to other countries.

Naturally, a trading firm that could help develop an economy on this island would have its use once she returned to Albahal. Shia hoped to receive his cooperation when the time came.

"S-Sure. I'll be in your care," Pelomas stammered with fear. He had not expected to be spoken to by an Albahal royal.

"I see," the mayor said, finally understanding why Pelomas had been selected for such an important post. "So we shall make a living by trading with other nations."

I chose him based on looks, but it seems like he really is fit to be the mayor.

"I'm sure my Libra powers were bestowed upon me by Lord Elmea so I could help you all," Pelomas said politely. "But I'm still young, and I certainly have much to learn. I ask the mayor, deputy mayor, and everyone gathered here to please lend me your support."

The mayor smiled back warmly. "We're counting on you as well."

He stood up and approached Pelomas to exchange a handshake amid the applause. Only when the mayor returned to his seat did Pelomas speak once more.

"There is one more thing we must tell everyone. Raven, if you would do the honors, please."

Raven nodded and stood up. "Hello, everyone. As you heard earlier, I'm Raven, and I've been in charge of the mercenaries hired by the Pelomas Whaling Company. I'll be the captain of the Pelomas Whaling Company Guards, and these are the vice-captains, Rita and Milci."

"Nice to meet you," Rita and Milci said.

"Ah, a municipal police of sorts," the mayor remarked.

"Exactly," Raven replied. "Until now, we've mostly been in charge of the transport of goods for the Pelomas Whaling Company, but on this island, we'll be maintaining peace and order. The army will protect you from outside invaders, and we'll handle any issues that occur on the inside. The members of this force will mostly be selected from the Pelomas Whaling Company mercenaries, so you can be sure we have experience dealing with these matters."

Though Allen had done his best to ensure that residents would not fight one another, that would not make the island completely free of crime. It might have been a tough pill to swallow, but there were likely a few criminals among the

immigrants. Knowing that, to help maintain the peace, Raven and his comrades would be joining the Pelomas Whaling Company headquarters in moving to the island. In fact, a prison that could house a hundred criminals had already been built.

Allen thought back to a scene he had seen in a game before—would Pelomas one day be thrown into prison following a riot from the town's residents? *I'm sure some employees of the municipal police might want to enter the Allen Army, and more people will start to mingle in the future.*

"But instead of mayors, perhaps we should have a king," Shia remarked.

Hardcore User Island had land, an army, residents, and could trade with other nations. It was a nation in its own right, which was why the Beast Princess had suggested that it have a monarch.

"Well, calling this place a kingdom would cause other nations to react," Allen replied.

Publicly declaring the founding of a nation would make others wary of it. Above all, Allen had no intention of creating a kingdom, and he did not expect this place to last forever. Bearing such a regal title would only shackle his movements.

"But—"

"Th-This is an emergency!" a resident cried as they burst into the room, interrupting Shia. "Monsters have appeared in the town!"

"Monsters? From where?" Allen asked.

"Th-The stable!" the resident managed to eke out between breaths. "An unknown monster was just there!"

The man had been in charge of a ranch back in his hometown and continued to look after livestock even now that he had moved to the island. He had been given a ranch to continue his work, and when he had visited the stable to check up on it, a monster had been waiting for him. At first, he had thought it was a large horse, but he had soon realized that it was a monster he had never seen before and rushed to the meeting hall for help. Allen had been holding this meeting a good distance away from the stable, but the island was small.

"Please tell me the exact location," Allen urged. "On this map, could you tell me which stable it is?"

"Ummm, here!" the resident said, pointing to the map on the wall. "It's this stable!"

Allen had planted Gold Beans, which created a barrier that kept out monsters of Rank A and below, but perhaps a resident had accidentally plucked one. *And then a monster just wandered into the town through the gaps. I should think of a plan to prevent the beans from being harvested, but I gotta deal with this monster first. And if no one removed the bean, it means the monster is Rank S.*

"Let's go," Allen said. "If it ripped through the Gold Bean's barrier, it must be powerful."

The No-life Gamers rushed out of the mayor's manor and flew to their destination atop Bird Bs.

"Are we in the right place?" Cecil asked. "The stable looks fine."

As she had said, there was no destruction in sight.

"Yeah, we're here," Allen replied. "We can't get a good look from where we're at. Be careful, guys."

He stood before the stable front and cautiously peered inside. In doing so, he indeed locked eyes with an entity that resembled a horse, but the truth of the matter was completely outside the realm of Allen's understanding. How in the world was he supposed to process this?

"Sh-She's..." Shia murmured with surprise.

The rest of the No-life Gamers were very familiar with this stranger, and they all held their breath in silence. Sitting on a bed of straw for horses, her legs folded neatly underneath her, was a majestic, horned horse covered in scales—Falnemes, the Goddess of Arbitration.

I can only describe what I see. I had the residents take care of the stables, and now, the Goddess of Arbitration is right in front of me. The stable was meant for regular horses, but Falnemes was a bit larger, and the small space seemed too cramped for her.

"M-May I ask whatever in the world is going on, Goddess of Arbitration?" Allen inquired.

Falnemes did not answer immediately, instead slowly looking over each and every one of the No-life Gamers.

"Krena is not here," she said, her gentle, feminine tone a far cry from Allen's initial impression of her. She had apparently come searching for the young lady.

"She's not. Shall I call for her?" Allen asked. Unfortunately, Krena was out farming iron golems with Dogora and the others.

"I see. No, that will not be necessary," Falnemes replied. She lowered her head and wrapped it around her body like a

serpent, curling herself into a ball before falling asleep.

"Huh? What's going on here?" Cecil asked Allen. "Why is the Goddess of Arbitration sleeping in one of the stables?"

"Should we just look after her with the other horses?" Allen replied. "She'll be like Haku. Let's call her 'Fal.'"

Allen feared revealing the truth to the other residents. If they began praying to her, Freyja would never be able to increase her power. Falnemes might suddenly disappear one day, but if she planned on staying for now, there was no reason to chase her out. If she liked it here, she was certainly free to stay.

"But this place seems too cramped for her. Let's remove the divider so she can have two stalls to herself," Allen suggested. He would ask the stableman to bring her straw and water, and to just generally treat her well.

"This is turning into one crazy island..." Cecil sighed.

"It's all thanks to the power of Lord Allen!" Sophie praised happily, clasping her hands in front of her chest.

It's not really my *power, per se... Huh? What's up with Rohzen?* For some reason, the God of Spirits was on Sophie's head, casting a forlorn gaze at the goddess without uttering a word. Allen had no idea what to say, so he decided to simply leave the deity be.

* * *

Ten days later, Krena visited the stables with an armload of carrots.

"Fal, have you been eating well?" she asked.

"Miss Krena. Yes, I've been eating well," Falnemes replied politely.

Krena offered one of her carrots to the goddess, saying, "You ate everything I brought you last time. Don't worry, I brought you plenty more. Eat up!"

Falnemes stretched her long neck and ate directly from Krena's hands. It seemed deities did not require the same meals as creatures in the Mortal Realm, but Rohzen ate meals heartily, so they could consume food if they wished.

Krena spent most of her time in the Rank S dungeon, but every now and then, she would return to Hardcore User Island to meet with the goddess and Haku, teleporting back and forth between the two. Conveniently, the cooldown of a King Me'd Bird

A's Awakened Ability was decreased. Instead of once a day, it could be used once an hour, allowing her to easily visit both locations.

The rest of the No-life Gamers gazed upon the wholesome sight of her and the goddess. *But why is Falnemes here anyway?* Allen wondered. He tried asking the God of Spirits, hoping that he would have the answer behind the goddess's presence. The deity replied that perhaps Falnemes no longer had a place in the Heavenly Realm. She had been tasked with arbitrating deities who did not act according to Elmea's wishes. Seeing her implied that a deity had done something wrong and was about to be punished—her very presence struck fear into many gods and goddesses. Perhaps she was not content holding such a position.

Merus had also mentioned that arbitrating other deities required one to follow extremely strict orders from the God of Creation. Falnemes's battle with Bask might have taken a toll on the Goddess of Arbitration's body, weakening her to the level of a Minor Deity. In any case, the God of Spirits had requested that she be allowed to rest on the island.

That was not all that had happened in the past ten days. Pelomas had tackled dungeons while managing the island and had received a class promotion. He was now a Magnate. Hopefully, he was one step closer to being a stronger man, in accordance with Fiona's wishes. Aware of Pelomas's resolve, Allen had decided to reduce the workload of the Magnate as much as possible by having each town come up with at least some of its own policies.

The Talentless Raven and Rita had helped Pelomas clear the class promotion dungeon, receiving the Talents of Swordsman and Thief, respectively. Milci had gone from Cleric to Saint.

"Are you going to ask Miss Fiona out on a date soon?" Allen asked.

"Y-Yeah. But if possible, I'd like to train in the dungeons a bit more first," Pelomas replied. He could not pluck up the courage to tell Fiona how he felt just yet and wanted to gain a few levels with the elves first.

I feel like he's the only one really enjoying his youth, Allen thought. He was busy developing the island, and with most of its residents squared away, he had recently started to farm in the Rank S dungeon.

He first wanted to obtain rings that increased stats by 5,000 for all five thousand members of the Allen Army. He also wanted to outfit them with hihiirokane weapons and armor, or perhaps even adamantite ones if he could get his hands on them. Those equips would allow everyone to stand their ground against Rank A monsters.

"Shia, how's it been since your class promotion?" Allen asked.

The Beast Princess had maxed out her skills and become a four-star Beast Fist King. She had maxed out her level as well, and was training fifteen hours a day to raise her skill levels.

"I'll be meeting with the Beast King soon. It's all thanks to you, Allen," Shia replied. Her goal was to strengthen as many skills as she could before she met with her father. She had been called to attend the conference of the Five Continent Alliance, and the rest of the No-life Gamers would be there as well.

"All right. Let's all go to Muha Town," Allen said.

Through his Shared vision with Merus, he could see many refugees in Fabraaze hoping to move to Hardcore User Island. Today, they would immigrate to the island, and Allen had had the entire No-life Gamers party assemble for this event. They rode atop Bird Bs and headed to Muha Town, a place slightly smaller than Élan Town. The homes there had been built with dome-shaped roofs made with dried bricks of mud. While this island lacked a desert, Allen wanted to make each town as familiar as possible to its residents.

The moment the party arrived, Merus teleported the immigrants to the island. These refugees came from towns including Rukoaque and had managed to evade the clutches of the daemonic incarnations. Much like the residents of Fabraaze, these immigrants had called the oasis cities within the Muharino Desert their home, and they murmured in awe at the island.

"I-Is this our new town?"

"That mountain must be where the benevolent Goddess Freyja resides."

"It's quite cool here, just as I was told."

"I brought them here," Merus reported to Allen.

"Thank you," Allen replied before turning to the future mayor of Muha. "Hello. You must be the mayor."

Once again, Allen had taken the liberty of selecting the mayor of the town. He had had a Spirit A sneak into the refugee camp of the dark elves and choose an elderly person who seemed like

a good leader. Just as he had done before, he gave a general description of the island once everyone had settled in, and Hardcore User Island's population grew.

* * *

Ten days had passed since residents had come to settle in Muha Town. Five thousand refugees had flooded into Carl Town from the former Republic of Carlonea, leaving only the three thousand merfolk of Crevelle Kingdom. Since the merfolk required water to survive and a lake had to be created from scratch, it was taking the longest to build. This afternoon, the conference with the Five Continent Alliance would be held.

"Are you guys ready?" Allen asked his party as he stood in front of the room that led to the final floor boss.

"Yep," Dogora said, voraciously gnawing at a chunk of meat on the bone that he had brought for lunch. Recently, his appetite had grown more ravenous, but no one was sure if it was because he was a growing fifteen-year-old boy or because he had become a disciple and entered Extra Mode.

The last time Allen had seen the Baukis emperor was around the time of the Daemonism debacle. Just like that time, magic ships containing people who would attend the Five Continent Alliance had gathered at the Giamutan Empire. However, with the right conditions, Allen and his party could teleport using Bird A and thus had no need to use the magic ship. For that reason, he had decided to farm iron golems until the last second.

The conference would be held in Beltias, the imperial capital of Giamut. Since the Demon Lord Army's invasion had been temporarily stopped, now was the perfect time to gather for a discussion. Ever since Allen had become a Rank S adventurer, he had been requested by Guildmaster General Makkaron to attend these Five Continent Alliance conferences, but it was then that Elmahl had sent out a distress signal. Allen had been too busy helping the people there and had skipped the meetings.

The No-life Gamers teleported from the final floor of the Rank S dungeon to the town on the first floor. It was a decent distance away from the entrance to the second floor, but it was the only place where Allen had been able to get two plots of land for 150,000 gold. This base was mostly used by the beastkin and dark elves of the Allen Army, the former group having decided to

first receive class promotions before leveling up in nearby Rank B dungeons. There were also a few from the latter group who needed to level up.

"Good, Shia and Luke are here too," Allen said.

Shia was lost in her thoughts with her fist clenched as she looked up. "Ah, are we going already?"

"Yeah, but it's not like we're going to war or anything."

Shia looked as though she were steeling her resolve in preparation to head to the battlefield. *She's just meeting her family, right?*

"I know," she replied. "All right. Let's go."

She punched her hand and stood up to head out with Allen and the rest of the party. The Beast Princess would be meeting the Beast King of Albahal along with Beast Prince Zeu. Zeu, with the help of the Ten Heroic Beasts, had fought the Demon Lord Army in Rohzenheim, forcing the enemy to retreat, before going on to fight in the Central Continent. He had utilized Albahal's greatest weapons, the Ten Heroic Beasts, to their fullest extent and created mountains of monster corpses.

While it was uncertain if his valiant deeds were thought of highly or if there was some political ploy in mind, the Empire of Giamut had started to push for Beast Prince Zeu as the future Beast King of Albahal. He had been personally invited to the conference instead of going as an attendant of the Beast King. That might have lit the fire of rivalry within Shia's heart, as she was gunning for the throne as well.

Allen turned to Luke. The dark elf was still a young boy, and he had been away from his family; he had, rightfully, been a bit nervous in the beginning, but he had managed to blend right in with the rest of the dark elves. He had followed them and the beastkin to the dungeons and increased his levels, allowing him to gain some confidence. *It's great that Luke's getting used to the army. Once he's matured a bit more, I'll add him to our party and have him get stronger through actual combat.*

Like the other dark elves, Luke had finished three Rank C dungeons and was currently tackling Rank B dungeons. With a party of forty-eight, they had an advantage in sheer numbers, as well as being equipped with rings that raised their stats and having the support of Allen's Summons. They were blazing through dungeons at an alarming rate.

Faable, the Sovereign of Spirits, was having her dark fur

petted by Luke, a sign that she had accepted him.

“Have you packed your things?” Allen asked.

“Yep. I’m ready,” Luke replied.

The young dark elf spoke rather casually with Allen and the rest of the party. He might have looked like an eight-year-old, but he was already fifteen, much like Allen. And though he was a royal with Faable by his side, his first experience with the No-life Gamers had been a game of ogre. Perhaps that game had been essential in deepening their bonds.

Once everyone had gathered, they used Bird A’s Awakened Ability, Homing Instinct, to teleport into a magic ship that was headed for Giamut. It did not matter if the magic ship was moving; as long as there was a nest there, the user could teleport to it without fail. The No-life Gamers landed in a wide room where Pelomas was counting gold.

“Sorry to have made you board this magic ship by yourself,” Allen said to Pelomas.

Scribbled-on papers were scattered across the room. The merchant had been tasked with determining the cost of paying wages to an army of five thousand.

“Don’t sweat it,” Pelomas replied. “I needed the time to calculate costs anyway. You’ll need roughly 150,000 gold coins a month. If they all receive class promotions, your expenses will nearly double.”

At the rate they were going, it was equivalent to Allen purchasing two plots of land near the Rank S dungeon every month.

“I expected as much,” Allen said. *No surprise there.*

The Allen Army consisted of five thousand people. Needless to say, they had to make a living somehow, and a good chunk had left their families behind to enter the war. Allen having the noble goal of saving the world from the Demon Lord did not mean that he could not pay his troops. He had amassed an army of people with Talents who had enjoyed a certain level of status before they were drafted. It was imperative that he compensated them based on their skills. Everything required money, and Pelomas had carefully calculated their wages before handing his report to Allen.

Basic Monthly Wages for the Allen Army

10 gold per person

Additional Monthly Wages Based on Talent

Two-star Talent: 20 gold

Three-star Talent: 40 gold

Additional Monthly Wages Based on Rank

5 gold for leaders (10 subordinates)

10 gold for captains (100 subordinates)

20 gold for colonels (500 subordinates)

50 gold for generals (1,000 subordinates)

100 gold for commanders (several thousand subordinates)

Pelomas claimed that the last bit would serve as a great incentive to motivate troops to clear dungeons. That kind of thinking was very fitting for a man who had a squad of mercenaries. Since Allen had generously provided weapons, armor, and rings, as well as sending out his Summons as support, the Allen Army was clearing dungeons at breakneck speed. Any gold and items eligible for exchange that were found in a dungeon were given to the Allen Army. After totals were calculated, the troops that had cleared the dungeon were given thirty percent of the profits as a bonus, and the remaining seventy percent was given to the soldiers developing the island and others who could not fight but were managing the place.

As a point of reference, Zenof, the captain of the Granvelle City knights, was paid fifteen gold a month, while Leibrand, the vice-captain, received ten. And those numbers came after House Granvelle had increased wages upon becoming a viscountship. Allen had confirmed as much with Viscount Granvelle back in Ratash, as the Summoner had wanted to use Granvelle's wages as a base for the Allen Army's.

Pelomas had a squad of two hundred mercenaries, operating under the name of Pelomas Whaling Company Mercenary Corps. Every member had been registered as an adventurer. They had all immigrated to Hardcore User Island and renamed themselves as the Pelomas Whaling Company Guards, and were receiving the same wages as before.

Since almost all of them had Talents as well, about five thousand gold a month was required to pay this force. Pelomas had claimed that he managed to avoid being in the red by having them clear dungeons and make money. The Pelomas Whaling Company Guards also required wages befitting their

Talents and roles.

The island still did not have any industries and could not make foreign currency just yet, but it still required money to support the residents until they could get on their feet. Allen had calculated all those costs and determined that he had enough money.

The beastkin soldiers of Albahal had received money from the country to fight against Daemonism. Ultimately, that debacle had caused them to lose a thousand of their soldiers, and the Beast Kingdom had given families who had lost their loved ones bereavement pay. However, the remaining two thousand soldiers had decided to join the Allen Army with Shia, so Allen had told Albahal that it no longer needed to pay them. The Summoner had relayed the same information to Rohzenheim and Fabraaze as well. Shia had looked inexplicably relieved once she had stopped receiving wages from her home kingdom.

Allen and his Hardcore User Island would be in charge of covering all expenses and costs in hopes of shutting out any outside investments. He wanted to reduce the risk of his power being transferred elsewhere, and with a bit of effort, he knew he could make between three and five hundred thousand gold in a flash.

“We will arrive in Beltias, the imperial capital of Giamut, shortly. For your safety, please remain seated, as the ship will shake when we land,” came an announcement from a magic tool that was mounted on the wall.

The magic ship slowly landed in the imperial capital. As Allen and his party disembarked, a luxurious carriage with a squad of knights in front greeted them.

“We’ve been waiting for you, Lord Allen and party,” the knight said. “Please allow us to guide you into the imperial palace.”

The lavish carriage rolled along, taking the No-life Gamers to the palace.

Chapter 4: The Five Continent Alliance Conference

When the carriage crossed the entrance to the imperial palace of Giamut, knights and other officials were already waiting. Allen and his party were immediately escorted into a waiting room. Allen began using the Seeds of Magic that he had had Merus make, deciding to increase his skill levels while they were waiting. Some time later, it became time to attend the fateful conference.

A knight of the imperial castle entered the waiting room. He spotted Dogora carrying Kagutsuchi on his back and approached the boy with large strides.

"Please leave your weapons behind," the knight ordered. A meeting where the world's royals and global leaders gathered did not permit weapons to be carried inside.

"Huh?" Dogora replied. "Ugh, fine. I'll skip the meeting, then."

The knight was taken aback by the boy's unexpected response. "Huh? Oh, um…"

Dogora knew that he would not utter a word at a conference where royals and important officials met to discuss difficult topics. He was not even sure that he would fully comprehend the contents of the meeting, and so he had decided to leave such complex matters to Allen. Above all, as a disciple, he wanted the divine vessel by his side at all times.

"Dogora," Freyja said through Kagutsuchi. *"You must abide by the rules set forth by humans in the Mortal Realm. I do not mind. You must make yourself known to the world."* It was clear that she had been listening to the conversation through the divine vessel.

"You sure?" Dogora asked.

The goddess seems to be in an awfully good mood lately, Allen thought. Indeed, she seemed to be in unusually high spirits. Three towns had been created on Hardcore User Island, and all the residents prayed every day and night to the flames in Freyja's altar without fail.

In Neel, a city within the Holy Land of Elmahl, a stone statue had been erected in the likeness of Dogora and Freyja, which

had no doubt also improved her mood immensely. The statue had actually been suggested by Allen, but the clergymen of the Church of Elmea had happily obliged and got to work on it immediately. It was quite a grand monument, proudly standing in the center of the city. The religious residents of Elmahl prayed to it daily. This also likely played a role in the partial return of Freyja's power.

A few days ago, Habarak had claimed that the fire in his forge had become hot and vigorous once more. The blacksmith was eager to get to work forging orichalcum axes for Dogora. The boy currently had an adamantite axe to wield along with Kagutsuchi. He always slung the two weapons behind his back during travel—a shocking sight to unwitting bystanders. Many did double or triple takes when they spotted him walking down the road.

Dogora and the rest of the Gamers ended up leaving their weapons in the waiting room, requesting that Kagutsuchi be treated especially carefully. They then walked out into the hallway, escorted by knights and other officials.

This palace is really clean. Is it new? Compared to the palace in Ratash, this place was far more extravagant, seemingly shimmering in every corner. The interior was opulent, and no expense had been spared—a clear display of the empire's wealth.

The imperial capital of Giamut had once been in the northern region of the empire, but following the invasion of the Demon Lord Army, it had moved to its current location. Much thought had gone into the design of the new palace, such as the building of a wider conference room and the expansion of the space where magic ships could land.

When the capital was being moved, the emperor had proposed the creation of the Five Continent Alliance and named the capital after himself, Beltias von Giamut VIII, or Beltias the Wise. He had helped lay the foundation for the fight against the Demon Lord Army, and much of it was still in use.

The No-life Gamers were guided to a room that Beltias VIII had personally designed. Inside, already sitting at a round table, was the head of each nation: Emperor Regalfaras von Giamut V, Emperor Pupun van Baukis III, Queen Lenoatiil of Rohzenheim, Beast King Muza van Albahal, and King Holanoroy van Crevelle. They were all in their respective seats alongside Hero Helmios

and an attendant who had come with each of the five leaders. Other observers were also granted seats at this meeting, with nearly a hundred desks forming a semicircle around the round table. Representatives of those in the Alliance sat at these desks, watching as the monarchs spoke with the person standing in front of a podium.

"There're quite a few people," Cecil murmured.

"Indeed," Sophie agreed. She, too, had been a victim of Allen's plan, forced to farm iron golems for days. Recently, Cecil and Sophie had shared a sense of solidarity unlike any other. Allen had determined that sending the entirety of the No-life Gamers to hunt iron golems was terribly inefficient, instead choosing to split the party in two. Allen, Krena, Cecil, Sophie, Volmaar, a King Me'd Spirit A, and a King Me'd Dragon A had formed one group. The other had consisted of Dogora, Merus, Keel, Meruru, a King Me'd Beast A, a King Me'd Stone A, and a King Me'd Fish A.

Team Allen and Team Dogora had gone their separate ways to farm iron golems, competing to see which could hunt the most iron golems in a day. Both groups had spent over ten hours a day in the dungeon for several consecutive days. Cecil and Sophie had become closer friends as a result, and their teamwork had improved as well.

Allen marched into the conference room, leaving the two ladies whispering behind him.

"Over here please, Lord Allen," a staff member said.

"Sure," Allen replied.

While the rest of his party took their seats nearby, Allen was led in front of the podium. There, he spotted Makkaron. It seemed this podium served as more of a stand for people to be questioned at. *Looks like he was put through the wringer.*

Allen was actually aware of the general flow of this conference, which had started the day prior. He had snuck in a Bird G by hiding it inside Queen Lenoatiil's pocket, then used Sharing to eavesdrop on the entire affair. He had even heard a good chunk of the questions hurled at Makkaron and their answers. This conference was not being hosted solely for Allen and his party; it was but one topic out of many that would be touched upon.

This world did not just have the Demon Lord Army to worry about. With numerous issues at hand, those present at this conference would discuss each subject at length before reaching

a decision. Needless to say, many of these issues did not have optimal solutions or even a single correct answer that they could unanimously agree on. Each nation within the Five Continent Alliance differed in political and national power, inevitably creating a hierarchy of sorts. However, the main goal was for everyone to come to a compromise that they could work with, and they would need to go through a series of discussions to come to an agreement. It seemed that these conferences did not allow a solution to be reached so easily in any world.

Allen recalled the program for the Five Continent Alliance conference, which he had peeked at from within the elven queen's clothes. Everyone in attendance was waiting to find out what Allen's future plans were.

Yesterday's Program for the Five Continent Alliance Conference

The current situation and damages to the Galiatan Continent following Gushara's Daemonism debacle

Provision of support for the restoration efforts in Galiat

Today's Program

Report on Rank S dungeon clearing guides

How the class promotion dungeon will be used and any issues

A hearing about the Allen Army's motives

This Year's Events

February: Rank S dungeon cleared

March onward: Gushara and his Daemonism followers cause destruction in the Galiatan Continent

April: Class promotion dungeon opens to the public

June: The Five Continent Alliance hosts a conference

As Allen was organizing his thoughts, he turned to Makkaron, who had been pummeled with questions as though this were an impeachment.

"You went through quite a bit," he said.

"Mm, it's always like this," Makkaron replied wearily. "I wish I

wouldn’t get called upon so frequently just because I’m nearby.”

The Guildmaster General had been being questioned for over an hour, and it sounded like the Five Continent Alliance had a bone to pick with him. He was being blamed for opening the class promotion dungeon to all adventurers, whereas Giamut had wanted the Five Continent Alliance to have complete control over its operations.

The Adventurer’s Guild was in charge of running the dungeon, however, and they felt they had the right to override the decisions of the Alliance. They wanted as many adventurers as possible to gain an extra star on their Talent. Sure, some people might die in the dungeon, but if everyone who cleared it became stronger and boosted the overall power of adventurers, it would increase productivity. Moreover, Allen wanted to prevent deaths as much as possible and had given all his dungeon-crawling notes to the Adventurer’s Guild’s information department. He hoped that the information he had gathered would help even a little.

The Five Continent Alliance was busy scrambling to clean up the aftermath of the Demon Lord Army’s invasion and had delayed announcing the class promotion dungeon. During that time, the Adventurer’s Guild had allowed those who had completed the entry requirements to use the dungeon as soon as they wished while making notes on how one could clear the dungeon open to the public. This had struck a nerve with the Alliance.

The Adventurer’s Guild and the Five Continent Alliance had friendly ties, but if their best interests clashed, they would look out only for their own benefits. Butting heads over and sometimes coming to a compromise on conflicting opinions was a simple fact of life. And because the headquarters of the Adventurer’s Guild was in Giamut, while Makkaron tried to take it easy, he was often called out to these meetings for questioning.

Seems like I’m here so they can gauge my army’s strength, my character as its commander in chief, and what our motives are. Ever since Allen had been called to this conference, he had been pondering the reason behind his summons. From the Five Continent Alliance’s point of view, they had been, as usual, at war with the Demon Lord Army when a Rank S adventurer was born for the first time in twenty years. The adventurer of immense power had started gathering an army of others with Talents to

create an enigmatic organization. The Alliance needed to know why this organization had been created and what its purpose was. Above all, no one had any idea who Allen was as a person beyond the fact that he had become a Rank S adventurer. Was he worthy of trust, or did he have a nefarious ploy in his mind?

Beside Beast King Muza, who was a head larger than the others and had his arms grumpily folded in front of his chest, sat the king of Crevelle. Allen had enjoyed a meal with this monarch in the past. Some nations within the Alliance rotated the representatives of their nations, and the king of Crevelle had been selected this year. *I see King Olbaas and Beast Prince Zeu too. Looks like they got special treatment from Giamut.* Indeed, the two royals were seated in the semicircular formation of desks, with the presence of the dark elven king signifying that Fabraaze had officially been recognized as a part of the Alliance.

An unimaginable amount of wealth and supplies were needed for the fight against the Demon Lord Army. Since the Alliance would cooperate to fight their enemies, the more nations they had, the better. Unless there was a pressing concern, those who wanted to join the Alliance could generally do so without facing much objection.

In general, only one representative was allowed per nation, but Zeu, who was sitting next to Olbaas, was clearly an exception. *No doubt Giamut's trying to do him a favor since Zeu's the favorite to be the next Beast King.* Additionally, the Ten Heroic Beasts were on standby within the imperial castle. Beast King Muza had personally arrived to pick them up and bring them back home. The Ten Heroic Beasts had all managed to survive the Rank S dungeon, the battle in Rohzenheim, and the clash on the Central Continent. As Allen gazed at Zeu, he heard a voice from the round table call out to him.

"Do not be nervous, Allen," Regalfaras von Giamut V said. He had golden hair, reddish-brown eyes, and a stern demeanor. "None of us here are your enemies."

"Oh, no, it's just that I'm not used to this sort of thing," Allen replied. "I'm worried about coming off as insolent, but that's it."

Does he have a mic or something? The emperor's voice had traveled well across the room. Upon closer inspection, there was indeed a magic tool in the shape of a microphone in front of each of the Alliance leaders, and a similar tool sat atop the podium. Allen approached the mic and repeated his words, his

voice echoing throughout the room like the emperor's had done moments ago. There were likely speakers of some sort that transmitted and amplified his voice.

"Ah, you're not nervous?" the Giamutan emperor replied. "Is it perhaps because you're as valiant as Hero Helmios?"

Allen simply smiled back, not saying a word. He had been gazing at Zeu and the other representatives. He was anything but nervous, and his attitude, as well as the attitudes of his party members, made it abundantly clear that they were as calm as could be. Only Luke and Pelomas seemed uneasy.

"Ugh, so a person who claims to be the hero of the Central Continent emerges," Muza sighed gruffly as he cast a stern glare at Allen. "More and more of you keep popping up."

He probably learned of me when I fought the Hero at the Academy. Sounds like the Beast King doesn't like the Giamutan emperor's ways and how the Hero keeps receiving special treatment. During his second year at the Academy, Allen had fought Helmios. Their battle was renowned for having been so fierce that they had almost destroyed the arena, and word of it must have reached the ears of the Five Continent Alliance leaders.

Allen had gone on to fight the Demon Lord Army in Rohzenheim, become a Rank S adventurer after clearing the Rank S dungeon, and aid Elmahl when it sent out a cry for help. The representatives of the Five Continent Alliance were dying to know the identity and character of this mysterious hero.

"Everyone is gathered here today because they're interested in you, Allen. And I've heard that you have created an 'Allen Army.' Would you kindly elucidate the goal of your organization?"

"My goal is to defeat the Demon Lord," Allen replied firmly to the Giamutan emperor's question.

"To defeat the Demon Lord. I see." The emperor's voice echoed through the room. Allen had declared not that he was going to fight the Demon Lord Army but that he would slay the Demon Lord.

Over a century ago, the Demon Lord had appeared in the Demon Realm, and after fifty years, he began his invasion of the Mortal Realm in hopes of destroying the world. He was feared as the Demon Lord of the End. It had been sixty years since the start of the invasion, and those in the Mortal Realm had barely been able to hold off the Demon Lord Army, let alone defeat the Demon Lord. Even the idea of killing him had been shelved for so

long that many had simply given up on the feat. And yet, here was this young man who had amassed a relatively small army for his lofty pursuit. All who had heard him doubted their ears.

"Yes, and that's why I've been working with my friends," Allen said. "But there's a limit to what we can do, as there are only eight of us. That's why I decided to form an army."

"Oho… You seem rather confident in your skills, Allen," the emperor replied before turning to the Hero, who was sitting next to him. "Helmios, what say you? Is this a possible feat?"

It was not an overstatement to claim that Helmios's accomplishments had kept this world turning, and no one was against him taking a seat at the round table. While the emperor looked as though he was trying to extract information about Allen from Helmios, in truth, he had already learned quite a bit from Makkaron. Regalfaras was aware that Allen had an almost obsessive desire to grow stronger, as well as a penchant for analyzing and testing new ideas. No tactic was off the table if he could accomplish his goal, and he did not take other people's feelings into consideration, even coming off as rude at times. He had zero interest in rank or honor, feared no authority, and was a bit of a fickle creature. If spoken to politely, he would sometimes offer his help, even if there were no benefits for him, and Makkaron had advised that it was best to treat the Summoner with care.

Allen's impulsive actions had been on display recently. On top of having jumped headlong into the fight in Rohzenheim to fend off the invaders, he had been one of the first on the scene when Elmahl had signaled for help. His actions were difficult to read. In each of those situations, it had seemed perplexingly miraculous that he had come out alive while chasing the Demon Lord Army away.

Those peculiar incidents had made the leaders of the Five Continent Alliance and the keen-eared representatives of other nations grow increasingly wary of Allen's future goals. Hence, when an extraordinary existence like Allen claimed to have a goal of defeating the Demon Lord, no one was sure if he was serious or merely chasing a pipe dream. It was impossible for them to predict the outcome of this endeavor, much less what the Summoner's true thoughts were.

Everyone in the conference room chattered in confusion, but Allen only noticed a change in the air. *Well, based on the size of*

our army and the Talents the members of it have, I can't blame them for thinking we're a weak organization. The No-life Gamers were a party of about ten people, yet they had quickly blossomed into an army of five thousand. It might have been a huge jump relative to their original size, but this army could not be considered large by the Five Continent Alliance, which constantly sent waves of people to the front lines. The armies tasked with simply defending strongholds on any given continent were likely much larger.

How, then, could they take Allen seriously? He was commandeering a minuscule force in comparison. Had this young man gone completely mad? Those surrounding the round table clearly thought as much.

"Well, Allen here has been saying the same thing ever since I first met him," Helmios said, his words creating even greater confusion. "That seems to have always been his goal. Maybe he *can* do it. At the very least, he's got a better chance than I ever would."

His answer caused people to start murmuring among themselves.

"Do... Do you truly believe that, Helmios?" the Giamutan emperor asked.

"I sure do," the Hero replied casually. "Besides, only the gods can see the future. A human like me has no way of knowing what's to come."

While it was said that Regalfaras and Helmios were the same age, that alone was not enough to warrant the friendliness in the way Helmios spoke. However, because he had heard rumors about the Giamutan emperor's character, Allen did not want the Hero to get too chummy with the monarch. *But rumors are just rumors. Maybe the emperor's actually a decent guy. Royal castles* do *tend to be breeding grounds for gossip like that.*

Regalfaras had a less than ideal nickname: the Bloody Emperor. He had had three older brothers who were meant to inherit the throne, but they had all met untimely deaths. Even the previous emperor had died suddenly, his life prematurely stripped from him, and Regalfaras had had no choice but to ascend the throne at a young age. The Bloody Emperor silently observed Allen's every move.

"I've heard that you gathered those with Talents from across the globe," Beast King Muza said. "Just how strong is the Allen

Army?"

"If we're talking purely about strength, I think they're stronger than anything you all have got," Allen answered. *But I don't think they can beat a Greater Demonic Deity, much less the Demon Lord.*

"Oh?" Muza replied. The hair on his face started to prickle from being firmly told that he was weaker than Allen.

Beastkin are so hairy—or furry, I guess. It's hard to tell when they're angry since I can't quite see the color of their face or their veins popping out.

"Beast King, I ask that you don't let your emotions get the best of you," Regalfaras said. "This young man isn't here to grapple with us and put on a show for everyone present. However, if your army really is stronger than us, Allen, that is quite impressive. Perhaps your reliable crew has a chance of defeating the Demon Lord. Ah, proving your claims would put everyone's mind at ease. Might you allow us to do a bit of research on you?"

Regalfaras spoke as though he had been waiting for Allen to say those exact words. The emperor signaled with his chin at the doors Allen and his party had entered through. The knights opened those doors and started to bring some items inside.

"Research? Like what? Will Mr. Helmios Analyze me again?" Allen inquired.

"Precisely. I suppose Rank S adventurers are all quick to catch on. But Helmios won't be the one to Analyze you. The results would be visible to him and no one else," Regalfaras explained. He then turned to the knights. "Bring it in!"

The knights brought in a black plank of wood and a crystal ball. Clergymen flooded into the room. *An Appraisal Ceremony. Quite the showy display for it too. The people of this world really love to appraise things, I guess.* Allen had been appraised once when he was five and again when he had entered the Academy. This would be his third time.

The plank's kinda big, Allen thought while gazing at the bit of wood.

"What will you do, Allen?" Cecil called from her seat a short distance away. "Will you get appraised?"

"Sure, why not?" Allen replied. "It'd be a problem if everyone's anxiety hindered our activities."

The Summoner was not trying to become a Demon Lord—an ill-mannered existence that cooperated with no one, forcing

others to fear and revere him through an awesome display of power. Instead, he would cooperate with the Five Continent Alliance in exchange for his wishes being granted. He could be calculating and selfish in his own right and was weighing the pros and cons of working with the Alliance or denying their requests. This was precisely what he had wanted to do at this conference.

"All right," Allen replied. "I don't mind being appraised."

"A commendable attitude," Regalfaras said. "Ah, could I compare you to the strongest hero within our empire?"

It seemed this ceremony was also meant to show the power of the Giamutan Empire, and the Beast King shot Regalfaras a withering look.

"Not this again..." Muza muttered, his voice being transmitted throughout the room via the magic tool.

All the while, the Appraisal Ceremony had been prepared. The plank of wood and crystal ball were placed upon a small platform between the round table and podium where Allen was standing. This allowed the semicircular formation of desks around the round table to get a good look at the appraisal process.

Helmios had already stepped away from the round table and in front of the crystal ball. A clergyman was giving out orders.

"Please place your hand on this crystal," the clergyman said.

"All righty," Helmios replied.

The moment he did so, the black wood became a screen, causing glowing letters to appear for everyone to see.

Helmios's Appraisal Results
Name: Helmios von Sacred
Age: 25
Class: Hero King
HP: 3,555 + 3,600
MP: 2,550 + 3600
Attack: 3,555 + 3,600
Endurance: 3,555 + 3,600
Agility: 3,555 + 3,600
Intelligence: 2,550 + 3,600
Luck: 3,199 + 3,600

Extra Skills: Natural Gift, God Strike
Skills: Hero King, Healing, Flight, Analyze, Holy Spirit Strike, Champion, Sparring, Axe Mastery, Sword Mastery, Spear Mastery, Shield Mastery, Throwing

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Huh? Why does he have two Extra Skills? I've never heard of such a thing. And he's got so many skills. Is that because of Natural Gift or something?

The crowd went wild at Helmios's results.

"Look at that! He's no longer a Hero! He's a Hero King!"

"Is this your first time seeing Sir Helmios's appraisal results?"

"They never cease to amaze me."

Everyone was overwhelmed by what they saw. While fighting the Demon Lord Army in Rohzenheim the year prior, Helmios, who had already received a class promotion, had reached his max level of 60.

Rather than simply ranking the growth curve of each stat from E to S, this particular Appraisal Ceremony displayed stats and skills in full detail. Special items must have been used to provide a more thorough appraisal. Still, even these items did not hold a candle to the grimoire that Allen had received from Elmea. There were no levels, skill levels, experience points, or skill experience listed on the screen. *And people of this world describe leveling up as overcoming a Trial of the Gods. Are levels and skill levels hidden because it might go against religious beliefs?* When Allen had first met Helmios and had been Analyzed, the then-Hero had not mentioned any levels either.

The Summoner decided to jot down Helmios's Status in his grimoire. *What* is *Natural Gift anyway? I'll get the answer from him later.* He recalled the time at the Academy when Helmios had pried about Talents and skills. Allen had managed to give him only the bare minimum back then, but when he had clashed against Demonic Deity Rehzel in Rohzenheim, he had done so while understanding that he would be revealing more about himself. And while it was unclear whether Helmios had purposefully hidden one of his skills, it was now apparent that he had two Extra Skills under his belt. Allen vowed to question Helmios so persistently that Makkaron's hour-long hearing would seem short in comparison.

“Next up…” the clergyman said, glancing at Regalfaras.

“Indeed,” the emperor replied. “While I’m curious as to what the results of each party member’s appraisal would be, the Rank S dungeon challengers must go first. They should be right next door. Call them in.” He grinned at Allen. “I’d like to see your results last. You’ve made a braggadocious claim to defeat the Demon Lord, after all.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” the clergyman cried.

The program did *mention that the Rank S dungeon would be discussed before my hearing.* Prior to the debacle revolving around Gushara and Daemonism, the Rank S dungeon had been cleared for the first time. The Five Continent Alliance had held a meeting to discuss ways to boost the morale of its armies and to express its appreciation to those who had cleared any dungeons. Allen had also been invited to this meeting, but Admiral Garara, Beast Prince Zeu, and Helmios would already be there. Fearing that the Allen Army might get mixed into the mess, Allen had decided to be absent from the discussion.

“Ooh! Hey there, Allen!” Rosetta called.

“Hi, Rosetta,” Allen replied.

“Ahem!” One of the officials loudly cleared his throat and glared at Rosetta to silence her.

As many others entered the room, it was clear that there was no time for idle chatter. There were more important matters at hand.

“Ugh, I know, I know!” Rosetta groaned. “I just need to be appraised, right?”

One by one, Helmios’s party was appraised. The Ten Heroic Beasts and Admiral Garara’s party were also nearby, but they would not be appraised this time around. Regalfaras was not keen on allowing other nations to boast about the strengths of their champions, barring those from Ratash.

Rosetta had finished her appraisal, and it was shown that she was a Phantom Thief King now. The class promotion dungeon allowed Talents of up to four stars to be promoted, and the other nine members of Helmios’s party had all received theirs.

“I just need to place my hand here, correct?” Dverg asked. He had a patch over one eye and was known as the champion of Ratash.

“Precisely,” a clergyman replied, and Dverg moved his hand onto the crystal ball.

Dverg’s Appraisal Results
Name: Dverg von Demonbreaker
Age: 71
Class: Sword King
HP: 3,555 + 1,200
MP: 2,550
Attack: 3,555 + 1,200
Endurance: 3,555 + 1,200
Agility: 3,555 + 1,200
Intelligence: 2,550
Luck: 3,199 + 1,200
Extra Skills: Breaker Strike
Skills: Sword King, Slash, Death God Strike, Stoutness, Sparring, Sword Mastery, Shield Mastery

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Dverg had also received a class promotion already, becoming a Sword King. He was yet to max his Talent level, however, and his skill levels were also lacking, so he had room for more growth. *I see. Both Helmios and Dverg have their full names displayed. Makes sense given that they’re nobles.*

Allen jotted down the Talents of all ten members of Sacred in his grimoire. Some of them had a last name, implying that their excellent Talent and achievements had rewarded them with a rank of nobility. It must have been quite difficult to give someone a last name, which was likely why the people of Rohzenheim lacked them. Oftentimes, the name of one’s party became their last name. There were also cases like Dverg, whose last name was based on his deepest wishes.

Names and Talents Within the Party, Sacred
Hero King: Helmios
Sword King: Dverg, Sylvia
Holy Knight King: Vesta
Saint King: Greta, Ingrid
Wizardess King: Limia, Lora
Bow King: Misty
Phantom Thief King: Rosetta

“That should be everyone,” Regalfaras said once Helmios’s

party had finished their appraisals. He wanted Allen to be next. “Now, I ask that Allen’s party be appraised.”

“O-Of course. Who will go first?” the clergyman asked.

“I’ll go,” Pelomas offered. He was least suited for combat.

For some inexplicable reason, Allen, who was supposed to be compared to Helmios, was saved for later. Instead, Pelomas the merchant was appraised, followed by Luke, who had not been class promoted yet. No one reacted upon seeing the results for either of these two. They were still growing, and had much room for improvement.

Next up was Shia.

Shia’s Appraisal Results
Name: Shia van Albahal
Age: 15
Blessing: Beast God
Class: Beast Fist King
HP: 3,211 + 1,200
MP: 1,721
Attack: 3,640 + 1,200
Endurance: 3,211
Agility: 2,991 + 1,200
Intelligence: 1,485 + 1,200
Luck: 2,139 + 1,200
Extra Skills: Beast Mode
Skills: Beast Fist King, Super Heavy Blow, Super Instant Kill Strike, Super Throat Chop, Super Explosive Fist

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“It seems Albahal has a powerful princess. I’m rather envious,” a representative muttered.

It had only been ten days since she was class promoted, and her skill levels were not maxed out yet. Still, her four-star Talent was impressive to anyone. Gasps of awe at her high stats filled the room.

“And she has the Blessing of Beast God Garm,” another pointed out.

Though she was in Allen’s party, her levels and skill levels had

also failed to display.

"Hmph. These measly stats only besmirch the name of Beast God Garm," Muza grumbled with a sigh, his voice echoing throughout the room. "If you cannot even come close to the Hero of the Central Continent, don't bother embarrassing yourself any further!"

Shia grew pale and Dogora frowned in response.

"Next up," the clergyman called.

"I'll go," Meruru said. She stood up and jogged over to the crystal to receive an appraisal.

"Ah! A Talos King has been born!" a person in the crowd gasped as they stood up.

Others similarly rose to their feet. Once Meruru had received her class promotion, she had met up with Dogora and the others to hunt iron golems. Since she was in Normal Mode, a single iron golem was more than enough to boost her level from 1 to 60.

Just like Shia had been doing, Meruru had farmed for over ten hours a day, her class skill having reached Lvl. 4. Because that skill had not been maxed out yet, it was the only one she had that raised her stats, but that was still enough to leave everyone slack-jawed. She was the second Talos King after Admiral Garara of Baukis. In other words, she possessed a Talent so rare that only one other person in the world currently had it.

Baukis had fourteen other Talos Generals. Unlike other three-star Talents such as Sword Lords and Saintesses, who died on the battlefields, Talos Generals were kept safe within a stout and durable golem. Many of them had survived the naval battles against the Demon Lord Army. Were all of them to receive class promotions, Baukis would boast over fourteen Talos Kings in their empire. The mere thought caused many to gulp nervously and turn white as a sheet. Only one grinned with satisfaction—a certain old man who had a baby face that did not quite suit his stature. His name was Emperor Pupun van Baukis III, and he was sitting in a chair that was not meant for someone of his size.

"Oho ho. Meruru, you've already received a class promotion, I see," Pupun said. "Well done."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Meruru replied with a deep bow.

Once the crowd calmed themselves, the Appraisal Ceremony continued. Krena, Keel, and Cecil showed off their four-star or higher Talents. With every result, the crowd murmured and chattered among themselves, and they seemed particularly

shocked to see that Krena had a five-star Talent.

“Everyone possesses extraordinary Talents,” Regalfaras said, growing sterner by the minute. “The girl called Krena is especially impressive. Her numbers are on par with Hero Helmios’s.” It was clear that the emperor was rather proud of Helmios’s Status and had not expected anyone to come close.

The crowd began to chatter once more.

“I’d expect no less from the powerful party that cleared the Rank S dungeon!”

“It seems their goal to defeat the Demon Lord isn’t just some proud nonsense.”

“A Saint King? Ah, he must be the new pope who saved Elmahl!”

“I’m an Apprentice Pope!” Keel countered.

He can’t help himself, but he still tries to be as well-mannered as he can. I don’t blame him when there’s all these important people around.

Dogora was next. He walked up to the crystal ball while muttering about how it was finally his turn. Having received Helmios’s report, Regalfaras had assumed that Dogora was the least impressive of the bunch. The boy lacked the oomph that the rest of the party seemed to have. Still, the emperor remained quiet and focused on the black plank.

The next moment, a blinding light filled the room, compelling everyone to cover their eyes. A powerful flash like the light of the sun enveloped the crowd for a split second as people gasped in surprise. It lasted only a moment, and when everyone’s vision returned, they again could not hide their awe at the jaw-dropping numbers on the wood.

Dogora’s Appraisal Results

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Name: Dogora
Age: 15
Blessing: Goddess of Fire
Class: Destroyer
HP: 6,329 + 4,800
MP: 2,927 + 2,400
Attack: 6,588 + 4,800
Endurance: 5,835 + 4,800
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  Agility: 4,473 + 4,800
  Intelligence: 2,765 + 2,400
  Luck: 4,288 + 4,800
  Skills: Destroyer, Super Full Might, Super
Explosion, Super Peerless Slash, Super Slaughter
Strike, Heart and Soul, Super Fighting Soul, Axe
Mastery, Dual Axe Mastery, Shield Mastery
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The crowd was in a state of confusion as people cried out.

"Hmm? What's going on?! What are these numbers?! Th-That Attack is completely off the charts!"

"The Blessing of the Goddess of Fire?! Does he have Lady Freyja's power within him?!"

"He might have more power than Krena!"

Dogora's over Lvl. 80, and he can still gain more levels. I wonder what his cap is. And with his Destroyer skill at Lvl. 3, he's learned Super Fighting Soul. The buffs he gets from it might be so great that they'd make me *tremble.* After resting on Hardcore User Island, Dogora had farmed iron golems, killing over eight thousand and reaching Lvl. 84 in the process. He had also passed Lvl. 3 with his class skill, which had allowed him to learn Super Fighting Soul. At Lvl. 1, it raised MP and Intelligence by 2,400, and other stats by 4,800. When Dogora had been in Normal Mode, Fighting Soul had not raised MP or Intelligence; it had only raised other stats by 2,400. It was plain as day—Extra Mode increased one's numbers exponentially while adding "Super" before each skill name. This also caused the user to deplete more than five times as much MP with every skill usage.

Thanks to all these upgrades, Dogora had managed to increase his class skill to Lvl. 5 within a bit over a month. Equipped with Kagutsuchi and an adamantite greataxe, he had also learned a new skill called Dual Axe Mastery.

"Dogora's powers are delightful to see," Muza praised.

It was finally Allen's turn. *This appraisal's gonna get weird again. I suggest everyone strap in and wait with bated breath.* When he was five years old, his Appraisal Ceremony had returned a peculiar result in the Talent section—it had been filled with symbols, making it completely illegible. Then, when he entered the Academy, his slow growth due to being in Hell Mode had been taken into consideration, giving him E rankings across the

board.

Allen expected nothing from this ceremony and assumed that another unfortunate result would be spat out. But when he touched the crystal, the results appeared on the board without much fanfare. People had expected another dazzling flash of light like with Dogora and were stunned by how smoothly the process had gone. However, they went wide-eyed with astonishment when they saw his stats.

Allen's Appraisal Results

Name: Allen
Age: 15
Class: Summoner
HP: 3,815 + 2,000
MP: 6,060 + 14,000
Attack: 2,124 + 2,000
Endurance: 2,124 + 3,800
Agility: 3,951 + 5,000
Intelligence: 6,070 + 16,800
Luck: 3,951 + 2,000
Skills: Summoning, Creation, Synthesis, Strengthening, Awakening, Expansion, Storage, Sharing, Quick Summoning, Equivalency, Deputize, King Me, Deletion, Sword Mastery, Throwing

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"I've never seen MP and Intelligence this high."

"I see. So the representative of the Allen Army is quite wise."

"I've never seen Intelligence over 20,000."

I guess the third time's the charm for me getting appraised. But no one's shocked like when they saw Dogora's results. That's fair though. People probably use swords and spears to fight wars. Battles against the Demon Lord Army were a daily occurrence for people in this world, and it was important to gauge just how many monsters a person could bring down on their own. Most of the royals present were Talentless, and very few had actually fought the Demon Lord Army.

To them, Dogora and Krena seemed far more impressive and reliable for the war effort than Allen. Many assumed that Dogora

was the main source of firepower, followed by Talos King Meruru, Sword Emperor Krena, and then Saint King Keel, the Apprentice Pope. With these excellent party members, Allen looked like he had taken charge by simply formulating cunning plans and not ever fighting on the front lines.

I wanna talk once everyone's calmed down. Allen grew weary at the crowd that refused to die down. He hid his hand behind the podium and used the Seeds of Magic that Merus had made to gain skill levels. The Summoner insisted on maximizing energy, and now that his appraisal was over, he wanted to use any free time he had to level up. Simply standing there doing nothing felt like a waste.

He still had no idea what Kyubel was up to, but he was certain that the Greater Demonic Deity had been plotting something all this while and was taking steps to move forward with some sort of scheme. It was thus imperative for Allen to be able to produce Rank S Summons as soon as possible so that he could fight back. But his grinding was quickly cut off by Regalfaras.

"Invel, wh-what in the world is going on?" the emperor demanded angrily. "I believe this is crossing the line! How did you manage to hide all these capable people?!"

Large veins appeared on Regalfaras's forehead, his voice trembling with rage. His wrath was directed at King Invel von Ratash, who was seated in the front row of the concentric chair arrangement. Perhaps Regalfaras had been confident that no one could outdo Hero Helmios, who had maxed his levels and skill levels, and had wanted to boast about the famed champion's extraordinary numbers.

Now that the cat was out of the bag, it had become crystal clear that the young members who led the Allen Army had astonishingly high stats—much to the ire of the Giamutan emperor. The Hero had paled in comparison.

"I-I haven't hidden—" Invel started.

"Oh? Do you deny it?" Regalfaras demanded.

The No-life Gamers had become famous this past year, and over half of its members originated from Ratash.

"Well..." Invel replied.

Uh-oh, looks like he's being cornered. But I'm all for it. Get him!

Over a hundred member nations from the Five Continent Alliance had gathered for this meeting, but the Giamutan emperor did not hold back on his cutting remarks.

“If you cannot cooperate with the rest of the Alliance, I would not be opposed to you leaving it!” Regalfaras bellowed, his hegemonic attitude on full display.

It was said that the only reason he did not attack the Central Continent was that it was a part of the Alliance. He wanted to avoid conflict with the other four leading nations, which he would undoubtedly receive if he started an invasion.

“Th-That’s not it at all,” Invel stammered. “For the past several decades, Ratash has been very cooperative with the Alliance’s ideals.”

“Balderdash! Your lot has been said to be on the side of the Kingdom faction!” Regalfaras shouted.

The Kingdom faction was against the Five Continent Alliance and the Academy faction. Those who were a part of it valued their own nation over all others. They were more conservative and refused to fight the Demon Lord Army.

Allen had not only fought against Hero Helmios at the Academy, but he had also been on the front lines of the war in Rohzenheim. He had even managed to clear a Rank S dungeon, becoming the first Rank S adventurer in two decades. Despite knowing all this, Ratash had failed to promptly report to the Five Continent Alliance.

The Alliance and its leading nations had their own information sources. They were keenly aware of Allen’s existence and movements even without a report, implying that they knew just how delayed Ratash’s actions were. For that reason, it was not a stretch for many to assume that the kingdom had some sort of plot in mind. And with the shocking results of the appraisal now shown for the world to see, Regalfaras could no longer suppress his fury. There was no stopping the Bloody Emperor once the blood rushed to his head.

The other representative saw the menacing Regalfaras and looked troubled. Surely, there was no need to be this harsh to a kingdom that was willing to cooperate with the Alliance. The representatives of the other four leading nations looked exasperated and silently watched the scene unfold, allowing Regalfaras to unleash his wrath. Pupun yawned, Muza crossed his arms and closed his eyes with a scowl, and Holanoroy glanced around in silent panic. Only Lenoatiil opened her eyes and tried to speak in hopes of mediating the situation.

“I’m terribly sorry, Your Majesty,” Allen said.

“Hmm? Allen? Whatever is the matter?” Regalfaras inquired. He calmed down, much to the relief of Invel.

“Your anger is fully justified, but the Ratashian king wants to fight the Demon Lord Army as well. It’s his utmost priority.”

“What are you on about?” Regalfaras and Invel said simultaneously.

“You see, the princess of Ratash, Her Highness Leilana, is hard at work at our base,” Allen divulged.

I’m helping you here, you know.

“What the?! A-Allen, why must you say that right now?!” Invel cried, finding Allen’s choice to be the worst possible one.

The other representatives turned to Invel, assuming that the king had rather close ties with Allen.

“Oh? Is this true?” Regalfaras asked, his voice filled with anger once more.

Unable to meet the glare of the Giamutan emperor, Invel gazed at the ground, the color having drained from his face.

“W-Well…” he mumbled.

Invel doted on his daughter, always letting her have her way. He had allowed her to attend the Academy, and even to bring her favorite tutor along with her, but one day, he had received a report from his close aide that had made him grow dizzy. Princess Leilana and the tutor that she fancied had decided to live at the Allen Army’s base. Moreover, she had started to clear dungeons with them.

“What’s with that face?” Regalfaras demanded. “Have you realized that you can no longer make any excuses? How low can you sink? I knew that you had a reason for hiding your powerful citizens.”

The emperor was implying that the king of Ratash had hidden Allen’s existence because he had quickly learned of the No-life Gamers’ power and wanted to use that to bolster their national strength. As Regalfaras’s voice was carried across the room, Allen realized that there was a clear distinction to be made.

Hmm? Ah, this might be the perfect opportunity. Allen leaned toward the mic on the podium. “I’m sorry that I keep interjecting, but I believe you’re greatly mistaken about our goals.”

“What did you say?” Regalfaras asked.

Since a Rank S adventurer and his party had been called all the way out to be questioned about their army of five thousand people, the emperor was willing to lend an ear to the boy’s

words.

"We indeed have friendly ties with Ratash. That cannot be denied," Allen said.

"Huh? Of course you do. And?" Regalfaras asked.

"But we don't belong to the Kingdom of Ratash, nor have we received any orders from His Majesty Invel. In fact, we aren't even a part of the Five Continent Alliance."

"Oh?"

Regalfaras narrowed his eyes with suspicion. Makkaron's earlier observations about Allen had been proven true.

"The Allen Army is an independent force, and we will face the Demon Lord Army in the future," Allen went on. "I ask that you don't give us orders that you've all decided on at Five Continent Alliance meetings."

"Then you'll be doing as you please, I suppose?" Regalfaras asked.

"Exactly. We don't really have a reason to take orders from you guys anyway."

Seriously, don't do it. Allen locked eyes with Regalfaras. In this world, there were only two organizations that could not be completely controlled by the Five Continent Alliance: the Church of Elmea and the Adventurer's Guild. While both organizations cooperated with the Five Continent Alliance, they each had different goals and acted of their own accord. If their goals differed from those of the Alliance, they were not afraid to turn their backs on the nations. In fact, both the Church and the Guild were more than willing to fight the Five Continent Alliance if push came to shove. Were Allen's story to be believed, a third independent organization would form alongside the Church and the Guild.

Regalfaras glanced at Lenoatiil. Allen had first become famous among the Five Continent Alliance when he was named the grand strategist of Rohzenheim—a title the queen herself had given him. The Giamutan emperor wanted to know if the queen would allow her grand strategist to do as he pleased, but Lenoatiil maintained her cool.

"Lord Allen hasn't said that he *won't* cooperate with the Five Continent Alliance," she said.

"Correct. I haven't," Allen noted. "There will certainly be times when the Allen Army should cooperate with the armies of the Five Continent Alliance. There's no denying that. We'll also place

magic tools for communication in our bases. If you require anything from us, please let us know. In fact, we plan on actively joining campaigns to defeat monsters."

Allen had already placed communication magic tools on Hardcore User Island. If needed, the Alliance could contact him directly. However, he did not want to be underestimated because of his small army of five thousand. He would not allow the Alliance to force him into doing anything.

"What are you saying?" Regalfaras asked in confusion.

Allen had mentioned that there would certainly be a need for his army to cooperate with the Five Continent Alliance in the future, but he had also claimed that he would do as he pleased in the same breath. The implication was that the Five Continent Alliance would need to cooperate with the Allen Army instead, and the emperor saw no reason to accept that request.

"There are many nations around the world that are plagued by monsters but can't receive any help," Allen said. "We of the Allen Army will respond to their requests."

"Are you saying that you'll be hunting monsters?" Regalfaras asked.

"Correct. Allow me to explain."

Regalfaras could hardly believe his ears. Had the Allen Army not been formed to fight the Demon Lord Army? But that was precisely the distinction that Allen had wanted to make as to his army's goals. The Summoner went into detail, hoping to clear up any questions that those present might have had.

All across the world, monsters ran rampant, and not everyone was lucky enough to receive the help that they desperately needed. Several monsters on par with the white dragon near Krena Village lurked within Ratash alone. Rank S monsters and even Holy Beasts were surely prowling about as well, terrorizing areas. The Allen Army was offering to subjugate these dangerous monsters for cheap.

To further increase its strength, the Allen Army required materials that dropped from powerful monsters. Orichalcum and adamantite were just the tip of the iceberg. Iron golems were a great source of metallic weapons and armor, but monsters were required to obtain wooden gear. Materials from high-rank monsters were precious, and there were times when Ancient Wood, a type of flora there was very little of anywhere in the world, could be transformed into priceless weapons. Bows,

wands, and the like were often more powerful if made from monster drops or magical flora than if they were made from metal.

As for armor, not everyone wanted to equip the sturdy and heavy adamantite. Healers, Scouts, and other classes that required one to be nimble relied on lighter armor that was easy to move around in while still having high Defense. Scales and shells from monsters or certain types of bark and other mysterious materials were necessary to craft such equipment.

For example, slaying a massive Rank S dragon would net enough materials to cover a hundred fighters that required lightweight gear. If such monsters roamed near countries that were exhausted from the five decades and counting of battle against the Demon Lord Army, the Allen Army wanted to defeat them for a fraction of the usual cost. And if anyone required the items that dropped from these monsters, the nation the monster originated from would be prioritized, with the army conducting the negotiations. These items would be sold or provided to those who needed it.

"Oho, Allen," Pupun said. "I would like a hihiirokane golem soon."

"Certainly, Your Majesty," Allen replied. "I finally managed to gather a set for Admiral Garara, so I shall give it to you as soon as you need it."

"R-Really?! Is it a supermassive golem?!" The emperor leaned forward excitedly.

"Of course. Your nation has provided the Allen Army with special treatment, so it's only fair."

Allen had promised the Empire of Baukis that he would provide a set of slates for the hihiirokane golem, as well as a Gigantify and a Supergigantify slate. Baukis did not have a set for itself just yet. Slates for a hihiirokane golem could only be obtained from the final floor of the Rank S dungeon, making it incredibly difficult to farm them. Thanks to the class promotion dungeon, the empire had more Talos Generals and Talos Kings under its control, and it was imperative that it get its hands on hihiirokane slates as soon as it possibly could. Allen had heard this and offered to provide the slates free of charge if he and his Allen Army could use the Rank S dungeon and the surrounding area as they pleased. This offer had been immediately agreed to.

"Very well," Pupun replied. "I shall send Admiral Garara and

the Magus Smith minister along soon. I shall also promptly provide you with a hundred golem users and magic tool users each."

"That would be a huge help, Your Majesty," Allen replied.

Oh? I get both magic tool users and *golem users? Sweet.*

Talents Required for Golems and Magic Tools

Talos Pawn (one star): can control up to Bronze Grade Golems

Talos Solder (two stars): can control up to Iron Grade Golems

Talos General (three stars): can control up to Mithril Grade Golems

Talos King (four stars): can control up to Hihiirokane Grade Golems

Magitech Technician (one star): can work with house-scale magic tools

Magitech Mechanic (two stars): can work with village- and town-scale magic tools

Magitech Specialist (three stars): can work with city- and nation-scale magic tools

Magitech Meister (four stars): can work with global-scale magic tools

Magic tool users could use different tools based on the number of stars they had. There were all sorts of tools in this world, from those for home use to ones that operated town-, city-, or even nationwide. It was the norm for every tool to have a button or a switch—if turning one on was all that was necessary, its user did not need to have a Magitech Talent.

Allen was actually on the hunt for a magic tool user. He needed someone to operate a magic-tool-like facility in the basement of the altar on Hardcore User Island. Judging from the size of the facility, a Magitech Specialist would be needed.

"Very good. I shall excuse your eccentric turns of phrase as well," Pupun said. "I would like the next set of slates very soon."

"Of course, Your Majesty. I shall provide it as soon as possible," Allen replied.

I actually have another set ready to go. The Summoner thought it best to stagger his gifts, hoping to receive extra appreciation with every donation. As he employed this cunning scheme, he

made sure to glare at the honest Keel, ensuring that the Apprentice Pope kept a straight face.

While watching the scene unfold, Regalfaras realized that Allen was starting to influence the Five Continent Alliance. Ratash, Rohzenheim, and even Baukis were willing to help the Allen Army. The Giamutan emperor had also realized exactly what Allen was planning when he had mentioned hunting down monsters for those who required his aid.

Regalfaras whirled around to face Helmios, but the Hero smiled calmly at the emperor's irate glare.

"I told you about Allen, didn't I?" Helmios said.

"I must speak with you later," Regalfaras replied through gritted teeth.

Muza, who had kept his eyes closed and his arms crossed, finally opened his eyes to speak. "Are you done with your speech?"

Allen noticed that the question had been posed to him. "Yes, that will be all. And I'd like to thank you again for lending me Shia and the beastkin."

The Summoner had ignored Muza up to this point, but the Beast King's question had necessitated a response. That being the case, Allen had decided to thank the monarch for letting Beast Princess Shia and the two thousand beastkin soldiers join him, but Muza's reaction to his gratitude was unexpected.

"Stop uttering nonsense, you insolent fool," Muza growled in a low voice. "It's been a millennium since my ancestors moved to the Garlesian Continent. There will *never* come a time when beastkin are *lent* to humans. We don't need to discuss this matter further, Shia. Pack your things. We're returning to Albahal."

"Father—no, Your Majesty," Shia interjected. "I decided to cooperate with the Allen Army of my own accord. He might have not explained the situation in its entirety, but that's everything he wanted to say."

The Beast King of Albahal unfolded his arms and grabbed the armrest of his chair as he stood up. "Then it is *you* who is mistaken, Shia. Do you truly think that you can go against *my* word and leave Albahal?"

No one failed to grasp the meaning behind his words. The Beast King was against Shia joining the Allen Army.

Chapter 5: Shia Settles Matters and the Battle Against the Beast King

“I have already reached adulthood,” Shia said quietly as she gauged her situation. “I would like to make decisions for myself.”

“A little girl like you, who was once satisfied with acting like a knight in shining armor, has certainly learned how to talk,” Muza said coldly. “But what of it? If you truly believe you can be responsible for yourself, you must first *prove* that you can. Else, you’ve done nothing but spout pretty words. So come. Show me.”

The room was overpowered by the two’s conversation, and everyone fell silent. Allen noticed that even Regalfaras had shut his mouth. *The Giamutan emperor’s scared. I’ve heard that Beast King Muza thinks with his muscles and is quick to pick a fight with people he dislikes,* he thought. Muza had clobbered Hero Helmios in front of the leaders of various nations. No one had the moxie to go against his words—save for one daring lady.

“Beast King, I would like to challenge you to a duel,” Shia said, firmly voicing her dissent.

Did Shia know this was going to happen? I mean, they’re father and daughter. Seems like stuff like this happens frequently. Allen recalled the solemn expression Shia had worn before she had entered this conference. She had looked as though she were going off to war. In hindsight, she must have predicted this outcome.

Allen had also heard from Shia that Muza never held back against people he did not like. Even when his ministers brought him policy proposals, he would inspect each of them himself and refuse to approve them if he spotted any portion he did not agree with. Not once had persuasion worked on this king, and if one were desperate to approve a policy, they would need to challenge Muza to a duel. If one showed the resolve to cross fists with him, the Beast King was willing to reconsider his thoughts.

Several times a year, these duels would occur, and ministers would give it their all in hopes of getting their policies approved. Needless to say, it was common for ministers to be gravely

injured during these bouts, and some had even perished in the process.

"Very well," Muza said. "Sir Regalfaras, I would like to borrow an arena."

"R-Right now?!" the emperor cried.

Allen recalled seeing a square-shaped training facility beside the imperial castle when he had stepped off the magic ship. *I see. That was an arena.*

"Right now," Muza replied. "There's no need for us to humor this impudent fellow any longer, is there?" He stood up to leave. Boasting a height that was at least two heads taller than Allen, the towering monarch dwarfed Dogora in every way.

"Wh-While our matter with the Allen Army has been cleared away, there are still a few other problems that haven't been resolved..." Regalfaras said.

Muza paid the emperor no heed and stomped out of the room, leaving the conference behind. Shia followed him.

"This is a bit of a problem," Helmios muttered as he stared at the Beast Princess. "Miss Shia won't get out of this unscathed."

"Is it that bad?" Allen asked.

Helmios silently nodded in response.

"We should go as well," Lenoatiil said quietly as she rose to her feet. "This involves the future of the Five Continent Alliance."

The Beast King of Albahal had the power to command the beastkin. Were Muza to forbid them from entering the Allen Army, the order would be followed. Furthermore, a duel with the Beast Princess, who had claim to the throne, would affect the kingdom's future greatly. At the very least, the Five Continent Alliance, which had banded together to fight against the Demon Lord Army, was not completely uninvolved with this affair.

The other leaders of the Alliance were guided by Helmios to a nearby arena. Allen and the rest of the No-life Gamers tagged along, and they spotted Shia seated beside the ring, her eyes closed and her fists clenched. As they approached, she opened her eyes and looked up at Allen.

"I knew this would happen one day, but I couldn't seem to find the opportunity to tell you so," the Beast Princess said. "I'm sorry."

"Well, this is a fight between you and your dad," Allen replied. "I won't stop you, but don't push yourself."

"I know."

Allen glanced at Muza, who was already standing in the ring. *He doesn't have any gear on.* The Beast King had neither a weapon nor armor. In fact, even when Allen used his Bird E to inspect the monarch, there were no rings, bracelets, or magic gear to be found. Muza was walking into this match with nothing but his raw stats and power.

"Krena," Allen said, turning to his friend. "Could you lend Shia your bracelet?"

"Sure," Krena replied.

Allen tried to prioritize the victory of his party member over Shia's determination to settle matters herself. The Beast Princess shook her head at the offer.

"No need. His Majesty has no equipment," Shia said, setting aside her brass knuckles and armor before approaching the ring. She faced her father with the leaders and representatives of the Five Continent Alliance as her audience.

"Have you said your farewells?" Muza asked.

"That won't be necessary," Shia replied firmly.

"Oh?"

"I will be Albahal, the Country of Beastkin's—no, the Garlesian Continent's first Beast Emperor. To make that happen, I will walk alongside my party. And so, I must bid you—and only you—farewell, Your Majesty."

Shia spoke quietly, but she was no longer gauging her father's mood. Her convictions were clear.

The Beast King's face contorted. "Your stance and mannerisms…have grown to resemble Mia's."

"Don't you *dare* speak my mother's name," Shia growled, her face twisting with choler. No child would usually direct such a livid expression at their parent. "*You* mobilized the Corps, father. Her death might as well have been at *your* hand."

"Correct. I did. Your hateful glare is also reminiscent of Mia's."

Despite Shia's request, Muza could not help but say his late wife's name. He did not deny her claims, but a forlorn glimmer filled his gaze. Unfortunately, Shia failed to catch it. *What's going on? What's happening?* Clearly, the pair of beastkin royals shared some sort of past that Allen was not privy to.

"If you think you can use me however you wish like you did with mother, you're gravely mistaken!" Shia spat.

"If you think you can, do it," Muza said. "Use your fists to deny my way of life."

The Beast King took a deep breath, then went limp. Shia took her chance and pounced. She acted like she was leaping forward, but she landed just short of Muza and crouched low. From that position, she punched upward, trying to bury her fist into her father's stomach.

BOOM!

"What?!" Shia cried, her voice echoing throughout the arena.

She had not expected her father to just stand there and take her attack; she had come up with a plan for when he dodged her punch. His action caught her completely off guard.



Muza sighed, then spoke in a booming voice. “You talk a big game about settling matters yourself, yet your resolve is pathetic!”

In the next moment, he blew Shia back.

“Gah!” she grunted.

She had used her arm to guard her stomach, but by the time she felt Muza’s shin hit her, she was already soaring toward the edge of the arena. While protecting the arm that had gone numb from the pain, she used the arm that she had punched her father with to strike the arena and change directions. The Beast Princess managed to land on her feet, and she immediately rushed back toward Muza.

Unfortunately, her fists would never reach him again. She stopped just short of Muza and stepped to the side to attack from his blind spot, but the Beast King crouched low and swung his foot out, knocking her into the air. He then lowered his massive fist onto his daughter.

Shia could not hide her shock as her body bounced across the arena, but Muza would not let up. His fists showered her as he attacked from her side, and she desperately raised her arms to defend herself. Such a flimsy defense could not hold up against the king’s barrage and kicks, however.

“What’s wrong?!” Muza roared. “Were you not going to settle matters yourself? And you call yourself Mia’s child?! Or have you finally realized that what you’ve been doing until now was just masquerading as a knight in shining armor?!”

Shia’s adventure had started when General Rudo, Muza’s loyal retainer, had been placed in charge of her. She had gathered soldiers and made her squad larger, earning her the sobriquet “War Princess,” which she was rather proud of. As her desire for the throne had grown, she had been bestowed a trial to complete before she could become the Beast King. The Beast Princess had pursued the Pontiff of Daemonism and become experienced in combat, but that still was not enough to best her father.

“Ngh?!” Shia grunted.

She crossed her arms in front of her chest before being struck by the Beast King’s knee, but her body flew into the air, and she plummeted back to the ground without being able to defend herself.

“Shia, stop it already!” Beast Prince Zeu called out, unable to

stand idly by for much longer. He had been in the audience before the match had begun, but he was now at the edge of the ring. “Just apologize to the Beast King!”

Muza glared at his son. “Stop acting pathetic, Zeu.”

“Your Majesty, please forgive Shia.”

Allen had never heard such desperate cries coming from Zeu, and Muza howled like never before.

“Don’t you *ever* speak like that again!” Muza roared. “One who is trying to become a Beast King must never beg for forgiveness! That impertinent human dares to ask that my countrymen and your younger sister be loaned to him! You claim to have friendly ties with that insolent whelp, but you must protect your citizens from acting in such a shameless manner! *That* is the kind of Beast King you all must aim to be! Those who go against that must not be shown mercy! Especially those who actively fight against these teachings! Absolutely unheard of!”

Huh. Maybe that’s why Beast Crown Prince Beku was recommended for the throne. A Beast King must be stern. Beku, the eldest son of the royal family, was looking to invade the Central Continent. Perhaps one needed to be ruthless at times if they were to lead and protect the beastkin. Both Zeu, who was worried about his sister, and Shia, who dreamed of loftier pursuits without facing reality, lacked such heartlessness. *And yet, both Zeu and Shia were given trials by Muza himself. Is dueling the Beast King one of those trials, maybe?*

Muza’s Children with Claim to the Throne Competing to Become Beast King

Beku, the eldest son (Beast Crown Prince)
Zeu, the second son
Shia, the youngest child

“But Your Majesty—”

“Your behavior is appalling, Zeu,” Muza replied. “You’ve been tamed by not only that impertinent human, but even by the Empire of Baukis and the Central Continent. Your shallow-mindedness has only led you to misunderstandings.”

Muza was aware that Zeu was lauded as a hero for having cleared the Rank S dungeon in Baukis and having fought the Demon Lord Army on the Central Continent, alongside the Ten Heroic Beasts. The Beast Prince was seen as a friendly force. If Zeu let all that go to his head, he could never become the Beast

King.

“That’s not the case,” Zeu replied.

“Then why don’t you step into the ring?” Muza challenged. “If you think you can do better than Shia, then by all means, face me.”

He approached his daughter, who was struggling to get back up.

“What?! Me?!” Zeu asked.

“That’s right,” Muza replied. “If you defeat me, you shall be the next Beast King. Surely, this is the fastest route to save Shia’s life?”

His massive hand grabbed Shia’s head, and he slowly lifted her in the air. The Beast Princess’s back, waist, knees, and then her toes were raised off the floor to float above the arena.

“Brother, I ask that you don’t interfere,” Shia said from within Muza’s grasp. “I must overcome the Beast King. This…is still my fight!”

She raised her arm and grabbed her father’s. But a single swing of Muza’s arm allowed him to shake her off as she dangled in the air. She was helpless within her father’s grasp, and she no longer had the power to fight back.

“What will you do, Zeu?” Muza asked. “Will you fight? Or will you allow Shia to perish before your eyes?”

Though he understood the Beast King’s ultimatum, Zeu’s legs refused to move.

“Clearly, I’ve overestimated you,” Muza spat. He raised his other arm in the air and made a large fist, preparing to hammer a deadly blow into Shia’s body.

“Grr… L-Let go,” Shia muttered, but her voice made it clear that she no longer had any strength left.

“I-I challenge you…” Zeu stammered as he placed a hand on the arena ring and prepared to climb on top.

“You bastard!” From beside Allen, a loud voice filled the arena. “Leave Shia alone!”

“Who the hell are you?” Muza asked, turning toward the voice.

“Didn’t you hear me?! Let go of her, dammit!”

A young man with a bumpkin face trembled with anger as he stepped into the ring. That young man, Dogora, stomped toward the Beast King, glaring at the monarch with bloodshot eyes. It seemed he could no longer sit back and watch after seeing Shia get absolutely clobbered. He cared not about ranks or claims to

the throne—there was something more important to him. But even as Dogora stormed his way over, Muza refused to move. The two scowled at each other, the air between them crackling as they did.

“Do you know what it means to stand before me?” Muza asked.

“I do. No father should raise a hand against their daughter,” Dogora growled.

Dogora’s father was a taciturn man. Every day and night, he continued to toil away in his weapons store. The man was honest to a fault, and not once had he ever scolded his son. In fact, he had never made any comments about the boy’s decisions or actions whatsoever. Dogora had done as he had pleased, and his father had never butted in. However, when he had mentioned that he wanted a weapon one day, the next morning, a club made out of a freshly carved log lay by his pillow. That was the kind of person Dogora’s father was. Thus, the young man could never stand by and watch as a father hit his daughter, no matter the reason.

“Ah, you’re the one with the Blessing of the Goddess of Fire,” Muza said, recalling the results that he had seen earlier. He released Shia from his grip, and Dogora managed to catch her before she fell to the ground.

“Don’t…butt in…” Shia croaked, her vision blurry from the pain as she looked up at Dogora.

“No can do,” Dogora replied. “I can’t just sit around and watch my party member get punched.”

He whirled around, shocking everyone present so much that they all gulped nervously. No fool would dare turn their back to the terrifying Beast King. But contrary to their expectations, Muza did not move a muscle. He silently gazed at Dogora’s back as the boy slowly made his way to the edge of the ring, then jumped down and headed back to his party.

“Keel, could you heal her?” Dogora asked.

“Got it. All Heal,” Keel chanted.



Sophie and Krena carefully laid the limp Shia down as Keel cast his magic. Dogora turned his back on the healed Beast Princess and stared at the ring while removing his armor.

"Don't do this, Dogora," Helmios said. "You'll die. I'm pretty sure the Beast King went easy on Miss Shia."

Dogora ignored the Hero's warnings and removed his bracelets and rings.

"Don't worry. I won't die," Dogora said.

Helmios watched as the young Destroyer, the upper half of his body naked, walked back into the ring.

"Mr. Helmios, did you lose to the Beast King in this same arena?" Allen asked.

"That's right," Helmios replied. "Shouldn't you be more concerned about your friend?"

"And the Beast King didn't have any equipment, I take it?"

"None. I was wearing orichalcum armor and using an orichalcum weapon, and I still didn't stand a chance against him."

"Did you use any of your skills?"

"No, I didn't go that far. One of us would've *actually* died."

Didn't you use them at the Academy? No, wait, he only used one skill, and he probably held back. Having witnessed the battle between Shia and the Beast King, Allen understood why Helmios had stated that the Beast Princess would not leave unscathed.

"Truth be told, I also tried to unequip myself, just like Dogora has done," Helmios said with a wry smile. "But the emperor told me to refrain from doing so. Still, it was a completely one-sided match. I was beaten to a pulp. But at least I'm alive to tell the tale. I decided to offer Dogora the same courtesy and give him a warning."

Allen posed a question that he had meant to ask for a while. "Can you Analyze the Beast King?"

The Hero had the Analyze skill, but he shook his head. "Nope. In fact, I can't fully Analyze you or Dogora either."

Oh? That means…

All the while, Dogora had entered the ring and now proudly stood in front of Muza, who was glaring at the boy.

"You're friends with that insolent human, aren't you?" Muza murmured. "I thought you had potential, so it's truly a pity."

"Huh? What're you on about?" Dogora asked.

"No matter. I shall allow you a free hit on me as well."

“Yeah?”

Dogora raised his fist, clenching it so hard that one could hear his muscles creaking, and buried it deep into the Beast King’s stomach with all his might.

“Hngh?!” Muza grunted through gritted teeth. He was in more pain than he had expected.

Suddenly, the Beast King swung back. His massive fist pounded Dogora from the side, blowing the young boy back. Muza did not so much as glance at the spot where Dogora had landed a few meters away.

“I suppose you haven’t received the Blessing of the Goddess of Fire for nothing,” the Beast King said.

Dogora turned his head to the side and spat out some blood, along with a single white tooth that rolled across the arena floor.

“All right, this makes us even,” the Destroyer said. He cracked his neck a few times as though he had just finished his warm-up, then charged at the Beast King.

“You cheeky little…” Muza growled. He stepped forward and received Dogora’s charge with his fist.

As the two exchanged punches, an explosive boom echoed throughout the arena. A large shadow and a much smaller one were exchanging a flurry of blows. Sharp jabs and heavy kicks were coupled with swinging elbows as their feet sliced through the air. The two fighters continued to pummel each other like two tornadoes clashing violently.

While the audience members all held their breaths at the awesome sight of the two displaying their skills and fighting prowess, Allen observed the two’s movements closely. *Hmm? Looks like the Beast King has slightly higher stats. That’s giving him the advantage. His Attack and Agility are both higher than Dogora’s. This is gonna be a tough match.*

Dogora could damage the Beast King with every punch he landed, but as time went on, they became less and less accurate. It looked as though neither he nor Muza had budged an inch since the initial punch, but they both refused to back down.

The Beast King moved quickly, frequently changing his positions and twisting his upper body while precisely defending attacks with his legs. He parried any kicks with his shins and blocked Dogora’s fists with the backs of his hands. Gradually, Muza was learning how to avoid direct hits. He must have had Fist Mastery and Sparring like Shia, making him suited to close

combat.

Dogora, on the other hand, had no such skills. The Beast King's attacks were all landing, and the damage was building up. His stamina was being chipped away as his movements grew slower, making it harder for him to evade. Meanwhile, one of his punches was dodged, and he received a counter to his stomach.

"Gh?!" Dogora grunted as he fell to his knees. His face twisted with pain, but he gritted his teeth and endured it all.

"What's wrong? Done already?" Muza asked. He stayed in a fighting stance, but he paused and gazed down at the young man.

"Shut up," Dogora said as he rose to his feet while mumbling to himself. "I was just remembering something... I get it now."

"If you had remained down, I'm sure you would have been able to walk away with your life," Muza said.

Dogora remained silent and prepared to fight once more.

"You've got courage, I'll give you that," the Beast King praised. "It's a shame you're friends with that impertinent human, but... Hmph!"

He suddenly threw a right hook, catching Dogora off guard.

"Gah?!"

It was the Beast King who groaned with pain. Dogora had dodged the attack and firmly planted his fist into Muza's stomach.



Dogora was not a prodigy like Krena, who rarely thought while fighting and acted purely on instinct. He was not equipped with useful information from his previous life like Allen either. However, he was nothing if not diligent. He had taken the lessons he had learned at the Academy to heart and had loyally followed the advice he had received from Dverg in the Rank S dungeon. The young Destroyer practiced everything he had learned daily. While he might have been a normal child who possessed no special gifts, thanks to his desire to become a hero, he solemnly absorbed everything that he was taught and mastered all that he learned one step at a time.

I see. This is how he shines. He probably has more Endurance than Muza anyway. An armed warrior like Dogora could not hope to nimbly dodge every attack that came his way. Instead, he had to tank them to a certain degree and use any openings that his opponents showed to launch counters. Naturally, those counters had to be powerful enough to make his foes flinch, stopping them from continuing their assault.

Unbeknownst to Allen, Dogora had received those training tips from Dverg. If that type of attack went well, Dogora could negate not only his opponent's attacks but also deal good damage as well, just as he had done to Muza.

Of course, for this tactic to succeed, one would need to receive their opponent's blows, exercise unyielding determination to wait for an opening, and be keen enough to take advantage of every opportunity. Dogora had lacked attentiveness until now and was attempting to master it in his battle against Muza.

"What's wrong? Done already?" Dogora asked, looking up at Muza.

"You brazen little..." Muza grunted. "You think you've won with a single punch?!"

The Beast King used his knee to attack, and Dogora crossed his arms in front of himself to defend, just as he had predicted. Another round of relentless kicks and punches started, but the Beast King was the one of the offensive. Dogora could only use his Endurance to brace himself against the barrage. When the Beast King finally took a breather and stepped back to launch an uppercut, Dogora headbutted his fist with all his might. Muza did not have enough force behind his punch, and it was knocked back, his body twisting to expose his side. Dogora threw a hook

straight for that opening.

"Gah!" Muza gasped as a globule of blood escaped his lips. His organs were crying out in pain.

The Beast King finally fell onto his bottom. Meanwhile, Dogora remained standing, blood dripping from a deep gash in his forehead.

"How d'you like that?" Dogora said, gazing down at the Beast King.

Muza looked up at him. "It's preposterous for a Beast King to receive mercy from a human…"

Game, set, and match. This is totally in Extra Mode territory though. Are Beast Kings in Extra Mode? Allen tried to gauge Muza's Status. While the Beast King's level was unknown, he had been able to stand his ground for a while against Dogora without the use of any weapons or armor. That would have been impossible were he in Normal Mode.

Helmios's Analyze skill did not allow him to see any stat increases that one gained from Blessings, Extra Mode, or Hell Mode. Furthermore, he had mentioned that he could not Analyze Demonic Deities at all. *Merus did mention that Rank A Summons can't Analyze Rank S monsters or Demonic Deities, so that checks out.*

"I'm not showing any mercy or anything," Dogora said. "But if we keep at it, it'll be tough for Shia."

"For Shia?" Muza asked.

"Yeah. You're her father, but you can't even understand how she might feel. Shia's bound to leave you one day too. She just wants you to know that—"

"N-No!" Muza shouted as he leaped to his feet. "That's the one thing that I mustn't allow! I won't allow Shia to leave! She will never receive my permission to do so!"

Suddenly, the Beast King's body grew larger, and his fur and snout grew longer. He took the form of a colossal, bipedal lion. Allen had seen Zeu and Shia do something similar before—this was Muza's Beast Mode. *Huh? He's gonna use that now?*

"Grrrr! I won't lose! I *cannot* lose!" the Beast King roared. He pounced, throwing another punch, and Dogora was launched to the edge of the ring.

"Gah!" Dogora grunted. He had bounced thrice and managed to get up, but his arms were bent at impossible angles.

The Beast King got down on all fours and charged. He opened

his mouth and clamped it shut, hoping to crush the Destroyer's head within his jaws. Dogora managed to dodge the attack in the nick of time and fled to the edge of the ring, but he had depleted his stamina during the earlier battle. His movements were sluggish, and he had no hope of escaping the massive reach of the Beast King. Muza raised his massive paw, equipped with sharp talons, and tried to swing it down.

"What the *hell* are you doing?!" Allen shouted from right next to Muza's ear. "At this point, you're just trying to hurt Dogora's resolve! Drop dead!"

He swung at the back of Muza's head, and the Beast King was blown into the middle of the ring.

"Gah?!" Muza cried.

Allen was floating where Muza once stood.

"Hey..." Dogora said.

"Tag out," Allen replied. "Switch with me, Dogora. I'll take care of this guy."

All right, let's start round three. Allen prepared to fight after Shia and Dogora, ignoring the shock that ran through the crowd and floating down onto the arena floor. There was no sense of justice to his actions. One could say that he had cheated as he had launched a surprise attack at the Beast King, who had been using Beast Mode on a tattered Dogora. But Allen did not mind being thought of that way.

Everyone had seen how, despite having known he was the underdog, Dogora had walked into the match against Muza without any gear. The boy had fought fair and square. In fact, it was Muza who had broken the rules—his own rules—and used one of his skills to go in for the kill. This was no longer a fair fight, and Muza was now an enemy of the No-life Gamers.

"I'm not gonna carry you like a princess, Dogora," Allen said.

"Hey?!" the Destroyer cried.

Allen grabbed Dogora's ankle and flung the battered, bumpkin-faced boy into the audience—straight toward Helmios. As he had anticipated, the Hero caught Dogora and cast healing magic on him. Once his friend's safety was assured, Allen took to the air again and folded his arms while gazing down at the Beast King.

"We're still doing this, yeah?" Allen asked.

Muza's face was filled with rage and his fur stood on end. The man was basically a massive lion now. "Graaar! I'll never hand

Shia over to audacious humans!”

The Beast King jumped into the air, hoping to tear Allen to shreds with his claws. The Summoner had already changed his cards in his holder from MP-boosting ones to ones focused on Attack. He swung his adamantite sword while boasting over 20,000 Attack.

“Hmph!” Allen grunted.

“Grah?!” Muza cried as his claws shattered.

Once the two clashed, Muza immediately jumped back. Much like his fist, which had sustained damage from Dogora’s headbutt, his shattered claws regenerated immediately thanks to his Beast Mode healing. Naturally, Allen had no intention of fighting fairly against an opponent like that. He had borrowed Krena’s Holy Orb and was wearing a necklace that raised his Attack by 3,000. He also had two rings that raised his Attack and Agility by 5,000 each. His armor had been switched to the kind suited for middle guards, which he had found in silver chests in the Rank S dungeon. It had good Endurance while remaining balanced enough for him to move in as he pleased.

His Attack and Agility were around 25,000, while his HP and Endurance were over 10,000. In addition, he was receiving the buffs from his Rank A Summons, using as many of them as he could. His critical rate was increased thanks to his Beast A, and he had Flight due to his Bird A. He also took less damage thanks to his Stone A, and his Spirit A made him more resistant to physical attacks. He had put cards into his holder in such a way as to give him the largest possible advantage against a single opponent since unlike stat-boosting buffs, the ones that granted him new powers did not stack. He had even had Keel cast a spell that increased his Endurance.

Beast Mode Muza was no match for this Allen. The Summoner was landing hit after hit. However, as Helmios was healing Dogora, he noticed that Shia, who was watching the fight, looked to be on the verge of tears.

“Allen, I think you’ve gone a bit too far this time,” Helmios muttered.

But the Summoner did not hear those words and continued to float around in Muza’s blind spots and stab him with his adamantite sword. When the Beast King was about to turn on his back, Allen grabbed his head and slammed him into the ground.

KABOOM!

A deafening sound filled the arena, and the thick floor tiles shattered. Dust and stone fragments danced in the air. Just how much power did one need to be able to exert such destructive force? None of the representatives could tell.

A circular indentation had formed in the ring, and the Beast King faced the skies with haggard breath, unable to get up. Allen floated above him.

"What now? Will you accept that we've won?" Allen asked. "We" implied Dogora and Shia as well.

Though the Beast King was indeed powerful, he was no match for the Summoner if he went all out. *In any case, I didn't think the Beast King would be this strong. A family that's produced Rank S adventurers isn't to be taken lightly.*

Allen had once been told by Makkaron that there were Rank S adventurers other than Bask in the past. A number of Rank S adventurers had come from the Albahal royal family. Muza was a Rank A adventurer, but the previous Beast King, Yoze, had been a part of the Rank S adventurer party. In fact, Makkaron, who had been questioned by Regalfaras earlier, had been the leader of a Rank S adventurer party known as Majestic.

As Allen was lost in his thoughts, he heard the Beast King mutter below him.

"Total Beast Mode."

"What?" Allen said. Before he could react, the Beast King jumped in the air.

"Graaaaar!" Muza roared.

He turned to the heavens as his body transformed once more. His body, which had been enlarged by Beast Mode, grew larger still. His joints started to shift, and he could no longer stand on two feet. His arms became front legs to support the full weight of his body, and his neck, waist, and head all changed form so that he could walk on all fours. When his transformation was complete, a titanic, golden lion stood gloriously in the arena. He looked up at Allen in the skies and let out a mighty roar.

"Roooooaaar!"

Hmm? Is this the third form that unleashes the true power of the Beast King? I think Shia mentioned that only the Beast King could enter Total Beast Mode. Allen flew higher, assuming he was safe as he examined the beast from above. But in a flash, the lion approached him, and he froze in astonishment for a moment.

Because Muza was now even larger and quadrupedal, his jumping power was higher than ever. Allen had failed to notice that, and the Beast King furiously slashed at the air with incredible speed, his long claws shredding the Summoner.

"Huh?! Gah!" Allen gasped.

He managed to use his arms to protect himself, but they were shredded, and fresh blood flew as he was knocked backward. *I even used my skills, but I've taken so much damage.* Allen had used Fish B's Turtle Shield along with its Awakened Ability, Turtle Barrier, to decrease the amount of damage dealt to him. Even so, he had been unable to block the attack and had taken heavy damage. He tried to use Flight to hastily move to the side as he careened through the air, but the Beast King was already beside him.

"Graaar!"

Muza swiftly swiped at the Summoner, knocking him down. The boy's body changed directions too quickly for Flight to slow him down, and he slammed into the ground, creating a circular crack all around him. When Muza tried to peer at the boy, an adamantite sword cut through the air, aimed squarely at the lion's face.

"Take this!" Allen shouted as he charged at the Beast King.

A loud metallic sound rang out, and Allen was thrown into the air once more. *His fur's so tough!* The sword had been deflected by the fur under Muza's chin, and as the Beast King had looked away, Allen had been launched upward by the force of his thrust.

When Allen came to a stop in midair, Muza looked up at him and smirked. A ferocious battle ensued. The fight was so terrifying that it could no longer be called a friendly match—it was a battle through and through. Both Allen and Muza were working to defeat the other as swiftly as possible, aiming for each other's vital areas. With every clash, the ring shattered just a little more. Both parties were trying to land fatal blows, but none could be called decisive. Though Allen had a sword, he had no skills to use with it, and Muza was too strong to be defeated without them. *This is insane. I've gotta make Shia the Beast King! I have to!*

His lips curled into a grin. He had successfully recruited golem pilots and magic tool users from Baukis, but he knew that Shia, who had the blood of Muza and his family flowing through her veins, could unleash far greater power than even them. If she

became the Beast King, just how much more powerful would the No-life Gamers become? Allen was excited by the thought.

Only through a series of coincidences had Allen ended up in this fight against Muza—a battle in which he was using everything he had to gauge the monarch's strength. However, because it had taught him what a huge asset to his party Shia had the potential to become, the Summoner determined that attending this conference had been worth his time. He could not suppress a smile as he tried to think of ways to calm the Beast King.

"Stop already!" Meruru cried. She used her massive hihiirokane golem to get in between the two.

"Whoa?!" Allen exclaimed in surprise.

"Allen, look around you!" Helmios, who was standing by the golem's feet, shouted.

"Huh?"

The Summoner glanced around and saw that the ring had been completely eviscerated. The audience stands had also been gouged out and destroyed. He quickly searched for the nation's representatives, hoping that they were safe, and spotted a group evacuating the arena.

"Eek! H-He's looking at us!" one cried as they locked eyes with Allen.

Screams echoed. Everyone was a good distance away, but they were afraid that they might get attacked. They all feared Allen. He was still in a daze when he noticed Muza's massive body shrink before his eyes. The Beast King's joints shifted once more, and both his fur and his snout grew shorter as he became smaller.

He's so small now. As Allen gazed down, Shia approached the Beast King lying atop the remnants of the destroyed arena and offered him a red cloak. He took it, and they began chattering, though Allen could not hear them.

"Your Majesty, please be ready for Shia and her squad to support the Allen Army," the Summoner said.

But Muza did not even glance his way.

"Oh, Mia. Even Shia will leave my side now," Muza muttered. "I have..."

He glanced at Shia and walked away, stepping over the debris as he wrapped the cloak around his shoulders. *I guess this fight's over for now. He honestly comes off as a clumsy, stubborn father to*

me.

Muza refused to look at Allen as he left. It seemed that he would not raise any more issues. And given that Allen did not plan to gloat, he also made to leave. Surely, someone from Giamut would clean up this mess.

After a short while, he decided to return to the conference room, remembering that the meeting was not over yet. While the leaders of the conference, including Muza, had gathered, not all of the representatives of the other nations were present. They had fled during the fight and had not returned. Allen entered just as Lenoatiil was voicing her opinion.

"With that much power, they can serve as a reserve corps in our fight against the Demon Lord Army," she said. The implication was that she wanted to allow Allen and his army to do as they pleased.

"Hmph..."

Regalfaras sounded grumpy. *Is he angry that we just destroyed his arena?*

"Oho, indeed," Pupun said. "Why don't we allow the Allen Army to do as they wish and have them team up with the Five Continent Alliance during battles?"

Baukis had been relieved of the duty of keeping tabs on the Allen Army and would be receiving slates to strengthen its golem army. Nothing else mattered to Pupun.

"I-I'd assume there are no issues with that," Holanoroy stammered cautiously. "We of the Crevelle Kingdom are well aware of the power Sir Allen possesses."

The Beast King did not utter a single word. He merely kept his eyes closed with his arms folded in front of him. Perhaps he was willing to accept everything without giving any input.

"I thank you for your cooperation," Allen said, assuming that the conversation was about him. "Unfortunately, Demonic Deities have far more power than what I've just shown you. I'd imagine the Demon Lord is above even that."

I didn't use my Summons, though. The stronger he grew, the more he came to realize that he was weaker than Rehzel and Lycaoron had been before their transformations.

The Five Continent Alliance leaders fell silent, either surprised that Allen had interjected or stunned by what he had just said. Not many had seen the Demonic Deities' powers with their own eyes, including the leaders present at this conference. Their

silence led Allen to believe that the meeting had ended, and because of that, he did not notice Sophie glance at the queen of Rohzenheim, who gave a small nod.

"As there are no voices of dissent, we of the Five Continent Alliance shall form friendly ties with the Allen Army," Lenoatiil announced before turning to the Summoner. "Now then, Lord Allen. As the representative of the Allen Army, what shall we call you?"

"Huh? Pardon?" Allen asked.

"You will represent the Allen Army, a group that is willing to cooperate with the Five Continent Alliance. How would you like to be addressed? I believe this is essential if we are to continue our friendly relationship."

Uh, does she mean like a title or something? Should I have a title within the Allen Army? Allen had not thought about that—he just wanted to be a representative of the Allen Army and Hardcore User Island. But he would need to compromise just a little and work as a team with the Five Continent Alliance.

"Could I think about it for a while?" Allen asked as he glanced at his party.

"Then how does 'Commander in Chief' sound?" Lenoatiil suggested. "You'll be Commander in Chief Allen."

Hmm? Isn't commander in chief a higher rank than grand marshal and admiral? A guy who's in charge of a measly five-thousand-man army is a commander in chief? From lowest to highest, rank order went: general, field marshal, admiral, and grand marshal. Allen believed that a commander in chief ranked above that. He felt that he was more suited to be a field marshal at best.

Admiral Garara had been granted his rank because he led the golem pilots of the Baukis Navy, and Siguul had been named grand marshal because he commanded Rohzenheim's elven army. A commander in chief outranked them both. Moreover, only an emperor outranked a commander in chief, making it seem like Allen was in charge of the entire Five Continent Alliance army. In truth, Allen did not care, and he glanced at his party.

"Sure, why not?" Cecil said.

"A perfect title for you, Lord Allen!" Sophie said, clutching her hands in front of her chest.

"All right then," Allen said, unable to find a reason to refuse.

“Since no one’s complaining, I will become the commander in chief of the Allen Army.”

And so, after fighting the Beast King, destroying an arena, and obtaining a new title, Allen’s first Five Continent Alliance conference drew to a close.

Chapter 6: Pelomas the Merchant's Profession of Love

Five days had passed since the meeting with the Five Continent Alliance. Allen, Cecil, and Pelomas were currently at the Granvelle City magistrate's manor. Coincidentally, it was also where Allen had lived while serving as a manservant of House Granvelle before leaving for the Academy. The magistrate was seeing the trio off at the manor's porte cochere.

"Please send Viscount Granvelle my regards, Lady Cecil," the current magistrate, a man in his forties, said politely. He had not been around when Allen was a manservant, but he was apparently a relative of Viscountess Granvelle. Allen had been told as much at dinner the evening prior, which they had eaten in the manor.

"Of course. I shall be off," Cecil replied.

The magistrate turned to the nearby coachman. "Rickel, take good care of Lady Cecil."

"Of course," Rickel replied.

Rickel had been the head manservant when Allen was still working there. He had taught Allen all sorts of things, both good and bad, and had taken very good care of the Summoner. Allen was happy to reunite with his old friend, who was walking toward the stable to fetch a carriage.

"Good grief, Pelomas!" Cecil said wearily. "You should see the look on your face."

Pelomas had a stern and terrified expression. "Well, I was rejected once."

"That's what we're here for. Don't worry. I know Fiona very well, so I'm sure I can handle her." She puffed her chest out proudly to reassure Pelomas and slapped him on the back.

"Wha— Ow! All right, all right," Pelomas said.



As he grumbled in response, he steeled himself to ask out Fiona, the daughter of wealthy inn owner Chester. He had been rejected once, and this would be his second attempt. Allen had been told that the reason for the rejection was Pelomas not being a strong man like Fiona wanted, but since then, he had received his class promotion and raised his levels in the dungeon.

Despite having grown stronger, he was still shy and hesitant, and it was making Cecil impatient. She had claimed that she would offer her assistance and pushed the merchant to visit Fiona once more. Since Allen was familiar with Cecil and Fiona's relationship, he was asked to tag along as well. Thus, the trio boarded the carriage led by Rickel and headed for Chester's luxury inn, located in the middle of Granvelle City's square.

"Allen, do you think my outfit looks okay?" Pelomas asked nervously. He was wearing clothes made by a famous tailor in the royal capital.

"Yeah, you look great," Allen replied absentmindedly. He was too busy using his Seeds of Magic.

Don't know, don't care. We're gonna be at Fiona's soon anyway. Allen could wear powerful gear without a care in the world. Quite frankly, he did not see the difference between this outfit and Pelomas's usual attire. Watching the merchant restlessly rustle around, fixing his collar and sleeves, he thought, *The clothes don't make the man. You're still the same old you.*

"Don't worry, you look great!" Cecil encouraged him. "You look like the son of a merchant who stumbled upon a small fortune!"

"I-I feel like you're not really complimenting me..." Pelomas mumbled.

Just then, the carriage creaked to a stop.

"Lady Cecil, we've arrived," Rickel said, opening the carriage door.

"Ah, thank you," Cecil replied. "You've become more serious about your job."

"Oh, my lady! I'm always hard at work, diligently toiling away!"

"Sure, sure. Of course."

Cecil, like everyone who worked at House Granvelle, knew that Rickel had the tendency to ditch work at times and was irredeemably lazy. She ordered him to head back, and after watching the carriage leave, the trio headed into the luxurious lodging.

A middle-aged man dressed in a luxurious, neat outfit approached Pelomas and Cecil. The man, who seemed to be the manager of the inn, personally guided the group to the highest floor, where Chester was awaiting them. The wealthy inn master was clearly looking forward to their visit. When they entered his room, he outstretched his arms and flashed a bright smile, exuding a welcoming atmosphere.

"Thank you for coming, Lady Cecil, Pelomas," Chester said.

"Why, thank you. You seem to be doing well," Cecil replied.

Chester was not familiar with Allen, and the Summoner was treated like a piece of decor. However, a certain lady had noticed his presence.

"Master Allen!" Fiona cried. She emerged from behind her father, Chester, her golden locks flowing loosely below her ears. She was enveloped in a luxurious white dress with gold embroidery, her beauty on full display. "Oh, and hi, Cecil. I see you're here too."

"It's been a while, Fiona," Cecil replied. "Yes, I'm here too."

Cecil, Allen, Pelomas, and Fiona were all the same age. Allen had once saved Fiona from a murdergalsh that was attacking Granvelle City. He had received gold coins as a reward, and he had used them to purchase a mithril sword, which had given him the strength to hunt and easily pierce the tough shells of armored ants. He had farmed quite a few magic stones from the Rank C monsters.

It had been five years since then. *Time really flies. I heard Pelomas met Fiona around that time.*

Chester guided Cecil and Pelomas to a table in the drawing room. Allen and Cecil sat on either side of Pelomas, sandwiching him. Across the table, Chester sat opposite Pelomas, and Fiona chose the seat opposite Allen's. The servants brought in tea, and cups and saucers were placed in front of everyone.

"Sir Pelomas, I trust that your business is booming," Chester started. He spoke politely, like he had done with Cecil.

"Um, M-Mr. Chester? As I've said before, there's no need for you to call me 'sir,'" Pelomas stammered. "You don't need to flatter me."

"What in the world are you saying? Sir Pelomas, you have brought all my luxury inns under your company's umbrella. I'm fully aware that a merchant should be respected not for their age but for the business they've done."

Though Pelomas had reached adulthood, he was still rather young, and he was bound to have many more subordinates and employees in the future. It was imperative that those around him understood just how impressive his accomplishments were.

Chester had opened a luxury inn business, and not a single location had closed down before being bought out by the Pelomas Whaling Company. The shrewd businessman had done a lot in his life, including having contributed more to Granvelle City's development than anyone else. Chester treating Pelomas with respect implied that he was entrusting the boy with supporting the economy of Granvelle City.

Chester had been renowned as a wealthy merchant and successful inn master within Ratash. However, he had been bought out by Pelomas, as the boy had wanted to prove his worth as a merchant. That was the condition he had been given in order to be allowed to court Chester's daughter. To that end, he had aggressively worked to amass enough wealth to purchase the inns, and the Pelomas Whaling Company now had control of every single inn within Granvelle City, save for the first, highest-ranking inn that Chester had established. With Chester working under the Pelomas Whaling Company, he continued to run the other inns as he had before.

"Master Allen, I thank you for coming today," Fiona said. "May I ask what relationship you have with Pelomas?"

"We were both born in Krena Village, and we're the same age. We used to play knights as kids," Allen replied.

When Dogora had served as the leader of the kids, he had dragged Pelomas along whenever they had decided to play around. Fiona, who had been blessed with wealth and power from birth, was a force to be reckoned with in Granvelle City because of her money. She had often taken the opportunity to visit the Granvelle manor when Allen was still a manservant. Her visits had become especially frequent after Allen had saved her from the murdergalsh, but even she was not aware of his ties with Pelomas.

"Is that so?" Fiona said. "And what have you been doing?"

"Ah, well, I've been working with Cecil and Pelomas on some things..." Allen replied. He thought the topic of the Allen Army might be a touch too violent for this situation, so he remained vague about it while mentioning that he was helping out with the Pelomas Whaling Company. *Uh, I need you to speak with*

Pelomas, not me.

"Hey, Fiona!" Cecil said. "We're not here so you can chat with Allen."

"Oh my," Fiona replied. "You still choose to get in the way of conversations between Master Allen and me?"

The two exchanged crackling glares as Pelomas shifted awkwardly in his seat beside Cecil. Meanwhile, Chester glanced wearily at his daughter next to him. The two ladies had been on bad terms ever since Allen was a manservant at the manor. Cecil, who might not have had money at the time, was still the daughter of a noble. Conversely, though Fiona had all the wealth in the world, she was the child of a commoner. They kept trying to one-up each other.

When Pelomas had told Allen that he was going to ask Fiona for her hand once more, Cecil had agreed to go with him as an act of support. Allen had gotten the sneaking suspicion that the conversation between the girls would quickly derail, so he had decided to tag along as well. His concerns had been proven true, but he was not here to indulge in nostalgia while Cecil and Fiona fought.

"Pelomas, staying silent will get you nowhere," Allen said, finding his chance. "Why don't you say a few words."

"R-Right," Pelomas said. "F-Fiona..."

Fiona glared at him. "What is it now?"

Is this not a lost cause? I feel like we should just take the L here. Based on Fiona's attitude, it seemed impossible for Pelomas to convey his feelings to her, and Allen felt like the boy should move on to another woman. But Pelomas could no longer back down. His face turned bright red as he gazed into Fiona's eyes.

"P-Please go out with me!" he cried.

It was an impressive display of iron will, and he clearly did not want to date anyone but Fiona. However, Fiona was just as stubborn as he was, if not more.

"I firmly rejected you the other day!" Fiona shouted. "I like strong men! I have told you as much, and if you still choose to try to woo me, I shall take it as you ignoring my feelings! I will *never* fall in love with a man who shows no consideration toward my thoughts!"

Allen decided that any chance Pelomas had with her was gone now. *That's that, I guess. I'll take him out to a good restaurant or something today. I hope there's one near our base at the Rank S*

dungeon.

"Fiona, I've told you many times just how impressive of a company Sir Pelomas has built," Chester said. He was accepting of Pelomas and Fiona forming a relationship and had told his daughter about Pelomas's capabilities as a merchant.

The boy owned the second-largest company in Ratash and ranked eighty-seventh in the world in terms of annual earnings. He had accomplished all this in a few short years, and Chester intuited that Pelomas had room for even more growth.

As a merchant himself, Chester could properly assess both a product's value and a person's character. Because he had confidence in his skills, he had clawed his way up to his current position. He was also aware that Allen and Cecil had played a role in helping the Pelomas Whaling Company get established and grow. That only improved his view of the boy.

A merchant certainly could not grow all by themself. Friends, relationships, and the rest of their network had to be utilized to the fullest to become established as a merchant. Chester was no exception to that rule. He wanted Fiona and Pelomas to form a close relationship so that his own company could grow as well. He had chosen to be here because he had expected his daughter to reject the boy and knew that he could not change her stubborn mindset alone. He cast a surreptitious glance at Allen.

Hey, I can't do anything about this. Allen could not make the situation better for Chester. He knew that nobles married one another purely out of rank and title in this world. However, as his values were unchanged from his previous life, he wanted everyone to freely choose who they loved. If Fiona was unwilling to reciprocate Pelomas's feelings, there was nothing Allen could do.

"Father, have *you* forgotten what I've told you many times before?" Fiona asked sharply.

The more Chester tried to convince his daughter how impressive Pelomas was, the more steadfast she became.

"I've been going to dungeons, and I'll become powerful enough that you'll deem me worthy," Pelomas said. His words no longer made sense, but he could not stay silent.

"And I've told you that's not the point!" Fiona cried. "If you understand how I feel, you should at least refrain from seeing me until you become strong!"

"Fiona!" Cecil butt in. "You can't expect a merchant to become

strong! I know that you know that!”

“I—” Fiona shouted, louder than ever. Suddenly, she realized that she had attracted everyone’s attention, so she spoke in a quieter voice. “I know that…”

She was embarrassed about having lost her cool and calmed herself down.

“Besides, what does ‘a strong man’ even mean?” Cecil asked gently. “Strength comes in all different shapes and forms. Don’t tell me you’ll consider dating him if he manages to defeat a dragon by himself or something.”

“Huh? A dragon?” Fiona asked.

In truth, Pelomas was not Fiona’s type. Not one bit. She had just been trying to find a reason to reject him. She hesitated for a moment, wondering if Pelomas would give up on her if she made such a difficult request. Surely, no merchant could kill a dragon by himself.

Allen, oblivious to her thoughts, seemed to be enjoying this situation. *Nice going, Cecil!*

“Hey, Pelomas, you hear that?” he said. “Fiona might consider dating you if you manage to defeat a dragon by yourself. You think you can handle it?”

I’ll lend you the best gear and all that. Allen cast a knowing glance at Pelomas, hidden from Fiona’s view. The Summoner had farmed iron golems and obtained various weapons and armor. If he loaned out Krena’s Holy Orb of Rubanka and helped his friend farm the final floor boss of the Rank S dungeon as well, even Pelomas’s pitiful stats might increase. Perhaps even a merchant could defeat a dragon.

“A-A dragon by myself?” Pelomas said in astonishment. But he remained resolute. “If she’ll date me…”

“Huh?!” Fiona gasped. “Are you in your right mind?!”

“Well, it looks like Pelomas is up for the challenge,” Cecil said. “Are you, Fiona?”

“Very well,” Fiona said after a lengthy silence. “If he’s willing to go that far, I shall consider dating him after that accomplishment.”

Oh? Is that all it takes? It sounds to me like she doesn’t hate the idea too much. To Allen, it sounded as though Fiona did not hate Pelomas to an absurd extent. *Or maybe she’s just worried that Pelomas might die because of her.*

“Then it’s settled,” Cecil said. “Don’t worry, Pelomas. You’ve got

us on your side. We won't do anything when you fight the dragon. And when you kill it all by yourself, Fiona will consider dating you. Deal?"

With Allen by Pelomas's side, Fiona believed the merchant would be safe. She would not be able to sleep well at night if someone were to die because of her.

"V-Very well," Fiona said. "If he can truly defeat a dragon by himself..."

Guess we're done here. Allen planned on gathering his party later to discuss which dragon to tackle, along with tips on how Pelomas could face the monster alone.

"Hey, Cecil," Fiona said. "What's that on your arm?" She had taken notice of the Holy Orb of Macris.

Allen had been wearing it during the ride to this manor; the item had increased his MP so that he could farm skill experience more easily. But the moment he had stepped out of the carriage, Cecil had demanded it back.

"Oh? You've got a keen eye," Cecil said happily, sitting tall and proud. A huge smile stretched across her face. "I got this from Allen!"

"What?!" Chester cried. "Th-This is the fabled Holy Orb of Macris! You could buy a nation with one of these!"

Even one of the wealthiest men in Granvelle had never seen the precious item for himself.

"That's right," Cecil replied. "Do you know of the Crevelle Kingdom? It was in trouble, and Allen received this item from the princess as a token of gratitude for our service. Oh dear, and then he told me that I was most suitable for this bracelet..." She could not hide her smile as she gathered the attention of Fiona and Chester.

Wait, if you bring that up now... Fiona gazed intently at the Holy Orb of Macris, an item so precious that it would easily cost over several million gold coins. She had just learned that Cecil had received it for free. The Granvelle noble lady's expression made it clear that she was not lying, and a new thought popped into Fiona's head.

"I-I want a Tear of the Holy Fish Macris too!" she exclaimed as she stood up and clenched her fists. The deal about the dragon had flown right out the window.

In *Tales of the Prostia Empire,* the Holy Orb of Macris was introduced as the Tear of the Holy Fish Macris. Every woman

knew of this. *Yeah, called it.*

"Wait, what?! That wasn't the deal!" Cecil cried in disbelief.

"It is now," Fiona responded in a huff. "I want something better than what you have!"

The two ladies began bickering, a scene Allen was all too familiar with. He had seen it many times when he was a manservant, and he was also aware that Fiona usually came out on top during these arguments. Oftentimes, she would bring snacks that were difficult to procure even within the royal capital to the Granvelle manor while dressed in clothes far more lavish than anything Cecil could possibly afford.

Fiona had clearly done it to show off her wealth, and while it was understandable that Cecil had taken her chance to brag, doing so had only incited Fiona's sense of rivalry. Now, the wealthy lady wanted an item that was incredibly precious. Allen however, could not have cared less.

"What now, Pelomas? Wanna give up?" Allen asked.

The Pelomas Whaling Company had a gross revenue of 1.8 million gold coins, but its net profit was obviously much less. If Pelomas wanted to purchase a Holy Orb of Macris with nothing but the profits from his company, it would take several decades.

"No, I won't give up," Pelomas said as he solemnly exhaled through his nose. "For you, Fiona, I will get my hands on a Holy Orb of Macris."

Fiona shifted her gaze to Pelomas, but the boy did not look away. After she inquisitively peered at him for a good while, she took a deep breath and smiled.

"Very well," she relented. "If you're willing to go that far, Pelomas, I ask that you present me with a Tear of the Holy Fish Macris. If you do so, I shall consider becoming your bride."

Pelomas leaped out of his seat. "R-Really?!"

"Really."

"It's a promise! I promise to bring you one!"

"I shall look forward to it. However..."

"Yes?"

"As I mentioned earlier, I'd like one better than what Cecil has."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

To Pelomas, a Holy Orb was a Holy Orb. He was not sure if some were better than others. Neither Allen nor Cecil understood Fiona's words either.

"I'd like one touched by no one else but you," Fiona said.

Wait, what? So we can't buy it? Fiona had tacked an odd condition onto her request. Now, it sounded as though Pelomas would need to receive the item directly from Holy Fish Macris himself.

"That's just a fairy tale! You can't really expect to find him!" Cecil said.

Allen had never read this tale, but apparently, there was a scene where Holy Fish Macris had personally provided someone with a Tear.

"But it's the one point that I cannot concede," Fiona insisted. "What will you do, Pelomas? Will you give up on me?"

"Got it," Pelomas replied. "You want me to receive the item directly from Holy Fish Macris, right?"

"Precisely. You can do it, can't you?"

"I can. Because I love you, Fiona. I'll get one soon, so please wait for me."

Pelomas refused to surrender. His feelings had not changed since the day he first laid eyes on her.

"Then I suppose we should call it a day," Fiona said. "You certainly have no time to dawdle."

She stood up and left the drawing room without once turning back. After a bit more small talk, Allen, Cecil, and Pelomas left Chester's inn, using Bird A's Awakened Ability to teleport back to their base near the Rank S dungeon. No one was there. Krena and Dogora were busy farming iron golems, and Shia and Luke were trying to clear Rank A dungeons.

"Just so you know, th-this wasn't my fault!" Cecil said immediately after they teleported. She crossed her arms in front of her chest to take a defensive stance, expecting to be blamed for this outcome.

"No one said it was," Allen replied. *Though I'm certainly thinking it.*

"No, this is fine," Pelomas added. "I'm not sure if she really meant what she said, but if Fiona now claims that she'll consider marrying me, I think her view of me must have changed a little bit. And it's all thanks to you, Cecil, so thank you."

"Yeah? Well, okay then," Cecil replied, surprised by his response.

"But a Holy Orb of Macris that only Pelomas has touched? What does that even mean?" Allen asked.

"Oh, those kinds of stories are common."

Cecil proceeded to explain that people had differing opinions about *Tales of the Prostia Empire*. There were actually several continuations to the tale that had been written afterward. Most of them hinged on the fact that the legends from the book were indeed true and told of a character who visited Holy Fish Macris in order to prove their love to their partner. The character somehow managed to receive a Tear from Macris himself and returned to their beloved. *Ah, so it's like a sequel. I guess this world doesn't have copyright laws.*

"Wait, so to clear this quest, we can't purchase the item?" Allen wondered. "We have to get it from a drop?"

He recalled fetch quests from his previous life that had allowed him to purchase the requisite items at stores or through trading with other users. While the latter generally involved those who had gotten the items while clearing other quests or defeating enemies, some drops were untradeable. Only the user could handle them.

"Uh, yeah, something like that," Cecil replied, just barely managing to understand what Allen had said.

"Has there been anyone in the past who actually got one directly from the source?" Allen asked.

"I've never heard of it."

There was no precedent, but Pelomas was all fired up and raring to go. *I feel like Pelomas is kinda playing a different game than us here, but okay.* Allen had felt the same way about Meruru in the past.

"All right, first things first, let's ask Shia to act as our middleman and get visas for Prostia from the Crevelle Kingdom," Allen said.

"Wait, can you do that?" Pelomas asked.

"Depends on negotiations, probably."

In any case, Allen wanted to collect more Holy Orbs so that he could buff his entire party with them. He had to get in contact with the Prostia Empire sooner or later, and the opportunity to do so had just presented itself on a silver platter.

Chapter 7: The Completion of Hardcore User Island

The No-life Gamers assembled in the eastern region of Hardcore User Island. Today, they would accept the last of the refugees into the fourth town, Crey, and hold a brief ceremony to welcome them. It would take some time to set up, and the No-life Gamers had decided to take a small rest before the festivities.

"Shia, how are things going after your class promotion?" Allen asked. The Beast Princess had been acting separately for a while.

"No issues at all," Shia replied. "I'm focusing on clearing the dungeons, but it's going well."

Following the conference with the Five Continent Alliance, Shia had been working hard to level up her skills. Luke was with her, and the two of them had already met the requirements to enter the Rank S dungeon. She was now helping the dark elf boy level his skills too.

Looks like she's put a lot of things behind her, like what happened with the Beast King, Allen thought based on how casually she had answered his question.

The Beast Princess was tearing through dungeons, due in no small part to the assistance she was receiving from Allen's Summons. Pelomas, the elves, and even Thomas and Princess Leilana got the same help as they tackled dungeons at the Academy. Allen had told Shia, Luke, and Pelomas to focus on increasing their skill levels instead of their levels. A single iron golem would allow them to max out their levels, after all.

"Have talks of you becoming the Beast King gotten anywhere?" Allen inquired.

"Hmm? You mean about me succeeding the throne?" Shia replied. "I haven't the faintest clue. I can only trust that Rudo is doing his best with the nobles."

"Huh? But you overcame your trial, and you showed your resolve to the Beast King."

The Beast Princess finally understood Allen's thoughts. If she became Beast King, he believed that it would make his party

even stronger. There was no better route for him to take. That was the type of person he was.

As a Summoner, Allen was able to wield all sorts of unusual powers, giving him more choices than other classes when creating plans for battles. However, he was still far from perfect and omnipotent. He felt that he was stronger while in a party as opposed to when he was traveling solo and relying solely on his Summons. For that reason, he had created four towns on an island that would house fifteen thousand people in an effort to strengthen Dogora. He wanted to make Shia the Beast King to further bolster his party.

Shia was not able to figure out all of Allen's intentions, but she could sort of understand why he was willing to poke his nose into the affairs of Albahal's throne. If that was the case, she would use him where it benefited her and draw a line that he could not cross.

"I feel like I'm starting to understand you, Allen," Shia said. "This matter is between members of the Albahal royal family—between myself and His Majesty. You should not get involved. However, I will tell you that my father and the other ministers are discussing these matters as we speak."

Allen had dispatched his Bird-type Summons to gather information that he was interested in. He had no need to ask Shia about Albahal's current state, as he was already well aware of the situation.

Following the Five Continent Alliance conference, Beast King Muza had personally proclaimed to his ministers that they would start discussing his successor. Beast Prince Zeu had already cleared the Rank S dungeon, meaning he had completed the trial he had been given in order to gain claim to the throne. Then, while the Daemonism debacle in Elmahl had been going on, he had fought two consecutive battles in Rohzenheim and the Central Continent alongside the Ten Heroic Beasts, fending off the Demon Lord Army.

Next, there was Shia, who had earned her claim to the throne through a trial of her own: capturing Gushara, the Pontiff of Daemonism. When the followers of Daemonism had proceeded to run wild, she had received assistance from the No-life Gamers and ultimately defeated Gushara.

Lastly was Crown Beast Prince Beku. He, too, was a potential successor, having had his claim since before his two siblings had

been given their trials.

The new Beast King had to be chosen from among those three candidates, and discussions on the topic had only just started. The three candidates' past deeds, their characters, and their battles against the Demon Lord Army were all being taken into consideration. The Five Continent Alliance was still in a state of confusion, and with the future of the world at stake, Albahal had its own future to think about. *Since the two overcame their trials, I wonder if Temi's prediction has changed.*

Temi was a member of the Ten Heroic Beasts, the strongest organization of warriors in Albahal. She was also a Beast Astrologist in direct service to the country's king and had once divined that Beast Prince Zeu would become the Beast King. She had then ordered that Shia receive a trial on the continent where the Union was located. Allen wondered whose name would appear if Temi were to divine the future Beast King again.

"Listen, if we need to bribe nobles or ministers, I won't spare any expense," Allen said. *A throne can be stolen away if it's purchased. Politics revolve around money.*

Shia had two older brothers who were quite a bit older than her, and one was the crown prince. Allen assumed that there were not many ministers willing to support the Beast Princess in this situation. If money was needed to manipulate them as desired, he would not be stingy.

"Don't underestimate the power of the Pelomas Whaling Company," he added.

"Y-Yeah," Pelomas nodded in agreement. Secretly, though, the merchant was worried that the company he had worked so hard to grow for Fiona's sake would end up being used to suit Allen's needs.

"I see. I'll think about it," Shia replied a bit wearily to Allen's insolent attitude. Simultaneously, she was frustrated by how naive she was. Before she had met Allen, she had been set on becoming the Beast King and reaching greater heights—she had wanted to create the first empire by beastkin and for beastkin, and had been willing to use any method at her disposal. Unfortunately, she had not considered bribing ministers, and when Allen had casually mentioned the idea, she had realized how sheltered she still was.

Allen was contacting Shia via a magic tool set up in the Adventurer's Guild of the Rank S dungeon. Perhaps it was

audacious of him to use the Guild for personal purposes and do as he pleased, but he felt justified in doing so, as this was for the good of the Allen Army. Shia felt like she had a thing or two to learn from this sort of attitude and gave a bitter smile.

"A-And what is the Crevelle Kingdom saying?" Pelomas asked anxiously. He was intimidated by Shia's wild appearance and had not interacted with her much, but he now had no choice but to talk to her.

"I haven't received a response yet," Shia confessed. "But it seems difficult to negotiate with them."

Shia was already trying to petition the Crevelle Kingdom for visas that would allow them into the Prostia Empire. Needless to say, their primary reason for wanting to enter Prostia was to help Pelomas get a Holy Orb of Macris. *And this is perfect for us. I need Holy Orbs for everyone in the party anyway.*

It was said that every Holy Beast in the world possessed Holy Orbs. Equipping them would increase the user's stats immensely. However, Allen only had two of these precious items: a Holy Orb of Macris given to them by the princess of Crevelle, and a Holy Orb of Rubanka taken from Bask. The Holy Orb of Macris was meant for a member of the rear guard, but Allen still wanted at least ten of them.

"Be a bit aggressive in your negotiations," Allen requested.

Put a gun to the head of those open to diplomatic relations to get what you want. That's Negotiation 101.

Shia shook her head. "Crevelle is dependent on the Prostia Empire. Naturally, that means that they can't be too aggressive with their requests. Pushing the limits with Crevelle would only strain our relationship with them."

The Prostia Empire was located on the ocean floor, and the Crevelle Kingdom was the only nation it had created above water.

"Then is it hard for them to issue us visas?" Allen asked.

"I didn't say that," Shia replied. "There are two types of visas that allow entry into the Prostia Empire. Crevelle can only provide the type that's for fellow merfolk. The other type of visa, which allows any species to enter, is issued by the Prostia Empire itself."

Shia continued to detail the situation as Crevelle had explained it to her. Every visa issued by the Prostia Empire was blessed by Aqua, the Goddess of Water. Wearing it allowed

nonmerfolk to breathe underwater. However, these visas could only be issued underwater, and the Crevelle Kingdom was currently being scolded by the empire for having been embroiled in the Daemonism ordeal.

"Negotiations take time," Shia said. "They can't all be solved with threats and weapons."

"E-Excuse me," a dwarf said, approaching them. "May we start now? Captain Rarappa has told us that preparations are complete."

"Hmm? Oh, sorry," Allen said. "We made you all wait. Yes, please begin." The No-life Gamers had been waiting, but the conversation had drawn on a bit too long, causing everyone else to have to wait instead.

"Thank you, Commander in Chief Allen. We shall begin releasing the water soon."

I don't mind being called that outside the island, but am I gonna be addressed like that on the island too? His title had been chosen with the help of the Five Continent Alliance, and Allen thought it would prove greatly beneficial to him when he eventually had to negotiate with the Alliance. However, he found it to be a bit troublesome to be called "Commander in Chief" or "Lord Commander in Chief" by his army and the island's residents. *It's a little pompous.*

"Commander in Chief Allen," Sophie whispered from beside him.

The elf princess had likely had a hand in coming up with the title, but when asked, she had only responded with how lovely "Commander in Chief" sounded. The truth was being kept from Allen.

All the while, the No-life Gamers headed to Crey Town, where the land of merfolk was being built. The town was currently just a massive, ten-meter-deep hole with a one-kilometer radius. There was a foundation at the bottom of it, and stilt houses had been erected. Once water was poured into the pit, it would become a perfect space for merfolk. When Allen arrived, an elderly merfolk, the mayor of Crey, approached him.

"I've been waiting for you, Commander in Chief Allen," the elderly merfolk said. "May I ask you to do the honors?"

"Right," Allen replied. "Could we activate the magic tool for this lake?"

"Yes, sir," a dwarf replied.

The cubic magic tool was activated, and water gushed into the pit.

“Wow! Look at all this water!” the elderly merfolk cried, so shocked by the sight that he was pointing out the obvious. “It’s gushing out!”

White foam sprayed its surroundings as the pit was quickly filled with water. This magic tool with water had been a drop from one of the silver chests that had come from an iron golem. Since Allen did not have any magic tool users in his party, he had held on to the item without knowing its effects, but when he had shown it to someone who could use such tools, he was immediately told that it was a great water creation magic tool. Even so, he had no idea where all this water came from and how it was created. The small box could not possibly contain it all.

“Maintain water levels,” a female dwarf commanded, acting like a queen instructing her servant. “We’ll stabilize the water’s surface by tomorrow.”

“Yes, Captain Rarappa!” another dwarf replied.

“I’m sorry to make you use such a powerful magic tool when you’ve just been assigned to this job,” Allen apologized to the captain.

“Don’t worry about it,” Rarappa replied. “You see, I’m also rather excited to be able to use and research all these precious tools.”

She smiled, her eyes peeking out from underneath her straight, green bangs that were neatly trimmed across the middle of her forehead. Rarappa was twenty-five, a decade older than Allen, and possessed the three-star Talent “Magitech Specialist.” Fewer than fifty other people shared her Talent. She served as the captain of the Magus Smith Squad in Baukis and had brought along ninety-nine other Magitech Mechanics to offer aid.

The group had decided to join the Allen Army after catching wind that Allen had quite a few rare magic tools he had obtained from the lowest floor of the Rank S dungeon. Since the Allen Army was set to fight the Demon Lord Army, even Magus Smith squads that stood at the rear were risking their lives, but the pros outweighed the cons. Many dwarves were dying to get their hands on rare magic tools.

Once enough water had filled the pit, Allen turned to another dwarf beside Rarappa and said, “General Zaurere, I leave the rest

to you.”

“Noted! Squad, march!” Zaurere shouted.

“March!” the golem users yelled.

Zaurere commanded his own squad of ninety-nine golem users from Baukis, and a few had their golems descend. The general mounted a Mithril Grade golem and marched toward the pit, carrying another tool called a great purification magic tool. This tool had the ability to sterilize water and preserve it in a pristine state, without the liquid becoming stale.

Merfolk spent most of their time underwater, and a floating island in the sky with an artificially created lake could not receive water from an outside source. This sort of device was required to keep the water pure. Both the water creation and purification magic tools carried “great” effects, meaning that a Rank A magic stone was required to keep it running for a year. Once the great purification magic tool was installed and the golem walked out, merfolk children started squealing and frolicking as they jumped into the water. *And with that, all four towns are done.*

As the three thousand merfolk headed to their assigned living spaces, Allen once again realized that merfolk could breathe underwater.

Chapter 8: The Allen Army’s Departure Ceremony

It had been nearly two months since the Allen Army started developing the island and clearing dungeons. Allen had held exactly one meeting with his party and those who had over a hundred subordinates, but he had not gathered the entire army for one just yet, so a date for just such an event was selected. Now that the Five Continent Alliance conference was over and the Allen Army had become known across the world, Allen wanted a departure ceremony to symbolize the end of a chapter and the beginning of a new one.

On the day of the ceremony, the No-life Gamers headed to the mountain in the center of Hardcore User Island. The temple on top of the mountain had several floors, with the highest floor enshrining a massive brazier dedicated to Freyja, the Goddess of Fire. This floor was spacious enough for Summons to have fought freely during the battle against Gushara and Bask but not large enough for a King Me’d Stone A, which was forty-five meters tall. The ceiling was lower than expected. Still, it could house the over five thousand soldiers of the Allen Army, barring a select few who were off in Academy City or training in the Rank S dungeon.

Allen had already received permission from Freyja to use the temple. One could never disrespect a deity. Still, Allen thought it would be insolent to use the highest floor, and since he needed to get on her good side, he decided to use the next floor down. Pelomas, Habarak, and the town mayors were also present for this ceremony. Allen felt it vital that they saw how the Allen Army would operate as an organization.

By the time the No-life Gamers reached the temple, everyone was already gathered, so Allen stepped onto the podium. Now standing taller than them all, he could see the five thousand refined soldiers in orderly lines, awaiting instruction. They faced the podium, divided into squads and species, with the highest-ranking commander in front and captains and other ranks behind them. Each line was straight and neat both horizontally

and vertically, and everyone was sitting. Allen had not wanted them to stand the whole time, showing consideration for their feet.

This kind of reminds me of a school entrance ceremony, he thought. *A school with five thousand students is colossal.*

The rest of the No-life Gamers were standing behind Allen. Captain Rarappa, who stood at the front of the dwarves, approached Allen and handed him a small device—a magic tool that amplified his voice. The ceremony was about to begin.

"I am Allen, the commander in chief of the Allen Army. Let the departure ceremony begin."



Everyone listened solemnly as his voice echoed throughout the floor thanks to the magic tool. *I guess people are humbler the more powerful they get.* Mayors and elves who were exponentially older than Allen were present. He did not mind being overbearing as the commander in chief, but he believed it was best to remain polite and modest. When he glanced at Sophie, she praised him with her eyes, encouraging him to keep up the good work.

"First, I would like to discuss the position of the Allen Army with regard to the Five Continent Alliance," Allen started, wanting to touch on the fact that the army was globally recognized.

The members of the Five Continent Alliance had continued their discussions even after Allen had left. He had received no word from them, however, so he assumed that his role was over for now. And though he was not sure what kind of impression he had left on the representatives of the other nations, he thought that it had gone quite well. Just as he had claimed at the conference, he wanted to install communication magic tools around the world so that he could take care of monsters Rank A and higher that were tormenting the land. His plan was to have the Baukisian magic tool users take care of that.

"That would be a huge help. We can contact the armies of the Five Continent Alliance as well," Rudo replied.

While no one was sure just how involved the Allen Army would be with the Five Continent Alliance, the army would likely be treated in accordance with their position.

"But surely not all nations will be understanding," Field Marshal Lukdraal said.

"We don't need their understanding, and we don't need to waste time with them," Allen replied firmly. "Tell them that we won't go down without a fight if they choose to invade us."

"I see..."

"That doesn't mean we should be tyrants, though. I ask that the generals and captains keep their subordinates in check."

The higher-ranking officials all seemed to agree and bowed their heads in assent. Allen went on to explain that a squad of Magus Smiths and a squad of dwarven golem users had been dispatched to support their army.

"Captain Rarappa, General Zaurere, please introduce yourselves," Allen requested.

The two soldiers marched forward from their squads. Captain Rarappa went first, gracefully jumping onto the podium and taking the voice amplification magic tool from Allen.

“Listen well! I am Captain Rarappa of the Magus Smith squad! Bring any inquiries about magic tools to me!”

She struck a splendid pose and made her introduction. Her subordinates, the other dwarves, started clapping furiously. Some of them even produced horns out of seemingly thin air and blew into them to cheer for their beloved leader.

“You’re amazing, Captain!”

Meruru, too, was awestruck. “That was awesome!”

When Allen glanced her way, he noticed that Sophie, who was sitting beside the dwarf, was wearing a glum expression. It seemed the elf was disgruntled with the fact that another person had gotten up on the podium, as she had built it for Allen alone. He felt that it was important to allow the uniqueness of others to shine, however, and he shot her a look asking her to remain quiet.

Rarappa had stepped off the podium and handed the voice amplification magic tool to General Zaurere. Both dwarves were smaller than even the beastkin who were sitting. Allen did not stop them from stepping onto the podium since it allowed everyone to get a better look at them.

“My name is Zaurere. We of the golem squad shall become your wall.”

He stroked his small beard and struck a pose as well. Then, he waddled his way off the podium and returned the magic tool to Allen. When the Summoner stepped back onto the platform, he noticed the troubled looks of everyone but the dwarves.

“We’ve got more unique characters joining us. Please give them a warm welcome,” Allen said, and the confused soldiers managed to give a thunderous round of applause. He waited for the noise to die down before he spoke once more. “Thank you, all. Now then, I’d like to discuss the rank of general for each army. As you may know, every species has a general standing at the helm.”

Field Marshal Lukdraal had been demoted to general, the highest rank in the army, and Captain Rudo had been promoted to the rank to accommodate the Allen Army having further divided each species’ army into squads, units, and platoons. The generals were in charge of their armies, with the captains

leading the squads, the commanders ordering the units, and the platoon leaders directing the platoons. The Magus Smith squad was a part of the Golem Army. Each section was in charge of reporting its current status, including class promotions.

The beastkin and elves had all finished their class promotions and could enter the Rank S dungeon. Both species were currently supporting the dark elves so that they could clear dungeons as well. The beastkin were adept at close combat, and that made it safer for the dark elves. It also encouraged teamwork between the two species.

“Once that’s done, I want everyone to work together to hunt iron golems,” Allen said. “Please think of this as a practice run before facing Demonic Deities.”

He predicted that the last of the dark elves would receive their class promotion in two to three months. The three species would then need to work together to defeat iron golems. These monsters had stat values of 25,000 across the board and were a touch weaker than Demonic Deities, but with proper teamwork and the use of Extra Skills, Allen believed that his army could kill them. Once the troops got used to teamwork and fighting powerful enemies, they could handle Demonic Deities while raising their skill levels.

This plan would also help fund the Allen Army. Since Extra Skills were required to defeat iron golems, taking cooldown into account, only a few could be slain a day. Even so, it would make them more than enough money for their needs.

“And we must explain our position as well,” Shia said from behind the Summoner.

“Yeah,” Allen replied.

Rudo, who sat closest to the podium, heard the conversation and interjected. “Pardon? Is anything going on with our Princess Shia?”

Allen decided to divulge what they had all been discussing the night before. Because he had only wanted input from his party, no one else knew about it, including Rudo.

“Since the other No-life Gamers will sometimes be in charge of the Allen Army, we decided on ranks and roles within the party,” Allen said.

It had only been two months since the Allen Army was formed, so it was still in the midst of growing and improving. There was ample time left before it was ready to mobilize.

Regardless, Allen wanted to inform everyone of the positions and roles of the No-life Gamers members. Once the army officially began operations, there was no telling what situations awaited it or what actions would need to be taken. It was possible that someone other than Allen would have to take the reins.

Allen had the No-life Gamers take the stand after he was done detailing his thoughts. But before he could give Krena the voice amplification magic tool, she stood in front of the podium and shouted at the top of her lungs.

“I’m Krena, captain of the Special Attack Force! Nice to meet ya!”

She stuck out the index finger on her dominant hand and pointed it at the troops gathered in front of her. Though she was not using the platform, it seemed Captain Rarappa’s attitude had influenced her. The Allen Army was stunned by her outburst, but they soon gave another round of applause, celebrating their new captain. The rest of the No-life Gamers used the voice amplification magic tool to announce their roles.

The Allen Army

Allen: Commander in Chief

Sophie: Tactician

Volmaar: Assistant Tactician

Shia: Field Marshal of the Vanguard

Luke: Field Marshal of the Rear Guard

Meruru: Field Marshal of the Golem Army

Krena: Captain of the Special Attack Force

Hardcore User Island

Pelomas: Governor of the island

Cecil: Lieutenant Governor of the island

Temple of Fire Goddess Freyja

Dogora: Disciple

Keel: Pastor

Once everyone had finished their introductions, Allen explained that these roles were based on each person’s abilities. For example, Krena was better suited to fighting on the front line than giving orders. Sophie, on the other hand, would be able to comprehend whatever situation the Allen Army found itself in and come up with a battle plan, making her the perfect tactician.

Pelomas might not be able to manage all four towns by himself, and Cecil seemed to fit the role he needed. She had seen her father, the lord of the Granvelle fief, work hard to manage his land, so she could offer a few words of advice. And while Dogora was a disciple tasked with getting more people to follow and pray to Freyja, he was completely unsuited to managing temples. Keel would fill that role instead. Dogora had mentioned that there did not seem to be much thought put into his role, but Allen had refrained from commenting on that.

After the No-life Gamers introduced themselves and their respective roles, Allen asked the army to treat them well in their new positions, and he received another round of applause. *Looks like they all understand.* General Bunzenberg and the other dark elves seemed especially joyful, likely because Luke had received a prestigious title.

"Are we done here?" Rarappa asked. She was eager to return to her research.

A magic tool research facility was being built on Hardcore User Island. At first, Allen had considered using one of the many open rooms in the temple for the facility, but he had ultimately decided that it was easier to gather faith from others if the temple was kept sacred. And so, a facility was being built near Habarak and the other smiths. Since some magic tools would require the assistance of a blacksmith, Allen had decided that it would be most efficient to put the research facility near the blacksmith sector.

While the building was under construction, Rarappa was doing her research in the basement of the temple, figuring out the device that moved Hardcore User Island. The magic tool users were rather busy, but Allen wanted them all to become class promoted so that they could use larger and more complex magic tools.

Allen remained quiet, too busy thinking about such things to answer Rarappa. Instead, Captain Raven piped up.

"Shall we bring them in?"

Realizing that the question was pointed at him, Allen hastily replied, "Yes, please."

Raven looked at the Summoner in bewilderment. "You don't have to be so polite with me, Commander in Chief."

He and the rest of the guards then took the staircase to the room below. As they left, the rest of the Allen Army was left

wondering what was about to happen. But since Allen was not saying anything, they all decided to patiently wait and see.

The guards emerged with some items and placed them in front of some soldiers before heading back down. During the several trips the guards made, the Allen Army members realized that they were being provided with something. They finally understood why they had been lined up by rank, divided by species and class, and asked to give the person in front of them some space.

An hour later, once every warrior had some kind of item in front of them, Allen spoke into the voice amplification magic tool.

“I’d like to start the awards ceremony to commemorate the beginning of the Allen Army’s departure.”

Each soldier had been presented with gear, including rings that boosted the necessary stats for each class. The golem squad had received slates, with General Zaurere’s being meant for a hihiirokane golem. The other ninety-nine pilots had been given ones for Mithril Grade golems.

Even before the SOS signal from Elmahl, the No-life Gamers had been hunting down iron golems. They had defeated 28,000 so far and had collected 25,200 wooden chests, 2,800 silver chests, and 25 gold chests. Silver chests had a drop rate of only about ten percent, and for gold chests, the drop rate was a minuscule one-tenth of a percent rate.

Items from Gold Chests

3 necklaces that raise stats by +2,000
1 orichalcum clump
3 magic tools (cubic)
8 adamantite golem slates
5 weapons not made of adamantite
5 pieces of armor not made of adamantite

Items from Silver Chests (Estimated Totals)

1,400 rings that raise stats by +5,000
140 magic tools (large, extra large effect)
280 adamantite weapons
280 pieces of adamantite armor
560 hihiirokane golem slates
45 weapons not made of adamantite

45 pieces of armor not made of adamantite

Items from Wooden Chests (Estimated Totals)

14,000 rings that raise stats by 3,000

1,400 magic tools (small and medium effects)

2,800 hihiirokane weapons

2,800 pieces of hihiirokane armor

5,600 mithril golem slates

700 weapons not made of hihiirokane

700 pieces of armor not made of hihiirokane

It was clear that gold chests had an extremely low drop rate, and only three had contained stat-boosting necklaces. While they paled in comparison to the rainbow chest drop item from Goldino that boosted a stat by +3,000, these necklaces were still a huge help. They boosted HP, Intelligence, and Endurance, respectively, and Allen had had his party members equip them.

He had also managed to gather a full set of slates for an Adamantite Grade golem, but he was yet to find a Supergigantify slate, though he had managed to collect several Gigantify ones. The No-life Gamers had also snagged an orichalcum clump before they had headed to Elmahl, but they had not found any more since. Perhaps it was a result of bad luck, but Allen suspected that a party was limited to one clump of orichalcum each.

Still, he had gotten many pieces of gear made from monster and plant materials from gold chests. Volmaar's spear, Cecil's rod, and Keel's staff had all been upgraded, as had Shia's and Luke's armor since they did not have anything made of adamantite. There had only been enough to reoutfit five of the party members, so Allen, being the least likely to die, had decided to hold off on giving himself anything new.

Thanks to the necklace and the upgraded rod, Cecil's spells had exponentially increased in power. Keel, who lacked Endurance, had received the Sacred Necklace from the Great Pope after defeating Gushara. Thanks to the drops from the gold chests, the Gamers were able to more than make up for the lack of Defense caused by Dogora having shifted to using a pair of axes.

"Um, wh-what are these?" General Lukdraal stammered.

"We've prepared weapons and other gear for each of you," Allen replied. "You can think of them as provisions from the Allen

Army. Each set of items has been procured for your specific class."

"Provisions. I see..."

There were only four generals within the Allen Army: Rudo, Lukdraal, Bunzenberg, and Zaurere. Beneath them were a total of twenty captains, fifty commanders, and five hundred platoon leaders. Each platoon leader was in charge of ten soldiers, and the commanders controlled a hundred troops, including the platoon leaders. The captains had five hundred subordinates. Captain Rarappa, who led the Magus Smith squad, had two vice-captains working under her, and Raven had Rita and Milci operating as his vice-captains.

"Wait, I get stuff too?" Raven asked, noticing items in front of him as well.

"Seriously?" Rita added.

"Are we part of this?" Milci inquired.

Indeed, the guards had also received their own provisions. Weapons and other gear that had dropped from silver chests had been supplied to generals, captains, commanders, and vice-captains. Almost all of the platoon leaders had gotten equipment from silver chests as well.

Since there were plenty of rings that boosted stats by +5,000, Allen was able to provide every general, captain, commander, platoon leader, vice-captain, and even a few soldiers with one.

"Please wear these in battle," Allen requested.

The gear and rings laid out in front of these soldiers would set them up for life if they were sold. Adamantite swords went for several thousand gold coins, and stat-boosting rings went for more. The generals who had received three-piece sets could make upward of tens of thousands of gold from what they had been given. Though the Allen Army had doubled every soldier's salary, they would still have to save up for decades to get their hands on gear like this.

"I cannot find the words to express my gratitude when being loaned such splendid gear," Lukdraal said solemnly.

It would have cost a pretty penny to provide a set for even one soldier, but Allen had managed to give all five thousand troops some kind of expensive equipment. All told, everything was worth over fifty million gold coins—on par with the national budget of Baukis, one of the wealthiest nations in the world. It exceeded the national budget of Rohzenheim, General Lukdraal's

home country, several times over, thus he believed that these were all assets belonging to the Allen Army. For that reason, he did not expect Allen's next words.

"Oh, I'm not loaning them to you. The gear is yours to keep. Those who have not been provided with adamantite gear yet, I'll exchange yours once I get my hands on a set."

Everyone froze in astonishment. They could hardly believe their ears.

"You're *giving* these to us?" Captain Rasu asked hesitantly. "We haven't even begun acting as part of the Allen Army."

"Then let me tell you the goals of our army," Allen replied.

"Goals, you say?"

"We took numerous safety measures to ensure that each and every one of you would return from the dungeons alive. Thanks to that, no one has died yet."

"Indeed."

"I'll be frank. Compared to your lives, these items in front of you are like a pile of junk."

Once again, the troops murmured in shock.

"Junk?!" Rasu cried, just as stunned as the rest of the army.

"Captain Rasu, say one of your comrades is in danger," Allen said. "If you use your Extra Skill to throw the adamantite spear in front of you, you might be able to save their life. Would you do it? You might not be able to retrieve your spear afterward either."

Even before deerkin Rasu was class promoted to Beast Spear Lord, he had possessed the Extra Skill "Brave Lance." It had the user throw their spear with all their might, piercing their foe as the weapon flew into the distance. Rasu was well aware of how it worked, so he often kept multiple javelins on hand.

"I'd throw it," Rasu answered instantly.

"Then what if your own life was at stake?" Allen inquired. "The weapon in your hands costs several thousand gold, but can you confidently state that you'd throw it without hesitation to save yourself?"

"I understand what you're trying to say." Rasu nodded along.

"And that's exactly what I mean. There are times when you must risk your life, but you must never cast it aside for weapons and armor. These are just items. They'll never be worth your lives."

Were the items only on loan, Allen feared that the need to return them might make the soldiers hesitant to use them. That

split second of hesitation was all it would take to decide one's fate, ultimately affecting the army as a whole. Captain Rasu knew that. While some lives might be lost during battle regardless, there was no need for any to be lost over gear.

"Then I shall risk my life for the Allen Army so that I do not put these excellent items to shame," Rasu said.

The rest of the Allen Army, including the generals, bowed solemnly. *Wait, what? I'm just saying to value your lives, not risk it all.* Allen managed to hold his tongue, and he ended the ceremony.

That night, to celebrate the completion of the four towns on Hardcore User Island, each town would host its own festival. The troops would help with preparations, and they all tightly clutched their new gear as they left the temple.

"Commander in Chief Allen," Habarak said.

"Yeah?" the Summoner replied.

"I completed one of your requests."

"Really?! That's great! Thank you!"

Now I'm getting excited! Allen's heart danced with delight. A truly priceless item had been created.

Chapter 9: Orichalcum and the Magic Cube

Allen walked out of the temple with Habarak and made his way down the mountain. It had an elevation of a few hundred meters and was the perfect place for a picnic. However, this mountain housed the temple of Freyja, and Allen wanted the island's residents to fear and revere the deity.

As he watched the Allen Army soldiers march away, a massive, white lump appeared. The excited creature wagged its tail, cutting through the air and causing the ground to quake. Haku had spotted the soldiers walking down the mountain and approached them happily.

Haku's grown, Allen thought. He felt like he was looking at a big, friendly dog.

"Awww! Haku!" Krena squealed happily. She raced down the trail and headed straight for the hatchling.

"*Grawr!*" Haku cried. It placed its head on the ground, expecting to be petted.

The hatchling narrowed its eyes happily as the girl stroked its head.



“He seems familiar with humans,” Luke muttered, holding Faable in his arms.

Krena motioned for the boy to join her. “Try touching him too, Luke.”

“O-Okay. He won’t bite, right?”

The dark elf cautiously approached Haku, who was as tall as an adult, and stretched his body to gently touch the dragon’s snout.

Luke’s not as rough around the edges. The boy had been a bit rowdier at first, but after clearing some dungeons, he had gotten used to life in the Allen Army. Though he was generally off doing his own tasks, he spoke in a relaxed manner whenever he met up with the No-life Gamers. The more they conversed, the more it was apparent that he looked and acted like an eight-year-old. Luke was actually fifteen, the same age as Allen and the others, but high dark elves likely matured a lot more slowly than humans.

Allen and the rest of the Gamers walked down the mountain, leaving Krena and Luke behind to play with Haku. The Allen Army split up to return to their respective bases, and Allen and his party headed to Habarak’s forge.

“How are your apprentices doing?” Allen asked.

“Hmm? Ah, not too bad,” Habarak replied.

The master blacksmith had gained more apprentices after coming to this island. Now that the merfolk populated Crey Town, Hardcore User Island had over fifteen thousand citizens. People required knives, pots, kettles, and other items for daily use, but Habarak and the ten smiths he had brought had not been able to keep up with the demand. All of them were master blacksmith dwarves who had brought apprentices whom they were close with, so Allen wanted them to focus on making and repairing weapons and armor.

And so, a handful of people from each of the four towns had been selected to become blacksmiths. On the condition that they would one day become independent, those chosen by Habarak’s many apprentices were to use their monthly wages to help Habarak and continue their training. Allen had prioritized those with prior experience, and many of them were former smiths or weapons sellers. Residents had jumped at the opportunity to train under *the* master blacksmith, and people were still sending in apprenticeship requests. The forge was now bustling with

many new apprentices.

"Over here," Habarak said, guiding the party to the side of the forge. An axe was propped up against the wall.

"Ooh! Orichalcum!" Allen cried.

We got the strongest weapon! Allen cheered internally. Even in his previous life, he had known that orichalcum was the strongest mineral, and it had left a lasting impression in his mind. His excited words tumbled out of his mouth.

"Try holding it," Habarak said.

"Right," Dogora nodded. He reached out, gripped the hilt with his nondominant hand, and swung the axe around. "Feels good."

He swung the weapon a few more times before when his other axe called out to him. *"Dogora, does the orichalcum axe feel that snug in your hand?"*

"Yeah. I can hunt down a ton of monsters with this."

"Can you, now?"

Freyja sounded miffed. Orichalcum was known as the mineral of the gods and might have been rarer than even Holy Orbs. It was said that Gaia himself had created orichalcum. *She sounds kinda jealous. I hope we don't make her too annoyed. And I know orichalcum is rare, but it doesn't pack the same punch that Kagutsuchi does.*

"I hope my sword gets completed soon too," Allen said. He wanted to help improve the goddess's mood by steering the topic back onto the fact that he required her assistance.

The Gamers had found two clumps of orichalcum so far. One and a half had been used to forge Dogora's greataxe, and the rest would be used for Allen's sword.

"Hmm? Right," Habarak replied. "The order'll be your sword, the knuckle-dusters, and the armor, yeah?"

"Shia's gear will be put on hold for now, please," Allen said.

"Yeah? Ya sure?"

"She might become the Beast King, and if she does, she'll be given proof of her title."

When Allen was farming iron golems in the Rank S dungeons, he had hoped for a couple more orichalcum clumps, but after twenty-eight thousand enemies slain, he only had one to show for it. If he wanted to make gear for Shia, Dogora, and Krena, there was a long, exhausting road ahead of him. However, Shia had another possible source for her gear. Known as the Symbol of the Beast King, monarchs were gifted orichalcum knuckles

and armor, as well as a Holy Orb of Quatro. Together, this three-piece set was known as the divine vessels of Albahal.

Not only did the Beast King unlock the upgraded version of the Extra Skill Beast Mode, but they also received orichalcum gear and a Holy Orb. Allen needed Shia to become the next ruler of the beastkin.

"Huh. Well, gimme a shout if things change," Habarak replied. He was only interested in smithing.

"Allen, don't make decisions on your own," Shia said. Contrary to her words, she internally renewed her determination to become the next Beast King.

Albahal currently reigned over two-thirds of the Garlesian Continent. While Beast Prince Zeu and Beast Princess Shia had managed to overcome the trials given to them by Beast King Muza that granted them claim to the throne, Beast Crown Prince Beku had priority. Discussions were well underway to choose the next monarch, and Allen wanted to prevent Beku from claiming the throne no matter what—the royal had a proclivity for making those around him unhappy. Other than that, the Summoner did not care who claimed the throne.

The matters of Thomas succeeding House Granvelle and Sophie becoming the next elven queen were being left to Thomas and Sophie themselves. If they required help, Allen was willing to offer his assistance, but he was not going to force it on them. He had only helped Zeu clear the Rank S dungeon and assisted Shia during the Daemonism debacle because their goals had been the same as his. Ultimately, he had pushed the siblings to earn their claim to the throne, but in both cases, it was entirely out of coincidence.

Allen was only rooting for Shia because she had joined his party, and making her Beast King would boost her gear's quality and her skill, strengthening the Allen Army. Had there been a simpler way for Shia to buff her skill and obtain excellent gear, the Summoner would not be pushing for her to become the next monarch. His goal was to strengthen his party for the clash against the Demon Lord Army, nothing more. *But if Shia becomes the next Beast King, I'll have to give Zeu a good luck charm.*

Zeu's wife, Rena, did not have even a shadow of a doubt that her husband would become the next Beast King. This was due in no small part to her having been told about Temi's divination. If Zeu ended up *not* becoming the next king, her rage would know

no bounds. She had mentioned that she would flee into the night should her husband fail to become the next Beast King. Were Shia the one to succeed the throne, Allen would present the Beast Prince with two rings that boosted Endurance by +5,000 apiece so that the royal could escape with his life when faced with Rena's fury.

As Allen was lost in his thoughts, he and his party left Habarak's forge and headed for Captain Rarappa's research facility. The Magic Tool Research Center analyzed the magic tools that Allen had collected from the Rank S dungeon, as well as developed new tools. The building itself was completed, but it could not fully function just yet.

When the Gamers stepped inside, the dwarves were busily carrying around the equipment that had been teleported in. *Found her.* Captain Rarappa was shouting commands, keeping just as busy as the bustling dwarves.

"Captain Rarappa," Allen said.

She stopped giving out orders and approached the group.

"Please take a look at this," Allen said, removing a strange cube from the Storage of his grimoire. It was around the size of a human head. "I found it in the Rank S dungeon, but I'm not quite sure what it is."

Pelomas had appraised it as a magic core. He had used his Extra Skill, Libra, and determined that this item had a value of around a million gold, but had no idea how it could be used. Since it was a *magic* core, it was easy to assume that it was some sort of magic tool, which meant Captain Rarappa was the best person to ask about it. The dwarf immediately knew what the item was.

"Wow! A magic core!" she shouted with twinkling eyes. "Whoa! And you've got three of them?! Awesome!"

"What are they used for?" Allen asked.

"Anything! I-I'm *so* glad I decided to come here!"

She cradled the three cores in her arms with delight, but Allen had not said that he would give them to her. Above all, her answer had not provided any insight into how the cores could be used.

"Could you explain their use?" Allen asked once more, unconsciously making his tone a lot sterner.

"They can be used as cores for magic tools. More accurately, they were meant to be but couldn't become dungeon cores,"

Rarappa replied.

"Dungeon cores?"

A dungeon core referred to the floating cubes that were on each floor, operating as needed. It seemed these magic cores were miniature versions of those cubes.

"Yep," Rarappa replied. "So these cores can be turned into anything. They can create items that haven't been made yet."

She claimed that one of these cores could operate a massive magic ship. *Wait, that means…*

"Then these magic cores can create magic tools, right?" Allen asked.

"That's right," Rarappa replied. "I'm glad you're so quick to understand things, Commander in Chief Allen. My former superior was extremely stubborn and refused to understand concepts no matter how many times I explained them. I…"

Rarappa was quite the chatterbox. Her primary reason for joining the Allen Army was that she apparently had not gotten along with her former superior.

"Anything, huh?" Allen said loudly, cutting Rarappa off. "Can you create a device that transports people and things from the island to the land below or underwater?"

Currently, the only way to get off Hardcore User Island was via Bird A's Awakened Ability. Allen had considered making a magic ship pad, but it would have taken far too much time to create a vehicle with a dining space and guest rooms that would only go to and from the island. He just wanted a magic tool to transport people and items. Unfortunately, though, not even the Empire of Baukis had such an item at its disposal, but if magic cores could be used to create new items, there was a sliver of hope that a magic tool that served just such a purpose could be created.

Rarappa nodded. "Yeah. It might take some time, but it's certainly possible."

Any idea can take form. We just need imagination. It was then that Allen decided to discuss the secret plan he had concocted for the impending fight against the Demon Lord Army.

"Could you create a teleportation device of sorts?" he inquired.

"Teleportation?! Like the ancient secret treasure?!"

Her movements are exaggerated, and she's so loud.

"Was there a teleportation device back in the day?" Allen

asked.

Rarappa started mumbling to herself while peering at the magic cores in her arms. “Yeah, three isn’t enough. I’d like at least ten magic cores for the tool.”

Allen’s words had been the perfect catalyst to allow all sorts of ideas to gush into her mind.

“Seven to go, huh?” Allen said. “Maybe I’ll try collecting ten if that could make the device.”

“Allen, what are you planning on making the device for?” Cecil grumbled. “You’re not planning on going to the Dark Realm, are you?”

She recalled the conversation between Merus and Allen. Long ago, Elmea, the God of Creation, had defeated the Daemon God, separated their body into five pieces, and cast those pieces into the Dark Realm. He had then destroyed the gate in the Demon Realm so that no one could resurrect the Daemon God. The Demon Lord Army’s plan was to somehow do just that, and it was trying to recover a teleportation spell that would take it to the Dark Realm. Allen was also interested in a teleportation device of his own, wondering if he could just warp in front of the final boss of this world.

“No, but we can try assaulting the Demon Lord Army’s headquarters,” Allen replied. “And a teleportation device would come in handy.”

“Right,” Rarappa added without facing him. “I’ll look into it, including the ancient secrets.”

“Got it. We have to move the island one day too, so you can prioritize whatever you’d like. I’m counting on you.”

Allen wanted to know if he could move the island, and he also wanted a teleportation device to be made with the magic cores. However, since the dwarves would be the ones actually doing the research and the brunt of the work, he wanted them to choose what they prioritized. Everything was being done to achieve his goal of defeating the Demon Lord. He was not against spending gold on the level of a nation’s annual budget to provide everyone with excellent gear, nor did he mind collecting orichalcum and Holy Orbs. And once the magic tools he had asked for were created, he wanted to use them to attack the Demon Lord Army.

“Indeed, this isn’t a bad way to go about things,” Shia mumbled. She considered her own ambitions and saw Allen’s actions in a favorable light.

Chapter 10: Attempting to Farm the Final Floor Boss of the Rank S Dungeon

The following day, after the Allen Army's departure ceremony, the No-life Gamers were on the final floor of the Rank S dungeon. Towering before them were one bronze golem, two iron golems, and one mithril golem. Alongside the hundred-meter-tall behemoths was the main act: Goldino, the final floor boss.

Until now, Allen and his party had farmed iron golems in the Rank S dungeon from early in the morning until late at night. Today, however, they were after the final floor boss, Goldino. All ten of the No-life Gamers had assembled to take on this mighty challenge.

In the past, they had gone against this boss as a massive group of forty, including Helmios's Sacred, Garara's Stinger, and Beast Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts. This time around, though, only the No-life Gamers would battle this monster, as doing so would allow them to keep the drops for themselves. Only Pelomas, who was not a fighter, had been left behind. *Merchants are more like benchwarmers. It's the unwavering truth of this world,* Allen thought.

"Are you sure we can do this alone?" Cecil asked anxiously, snapping Allen out of his thoughts.

"It shouldn't be a problem," the Summoner replied. "I made a Nest in front of the retreat cube, so we can flee whenever."

But I think we'll be fine. Allen believed that his party was more than strong enough to defeat Goldino, even without using his backup plan.

"So we'll flee if worse comes to worst," Cecil said. "But then what?"

"We'll invite the Hero," Allen replied. "He seems like he's got some time on his hands."

And I want to test out his Natural Gift skill. It seems to have some kind of crazy effect. When Allen had forced Helmios to divulge details about Natural Gift, he was left completely blown away.

"Allen, what do you take Mr. Helmios for?" Cecil asked.

“A hero,” Allen replied.

“Never mind…”

She looked exasperated. Had he not considered just how precarious a position Helmios was in?

“All right, let’s do our best!” Krena said, completely failing to read the room.

“Yep,” Dogora grinned.

“Tam-Tam’s here too!” Meruru shouted, striking one of her cool poses.

Keel and Cecil seemed taken aback, but the other muscleheads were raring to go. Keel, Sophie, and Volmaar boarded Bird Bs so that they could move around more freely.

“You’re with me, Luke!” Krena said excitedly.

“Okay!” Luke replied.

Veterans trained newbies best. Shia was also attempting her first clash against Goldino, and she, who was paired with Dogora, looked delighted.

“Dogora, I leave my back to you!” she said.

“Huh? Right, sure,” Dogora answered, sounding confused.

As usual, Allen and Cecil were a pair, and they climbed onto the back of a Summon. Krena and Luke were also provided with a Bird B to fly around on, but Dogora and Shia would be freely doing as they pleased on foot, standing on the front lines.

“Should we have practiced a bit beforehand?” Allen asked, referring to Dogora and his new orichalcum greataxe.

“Nah, I’m good,” Dogora replied. “It fits nice and snug in my hand.”

In his dominant hand was Kagutsuchi. Veins coursed through the weapon, which pulsated and glowed. The light from the blade was indicative of the divine power Freyja had recovered thanks to the prayers of the residents of Hardcore User Island. In his other hand was the orichalcum greataxe forged by Habarak. It had taken the master blacksmith over a month to complete.

Dogora was able to wield both weapons smoothly, as though they were a part of his body. Meanwhile, Krena readied her orichalcum greatsword, which she had taken from Bask.

“Tam-Tam, come forth!” Meruru shouted. A Supergigantified golem in all its vermilion glory descended upon the dwarf, and she climbed inside.

“Let’s do this,” Allen said.

He Summoned a King Me’d Merus as they approached the five

lined-up golems. Goldino stood in the center. Past experience told the Gamers that the golems would not move until they got close.

"Oh? Your party is rather small, yet you dare challenge us? I suppose you must all have a death wish," Goldino suddenly said.

Allen was tired of hearing the same pompous phrase.

"It seems it doesn't remember us," Cecil observed. The final floor boss of the Rank A dungeon did not recognize the Gamers no matter how many times the two parties clashed, and apparently, Goldino was no different.

"You measly runts. Cower and struggle with fear and despair..." Goldino started.

It was like an unskippable cutscene. Allen did not wish to waste time listening to the same old phrase that he had already heard, so he immediately started to fight.

"Go, Merus!" Allen ordered.

"Aye," Merus replied. The Angel A paid no heed to Goldino's spiel and rushed in.

Thanks to King Me, Merus's stats were 35,000 across the board. Before any of the golems could react to his speed, he approached an iron golem and used Bird A's Awakened Ability, Homing Instinct. He and the golem teleported a kilometer away, where a King Me'd Dragon A awaited them. The Summon was over three hundred meters tall and had fifteen heads. Its many necks wrapped around the iron golem, and it used its 25,000 Attack to squeeze the monster.

"All right, now they can't revive one another unless they retreat," Allen said.

In their last battle, the golems had been herded into a narrow passageway, splitting up their group, but this time around, Allen planned on using the spacious area to the fullest. He had been more focused on efficiency as of late. The Summoner's goal was to defeat them even one second faster.

"Y-You insolent shrimps!" Goldino boomed. "Behold true fear as you witness our power!"

"Shia, Dogora," Allen called. "We don't have many people this time around, so you'll have less support. Don't take too many hits!"

"Leave the vanguard to us!" Shia shouted back.

"Copy that!" Dogora added.

The two rushed in—they were tasked with stopping the

bronze golem in its tracks. Barring Goldino, the golems' stats ranged from 20,000 to 30,000. But Allen predicted that the bronze golem's drill punches had an Attack higher than 30,000.

"Raaaaah!" Meruru shouted from atop Tam-Tam as she headed for the other iron golem.

The hihiirokane Tam-Tam boasted stats that rivaled the iron golem's. Meruru might not have been able to solo the monster, but she could certainly stand her ground for a good while, preventing it from rejoining the other iron golem.

"Hayate, Okiyosan, Octo, join the fight!" Allen commanded.

"Yes, sir!"

"Tee hee hee! Kill, kill, kill, all day long!"

"Aye, aye, Cap'n!"

The King Me'd Beast A, Spirit A, and Fish A, which all had stats that rivaled the four golems that were not Goldino, aimed for the iron golem, preventing it from regenerating. Beast A moved nimbly, its buffed Attack shaving away at the golem's health. Spirit A used its Ability, Spirit Guide, to get behind the iron golem and aim for easy crits. Fish A's Octopus Heart prevented it from going down easily. The Summon had three hearts, and thus three health bars. It could be killed twice, and with each death, it would revive with full HP and MP.

Any lost hearts would be fully restored after a day. Keel's Extra Skill, Drops of God, could also fully restore one heart, but after some testing, Allen had determined that it was better to save the Extra Skill and instead Summon the Fish A once more. It was important for Drops of God to be ready to use at any time.

"Ouch! Hmph!" Octo cried. Fish A might have had multiple lives, but it could still feel pain.

"Use Smokescreen!" Allen commanded.

Octo followed the order, shrouding the area with dense mist. It lowered the accuracy of the enemies' attacks. Until now, there had been no need to use this Ability, as Allen and his party had taken down Rank A monsters rather easily. But a Smokescreen from a King Me'd Octo was effective against some Rank S monsters. The effect of this Ability was based on the Intelligence stat difference between the Fish A and its enemy. *Since a King Me'd Octo has over 25,000 Intelligence, Smokescreen might be effective now.*

Even if a monster lacked Intelligence, some types were completely immune to debuffs. However, barring Goldino, these

golems were greatly affected by Octo's Ability.

Keel and Sophie healed their party members, reducing any additional strain. Though only a party of ten, the Gamers managed to hold their own against the Rank S final floor boss and its goons.

"What are you doing, mithril golem?!" Goldino roared hastily. "Destroy our enemies at once!"

High power is the best way to break a deadlock. The mithril golem changed to its flying mode upon receiving Goldino's order. Mithril golems did not have high Endurance, but they were quite the nuisance when flying around and attacking people from above. It had been a tricky foe during the first battle, but this time, Allen had a plan.

"Rockanels! Absorb!" Allen shouted.

He Summoned a King Me'd Stone A and three Deputized Stone As. They stepped in front of the mithril golem's line of fire and absorbed its attacks.

"We're doing well!" Cecil noted. "We'll be able to defeat it soon!"

"Yeah!" Allen replied.

The pair targeted an iron golem, timing their attacks with Merus and Dragon A, who were fighting the other iron golem a kilometer away. The two golems were defeated at the same time, preventing any sort of regeneration.

"Y-You mongrels are truly—" Goldino started.

"All right, I think we've got enough," Allen said. "Rockanels, Focused Bombardment!"

The four Stone As used their Awakened Abilities and fired away, flinging the hihiirokane clumps that had absorbed magic power straight at Goldino.

"What?! Gah!" Goldino grunted. Even it was unable to endure these attacks, and its hundred-meter-tall body was knocked backward.

"Huh?! Did we do it?!" Keel cried.

Goldino slowly toppled over onto its back. The King Me'd and Deputized Stone As' increased Endurance had allowed them to absorb more of the mithril golem's attacks than before. The Summons had been able to unleash far more powerful attacks.

"I hope we beat it," Allen said.

"I hope so as well, but will things really work out so nicely for us?" Cecil asked doubtfully.

This time around, the Summoner had prioritized efficiency. It was as though he were trying to speedrun this fight. If possible, he wanted to avoid having to fight Supercombined Goldino.

"Y-You runts truly seem keen on dying," Goldino rumbled. "If you want to know just how powerless you are, I shall hammer it into you! Golems, gather around me!"

The iron golems, frozen in place, and the bronze and mithril golems that were still attacking flew toward Goldino, transforming into various parts for the boss.

"I guess that's a no," Allen said. "But at least we don't need to attack the bronze and mithril golems anymore."

"I suppose," Cecil said.

In his previous life, Allen had played games with bosses that had multiple phases. Even if his attacks had been overkill, the bosses had almost always entered their next phases without actually going down. This world seemed to operate on the same logic. However, if the iron golems were defeated, even if the mithril and bronze golems remained, it would force Goldino to enter its next phase.

"Rockanels, continue Absorbing the mithril golem's attacks!" Allen ordered.

On Goldino's shoulder was the mithril golem that had transformed into an artillery battery. The Stone As were tasked with Absorbing its shots.

"Merus, change its element!" Allen commanded.

"Give me a few moments," Merus said.

Meruru approached Goldino, trying to become a wall for Merus. She was taking on the same role as Admiral Garara and the members of Stinger during the last battle.

"Hrrrngh!" Meruru grunted.

Fish A charged at Goldino, but the boss was focused on Meruru. At the same time, the Stone As were glued to the mithril golem in hopes of decreasing the strain on the dwarven girl.

"Done," Merus said.

With his 35,000 Intelligence, Merus had used Endow Element to change Goldino's weakness.

"Huh? It changed," Dogora remarked. When he had slammed Kagutsuchi down on Goldino, he had noticed a change in the impact of his blows. Goldino's weakness had now become the fire element.

It's probably thanks to Kagutsuchi. The 150-meter-tall Goldino

staggered when hit by Dogora's weapon. Allen had learned through his grimoire that Dogora had entered Extra Mode after their battle against Bask. When Freyja had initially offered her Blessing, its effects had been listed as "tiny." Since then, however, it had been upgraded to "moderate." Dogora was receiving buffs that put even the Holy Orbs to shame.

Effects of Fire Goddess Freyja's Blessing

Tiny: Only absorbs fire attacks

Very Small: Absorbs fire attacks, increases all stats by +1,000

Small: Absorbs fire attacks, increases all stats by +3,000, increases damage by 10%

Moderate: Absorbs fire attacks, increases all stats by +5,000, increases damage by 30%, reduces cooldown of Super skills by 30%

It was all thanks to the daily prayers of the Hardcore User Island residents and the massive stone statue erected in Neel, a city in Elmahl. Citizens of the Holy Land had started to place their faith in the Goddess of Fire. *I've gotta get her more followers.*

However, there was a condition for Dogora to use her Blessing: He had to have Kagutsuchi equipped. Beast King Muza had had no way of knowing that during their battle in Giamut's arena, but Allen knew that Dogora had cast his Blessing aside to fight fair and square. The monarch having used Beast Mode against such resolve was a huge slap in the face—one that the black-haired boy would not simply forgive and forget.

"Cecil, use Fire Magic," Allen said.

"Got it. Flare!" Cecil chanted.

"I-Impudent runts!" Goldino shouted, crouching down to attack Dogora. "G-Gah?!"

The boss was open to a frontal assault by Cecil's Fire Magic. Using her over 35,000 Intelligence thanks to the Holy Orb of Macris, a necklace that raised Intelligence by +2,000, and a rod she had obtained from a gold chest while farming the iron golems, she launched another massive fireball. This time, it was aimed squarely at Dogora's back, and Goldino could not hide its shock.

"You! You plan on blasting away your friend too?!" the boss boomed.

However, the massive fireball was absorbed by Dogora as

though there were a black hole in his back. Now that he was Freyja's disciple, Fire Magic and Fire Breaths had no effect on him. In fact, he regenerated HP from the attack.

Goldino was caught completely by surprise, and Allen used the chance to utilize his Summons. After they shaved away a good chunk of Goldino's HP, he turned to his friend.

"So far, so good! Dogora, finish it off for me!"

"Got it!" Dogora replied. "Heart and Soul!"

Kagutsuchi emitted a dazzling glow. Dogora kicked Goldino's shin and raced up the arm that had transformed into a drill. He kicked off the boss's elbow and swung his divine vessel down at its chest.

BOOM!

No one had heard such a deafening sound before.



“Gaaah?!” Goldino cried. An opponent one-hundredth its size had punched a hole into it, blowing it backward.

Hmm, has he regained some of the power he showed back then? Allen recalled the time when Dogora and Bask had clashed. Bask was a Greater Demonic Deity, meaning he was likely more powerful than Supercombined Goldino. Bask had even received constant healing from the skeletal Pope, and Dogora had still managed to slice Bask’s body in two. Compared to the power that Dogora had shown in that fight, the boy was still unable to fully wield his might as a disciple. *I have to make his Blessing become “great” so that he gets ever stronger buffs. And Sophie and Shia have Blessings slumbering within them, so I gotta awaken those too.*

Sophie likely carried the Blessing from Rohzen, and Shia was protected by Garm, the God of Beasts. Luke was also under the protection of Faable, the Sovereign of Spirits. However, none of them enjoyed any benefits from these Blessings. Perhaps it was because deities made sure not to meddle too much with the Mortal Realm’s affairs, as Rohzen and former First Angel Merus had mentioned in the past. But if Dogora’s Blessing from Freyja buffed him to this degree, Allen wanted to ensure that the other three received some sort of benefit from their Blessings.

Cecil, Krena, Keel, and Volmaar don’t have Blessings, but I wonder if there’s a way for them to get something. For example, a Blessing from Isiris, the Goddess of Magic, would be perfect for Cecil. Allen had absolutely no idea how to go about having it granted to her, though.

Holy Orbs and other items were already boosting the stats of his party members, and a Blessing from deities would only further increase their power. Allen could not hide his excitement upon learning a possible method other than Extra Mode to have them grow stronger.

“Heh heh heh… Y-You fools!” Goldino shouted. “You’ll rue the day you made me unleash my full power! This is my true form!”

As Allen was busy thinking about the future, Goldino’s components scattered, and True Goldino emerged.

“Merus, is Endow Element still in effect?” Allen asked.

“It is,” Merus replied. “Its weakness is still fire.”

Though Goldino had changed forms, Merus’s Ability was still affecting it.

“All right, then use Judgment Lightning,” Allen said.

“Got it. Receive the purification of judgment!” Merus chanted.

KABOOM!

“Y-You little… Huh?!” Goldino gasped. “I-Impossible! I-I can’t move!”

The monster would not go down even when Merus drained his MP using his Awakened Ability, Judgment Lightning. However, the attack’s effect temporarily locked Goldino where it lay on the ground.

“Cecil, the usual, please,” Allen said.

“Okay! Petit Meteor!” Cecil shouted.

A colossal, crimson boulder of fire appeared out of thin air and slowly crushed True Goldino.

“Y-You ruuuuunts!” Goldino shrieked.

Cecil’s Extra Skill possessed both the fire and earth elements. Since Goldino was now especially weak to fire, the Extra Skill’s damage had been amplified.

“Nice. We did it,” Allen said. Goldino had given them much trouble before, but now, they were able to defeat it in a flash.

“We did it!” Cecil crowed. “But that was a lot quicker than I thought.”

The rest of the No-life Gamers were pleasantly surprised by the outcome. *And we did it without the Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits. We could probably beat it faster if we had that buff. No, I should probably save it for emergencies. I’ll have to test that out later.* Wanting to test out their strength, Allen had had his party fight Goldino without the Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits, and they had won. Because of that, he decided that it would be best to save that skill for emergencies.

“Damn it… My spells didn’t do a thing to it,” Luke grumbled.

“Hmm, so this is the Rank S dungeon boss my brother fought against…” Shia mumbled.

It was a first for both of them. Luke’s buffs had barely been effective, and Shia’s attacks had not seemed to do much either.

“It’s good enough for a first fight,” Allen assured them as he considered discussing future formations. “I’m looking forward to seeing you two grow.”

“Ugh. Guess there aren’t any rainbow chests…” Keel mumbled.

The rewards this time were three silver chests and one gold chest. The silver chests contained an adamantite weapon, a hihiirokane slate, and a ring that increased stats by +5,000. The gold chest contained a magic core.

“Not bad,” Allen said.

His party had no use for the equipment, but it could be utilized to strengthen the Allen Army. As for the magic core, he was trying to collect ten of them, so he was happy to have claimed his fourth one. Nothing they had found would benefit his party, though, so while the drops were not bad, they were by no means great.

“I’m tired. Why don’t we head back for now?” Cecil suggested.

“Huh?” Allen asked, befuddled.

“What do you mean, ‘Huh?’”

“We’re gonna farm iron golems now.”

“What?! Are you right in the head?!”

Allen had prioritized efficiency for this fight because he had wanted to defeat Goldino before starting the party’s daily iron-golem-hunting routine. The boss of the final floor could only be fought once a day, so if they could clear it with no issues, they could also farm iron golems.

Cecil turned pale upon learning that Allen’s goal was to farm three hundred iron golems. But reluctant though she was, the Gamers dragged her along as they split into two groups and diligently took down the behemoths.

Chapter 11: Thomas's Class Promotion and a New Talent

Three months had passed since the No-life Gamers had managed to defeat Goldino by themselves. Farming the boss had become a daily routine, and they had now defeated it ninety times. For this, they had been rewarded with a total of 360 chests. Only ten of them had been rainbow chests, and as Allen had expected, their extreme rarity meant that they contained valuable items. Thanks to the drops, Allen's party had become stronger still.

Hardcore User Island had also developed a fair bit during that time. Roads had been paved to connect the four towns, and the different species had begun to mingle. The residents were adapting to their new environment well. It had not even been half a year since the first immigrants had arrived, but they were already starting their second harvest of crops.

Thanks to the power of the spirits borrowed by the elves and dark elves, the land remained arable for consecutive harvests. They predicted that there could be three harvests per year. The island was by no means large, but it could produce plenty of food.

Moreover, the addition of the Magus Smith squad to the Allen Army had allowed communication magic tools to be installed throughout the island. Allen could now communicate with the nations within the Five Continent Alliance. The Magus Smith squad was also tasked with researching and maintaining magic tools obtained from Rank S dungeons while searching for ways to improve the island's residents' quality of life.

Today was a day off for the party. Normally, this day was used to hold meetings with the Allen Army, inspect how the island was developing, and allow party members to take a breather, but Allen and Cecil were currently on the final floor of the class promotion dungeon. This was where people received their class promotions after clearing three tasks. The two were joined by Thomas, Princess Leilana, and two other friends from the Academy.

“And now you’ll finally get a Talent, Thomas!” Leilana squealed, a halberd resting on her shoulder.

“Yeah, I will,” Thomas replied.

“What’s with you? Come on, celebrate more!”

The princess was in high spirits. It had been a few months since Thomas had gotten help gaining levels, and he had finally maxed out at Lvl. 60, making him eligible for a class promotion.

“I’ll finally get a Talent too,” Thomas murmured.

His younger sister had been born a Wizardess, and his late older brother had been born a Swordsman, but Thomas was Talentless. He had been frustrated by this and was very happy to be receiving a Talent. Unfortunately, however, he could not gather his thoughts well. He could only see that Princess Leilana was delighted.

“Would you prefer a class in the vanguard, rear guard, or middle guard?” the cube inquired.

“It’s like you said the other day, Allen,” Leilana remarked. “I guess you can’t just say ‘Make me a Cleric’ and be done with it.”

Allen had already explained the details of class promotions to the princess. Those who were Talentless chose either the vanguard, the rear guard, or the middle guard. Once they did so, a Talent would be randomly assigned to them.

“I apologize for disappointing you,” the cube said.

“No matter. I’m sure Thomas will become a Cleric,” Leilana replied. Since she was a Halberd User, she wanted a Cleric to heal her.

I wonder what he’ll get, Allen thought. While the vast majority of the Pelomas Whaling Company Guards had Talents, there were several Talentless people, including Captain Raven and Vice-Captain Rita. They had been with Pelomas ever since the merchant had started his own mercenary force and hired them because of their character. Both of them had already cleared the class promotion dungeon and received Talents, which was how Allen was aware of the process.

“Um, I should choose rear guard, right, Allen?” Thomas asked.

“Exactly,” Allen replied. “You’ll have a chance of becoming a Cleric that way.”

“Then rear guard, please.”

“Rear guard. Noted. Please throw this box high above me.”

Pale light gathered in front of the cube, and a small twenty-sided die that could fit in the palm of one's hand appeared. Some faces of the polyhedron had letters, while others were blank. *So we're using a dice roll this time.* Allen had also seen ghost legs and roulettes being used to randomly generate a Talent to be bestowed upon a person.

The cube explained that landing on either of the two blank spaces on the die allowed the user to choose whatever Talent they wished. Feeling Princess Leilana's stare boring through his back, Thomas clutched the die and flung it high in the air.

What'll it be? What'll it be? As Allen hummed a dramatic little tune he learned in his past life in his head, the die formed a beautiful arc and flew over the cube. It bounced thrice before slowly rolling to a stop with one side facing up.

Leilana desperately chased after the die and screeched upon seeing the result. "Huh?! What?! Musician?! Thomas, sit right there!"

"Eek! I'm sorry!" Thomas wailed. The princess had put him into a cobra twist, locking his joints in place.

I feel like this is what people call "unreasonable," Allen thought. Meanwhile, Cecil said nothing, gazing at the scene as though it were nothing out of the ordinary. *I wish you'd see yourself in this and feel bad for how violent you are to me on a daily basis.*

Cecil whirled around to face Allen, much to his surprise, and asked, "Allen, what kind of Talent is Musician anyway?"

"It's a support role that provides buffs," Allen replied. "Musicians use their instruments to strengthen others. There's a similar Talent called Bard, but that one sings instead."

Realizing that Thomas had gotten exactly the type of Talent he had been hoping for, Allen grinned. He had actually wanted to do some testing with a few Talents, and among them was one that specialized in buffs. The No-life Gamers had Sophie to buff them, but that was not her primary role; she was simply utilizing the spirits who could apply buffs. Allen suspected that he could stack his buffs if the right class came along.

When Allen had fought with Helmios, Admiral Garara, and Beast Prince Zeu on the final floor of the Rank S dungeon, he had noticed that buffs from separate species tended to stack.

"Like Lepe, then," Cecil remarked.

"Yep," Allen replied. "Musician, huh..." *He honestly reminds me of a noble who just decided to pursue their passion. But hey, this*

wasn't my *fault.*

Thomas had received a Talent where he played an instrument and buffed his allies based on the tune he played. And since he had started off Talentless, he was allowed one more class promotion. To do so, he had to max his level and skill levels.

"In any case, Talents are bestowed upon us by Lord Elmea. It's not something we can change," Leilana said. "But now that you've finally been given one, we must celebrate this joyous occasion."

She shot Allen a threatening glare, making her implication clear: The celebration would be for just the two of them. *As usual, this princess sure is precocious.* He received the message loud and clear.

"I'm terribly sorry," Allen said, trying to sound as apologetic as possible. "I would love to join in on the festivities, Princess Leilana, but we've got plans of our own..."

"Is that so? Then I suppose you'll simply have to miss out!" Leilana replied happily. "I'll celebrate with Thomas."

Cecil shot Thomas a look, silently telling him to be careful to avoid any questionable situations, and he nodded back in agreement. *It's like sibling telepathy.* Allen and Cecil then left, teleporting back to the Rank S dungeon.

"We're back," Allen said.

"That was quick!" Krena replied, welcoming them.

Their base was almost complete, and she had been in the training area. Since Hardcore User Island was developing smoothly, Allen wanted the army's bases in Academy City and Rank S dungeon to undergo their own developments.

When the Gamers had met up for a meeting, Sophie and Cecil had claimed that spending all day in dungeons would hurt the army's morale. Helping with base construction would be an excellent change of pace for them. Allen, who did not mind spending all day every day in the dungeon, did not quite understand, but it was important to listen to others.

And so, in addition to days off, soldiers were also allotted days to do some building. Having several of the same structures had seemed like a terrible use of space, so Allen had decided to tear down all the walls, leaving only two buildings standing. The rest of the ground had been leveled to create additional living spaces or training areas. Since a clearing was easily made by leveling the ground, Krena and Dogora spent their days off training

there.

They would eat breakfast, do some morning training, head back inside to eat a hearty lunch, and then go out to train once more before returning in the evening. While the two had been training, Krena had mentioned that she was happy to learn that Dogora's stats were higher than hers. Now, she could fight him without holding back.

Dogora had continued to raise his level and was now Lvl. 95. The training helped him to better wield two axes. Iron golems and Goldino were large targets, so accuracy was not particularly important against them, but if he came face-to-face with someone similar to him in size like Bask, unnecessary movements would be fatal.

Allen noticed Shia in the back of the training area, absentmindedly staring at people training.

"Oh, are you just spectating, Shia?" he asked.

"Huh? No, I'm done for now," the Beast Princess replied. "I came to get everyone because it's almost lunchtime."

She seemed to be in a daze, though…

Shia loudly announced that it was lunchtime, and Krena rushed into the building at tremendous speed. She zoomed past Allen to head inside. Allen and the others then calmly stepped into the dining area, where they saw the soldiers who lived at the base bustling around while enjoying their lunch. The residents of Hardcore User Island were handing out food and busily walking around the area. They had been dispatched to the two bases from the island and were hard at work.

Someone had to make food and clean up in the Allen Army. At first, Allen had wanted the soldiers to take care of all the odd jobs themselves, but by the time he had assembled his troops and made a base for them, he had already spent over a hundred million gold. Given that it had taken such a hefty investment, Allen wanted them to focus on fighting. He had consulted Pelomas, the island's governor, and the merchant had suggested using the island's residents for these services.

Following Pelomas's advice, Allen had set up a job listing, offering triple the average salary. Upon his doing so, people had flooded him in search of work. He had managed to hire those experienced in cooking and distributing food. The residents greeted Allen as he walked by, and he gave half-hearted responses as he made his way to a seat in a corner of the busy

dining area. He wanted to dine with everyone in this cafeteria-like space and had rejected Sophie's idea of eating in a more private area with only a few high-ranking soldiers.

A while after he took his seat, plates piled high with food were placed in front of him. Krena's eyes sparkled with delight as she grabbed a hunk of meat and voraciously chowed down. Allen recalled the soldiers having been taken aback by her seemingly insatiable appetite at first, but when he looked around, no one seemed to be bothered anymore.

"Hmm? I don't see General Rudo," Allen remarked. "Is he talking to Albahal?"

"Seems like it," Shia replied. "He's been doing so since this morning, so it's taking him quite a bit of time."

Rudo had regularly been in contact with the Country of Beastkin and had reported that today's meeting would decide the next Beast King. Currently, Beku, Zeu, and Shia all had a claim to the throne, and one of them would be chosen as the next monarch. Muza and the other ministers had gone through several rounds of discussions.

Allen had determined that he could do nothing even if he visited Albahal. He had had Rudo take one of the communication magic tools from the Adventurer's Guild so that he could receive contact from Albahal. This was part of the reason Allen was unable to celebrate Thomas's class promotion, but it seemed Rudo had not returned yet.

"Ooh, lunch!" Luke said excitedly. "I'm so hungry!"

He walked toward Allen and the group with his tutor-slash-attendant behind him.

"Lord Luketod, we still haven't finished your morning studies," the dark elf tutor nagged.

It was the usual scene: Luke tried to ditch his lessons, and his tutor desperately tried to hammer information into him.

"All right, all right," Luke replied. "I'll do it after lunch."

As Allen looked over Cecil's shoulder to glance at Luke, her skirt lifted up, allowing the world to see what lay beneath it. *Huh. Granny panties.*

Cecil gasped and froze for a second before she whirled around, locking eyes with a grinning Luke. It only took a moment for her to understand what had just occurred.

"I-I'll kill you, you perverted brat!" Cecil screamed.

She lunged forward and chased after Luke, her face twisted

with demonic anger.



Chapter 12: The Woes of the Royal Family

“Stop! Get back here!” Cecil roared.

“No way! Go away, Miss Granny Panties!” Luke teased.

“I-I’ll kill you!”

The furious Cecil chased after the dark elf boy, but the dining area was teeming with Allen Army soldiers out for lunch. Needless to say, Cecil could not run around freely. In contrast, the little dark elf could easily crawl under tables, pop out to taunt the noble lady, and flee.

“Oh, King Olbaas…” the dark elf tutor sighed, burying their face in their hands.

I’m sure the tutor is afraid for the dark elves with a future king like that, Allen thought.

Luke was full of energy today too. The dark elf boy was older than he looked, but he resembled an eight-year-old boy. His personality matched his appearance, as he was always being mischievous and looking for trouble. He loved playing pranks like lifting Cecil’s skirt and touching her butt.

Luke had targeted others before. When he once dared to lift Krena’s skirt, he was caught in the blink of an eye. “You can’t do stuff like that!” Krena had scolded while tying him up and hanging him from a tree. It was a new side to her that Allen had not seen before.

When Luke had touched Sophie’s butt, the elf had smiled and twisted the boy’s arm. Allen had needed to go in and calm her down. The Summoner did not want the elves and dark elves to wage war against each other over a boy’s mischief.

Meruru was not ever targeted, perhaps because she looked to be the same age as Luke, and the ever-vigilant Shia never allowed anyone to get behind her. *But with Luke’s mischief, I was able to see a new side of all the other ladies.*

After some time, Cecil emerged, covered in dust and her hair a mess. Carrying a similarly filthy Luke under her arm, she returned to where Allen and the rest of the party were seated.

“Hey! Let go of me, Cecil!” Luke wailed.

“And why should I?!” Cecil shouted back. “You know what you did!”

She threw the boy into his seat, and a black weasel that was eating on top of the table swiftly moved on to his lap. Cecil glared at Luke before sitting beside Allen with a loud *thud*.

"Kings come in all sorts of forms," Allen mumbled as he watched Luke's tutor leave the dining area with slumped shoulders. "But that's nothing new."

"What are you on about?" Cecil asked. "Aren't you the commander in chief? You should scold him for what he did."

"But he's a kid."

Allen had carried his teachings from his previous life, where boys would be boys. This level of mischief was not enough to bother him. He watched Luke greedily chug his soup straight from the bowl, etiquette be damned as he splashed the area around him, and started to understand why King Olbaas had entrusted his son to the No-life Gamers.

In the past, the dark elves had lost a battle against the elves and were banished from the continent where Rohzenheim was located, forced to find shelter in the southern region of the Galiatan Continent. Though not the king at that time, Olbaas had been sitting on the throne for quite a while, rebuilding ties with elves, helping the dark elves repopulate, and doing what he could to restore his species to its former glory.

As king, Olbaas's greatest challenge had been having children. Allen was not privy to the details, but just as there were high elves who protected the World Tree in Rohzenheim, there were also high dark elves who protected the World Tree in Fabraaze. These special types of elves could not easily conceive children. Luke had been the king's first child after many attempts, and the boy had thus been raised quite spoiled. Then, Sophie, the favorite to become the next queen of Rohzenheim, had appeared with Rohzen, the God of Spirits, and thwarted the daemonic incarnations with a small team and a few Summons.

Olbaas had suspected that Allen, who was in the same party as Sophie, was the savior of the world that Rohzen had prophesied. When the king had then seen Rukoaque being destroyed along with the Demonic Deity, he might have thought that the future of the dark elves could be easily snuffed out.

There was still hope to be had, however. For some reason, Faable, the subject of their worship, had taken a liking to Luke, and Olbaas had guessed that there was some reason behind it. The king had entrusted his son to Allen in hopes of finding an

answer.

"Food's good today too!" Luke shouted.

"Don't shovel food into your mouth. You can choke," Faable warned.

"You're right. Thanks."

He petted the weasel's head, his hands grubby from the soup and the juices of other stews, but the Sovereign of Spirits did not seem to mind one bit. She began cleaning her silky, black fur. This was their usual exchange. Sophie said not a word as she stared at Luke.

"I'm sure you had a phase like that too, didn't you, Sophie?" Allen asked.

"No, never," the elf princess replied coldly.

Really? He glanced over at Volmaar, who had been her guard for years. The elf had surely noticed the Summoner's gaze, yet he refused to meet it. Perhaps Sophie's childhood was not to be discussed. *Hmm, I guess royals are expected to have a certain level of etiquette and elegance. I wonder if there was any of that in my previous life. Let's see... Yeah, when I was a snot-nosed kid playing in the sandbox, I remember seeing kids my age getting up onstage to perform traditional plays and properly introducing themselves to large audiences.*

In this world, Allen had been able to interact with Sophie, Shia, Luke, and other royals from various nations and species. Much like the kids in his past life who had gone onstage at a young age, royals likely carried woes and struggles that no commoner could possibly imagine. That was the way of the world. His mind wandered to the selection of Albahal's next Beast King. *I wonder if it'll still take some time...* He had heard that the next monarch would be chosen in the morning, and that King Muza would personally announce the next king early in the afternoon.

"Did we make it?" Keel asked as he entered the dining area with a buzzed Meruru.

"Yep. No news yet," Allen replied.

The group had made plans to meet for lunch, which had left them free to do as they pleased until then. Keel had been offering healings at a nearby church, and Meruru had been drinking at a nearby tavern since morning. He had lent her a shoulder and set her down in a seat before going to get some food.

“Dogora, you mustn’t just eat meat. Have some vegetables and bread as well,” Shia said.

“Hmm? Yeah, got it. Hey, wait!” he cried.

Dogora, who had meat in both of his hands, gave a troubled response as bread, vegetables, and fruit were laid out in front of him. He reluctantly ate the other foods.



Allen had seen this exchange a handful of times since the Five Continent Alliance conference. *Maybe it's because Dogora saved Shia.* The Beast Princess had challenged Beast King Muza to a duel in order to gain her independence. As her father had pummeled her, Dogora had stepped in to protect her, fighting in her stead and getting beaten to a pulp.

It seemed Shia was appreciative of Dogora's bravery. Beastkin were an emotional species who wore their hearts on their sleeves. Shia was no exception, and right now, her emotions, which went beyond extreme gratitude, were directed at Dogora.

"Are you guys at it again?" Keel asked wearily, standing behind the pair and holding a wooden tray piled high with food in both hands.

Allen gazed at Keel, implicitly telling the Apprentice Pope to keep his mouth shut. This was not the first time that Shia had taken care of Dogora. The Beast Princess had begun her training in the Rank S dungeon and had tackled the final floor boss with the rest of the party. She was training daily by farming iron golems, and when the Gamers split into two groups in hopes of increasing efficiency, she always joined Dogora's group.

Luke had also managed to farm in the Rank S dungeon, having successfully received a class promotion to Dark Wizard. He was a debuffer, but it seemed his spells did not work on the golems on the lower floors, as golems were resistant to debuffs and Luke lacked the Intelligence to cast more powerful spells. As of late, he had been training on the final floor of the Rank S dungeon to raise his skill levels.

As Allen recalled the current state of affairs, he noticed Dogora give Shia a "Are you my mom?" look, and the Summoner hastily butted in.

"Dogora, you should eat some bread if you're planning on training in the afternoon," Allen remarked.

"Yeah?" Dogora asked.

"Meat will help you bulk up, but bread will give you the energy to be more active. There isn't a type of food that you can go absolutely without, and it's important to eat a well-balanced meal. But since you're still growing, you can add more meat into your diet."

"Huh. Makes sense."

Though Allen was not sure Dogora had completely understood his explanation, the Destroyer still reached out and

munched on some tough bread. Shia frowned and shot Allen a seething glare. *Okay, so she seems mad.* Dogora had refused to listen to her advice, and she was angry that he had taken Allen's. *If you want him to do what you say, you just gotta convince him.*

"But he really is late…" Cecil murmured.

Allen checked the clock. *Maybe Zeu was given the throne and Rudo can't bring himself to report the bad news back to us.* The rhinokin had looked after Shia ever since she was young and had become captain of her beastkin squad. Allen surmised that he was in denial of the result, and the Beast Princess had failed to attain the throne.

Just then, there was a loud *bang!* The doors of the dining hall flew open, and Rudo dashed into the room in a panic. *Oh, speak of the devil. Wait, is something wrong?* Everyone in the dining area was focused on Rudo's noisy entrance, and when the general spotted Shia, he shouted as loudly as he could.

"Beku— Crown Prince Beku has started a revolt! The Beast King has been attacked!"

"What?!" Shia yelled as she leaped to her feet. "That can't be!"

A new ordeal had just begun in Albahal.

Chapter 13: Turbulence in Albahal

Today, a new Beast King would be crowned. Rudo had headed to the Adventurer's Guild to use the communication magic tool to receive the news. Unfortunately, however, the rhinokin had returned with tidings of a revolt in Albahal.

"Is my father all right?!" Shia asked, forgetting to use Muza's title.

She still worries about her dad even though he clobbered her just the other day, Allen thought. *And it sounded like her mother had already passed.* The Summoner could not understand why Shia valued her father so much. Mia, presumably Shia's late mother, had never been mentioned again after the battle between Shia and Muza.

"He's fine," Rudo reported. "He was injured in the revolt, but the Corps healed him. The revolt has apparently already been suppressed. Your Highness, I think it best that we go elsewhere before discussing further details."

"Right," Shia replied.

There were many soldiers gathered in the dining hall, including some of the beastkin from Shia's squad. They had all narrowed their eyes with suspicion at Rudo's mention of "Crown Prince Beku" and "a revolt." However, it was imperative to confirm the situation first, and Allen suggested that they all move to their personal conference room.

"I don't even know where to begin..." Rudo muttered as he took a seat. He still needed time to organize his thoughts.

Wait, so it's not just that Beku started a revolt? What's going on?

"S-Start anywhere! Tell me everything!" Shia ordered hastily.

"If the revolt has already been suppressed, it'd be best to start from the very beginning," Allen interjected. "How did it happen, anyway?"

The current king was deciding on his successor, so there had to have been some trigger for the revolt. To find that trigger, they had to first figure out the entire timeline of events.

"Very well. I shall start from the top," Rudo replied.

Rudo began when the Five Continent Alliance had finished its conference with Allen. After returning to Albahal, Beast King

Muza had quickly summoned his ministers, including Temi as an advisor, and held an emergency meeting. The monarch had stated that he would choose either Zeu or Shia as the next Beast King and that once the decision was finalized, he would step down from his position. When pressed for a reason, he had stated that he had done the unthinkable during his duel against Shia and that it had done considerable damage to his reputation as the Beast King.

Must be because he used Beast Mode. Allen glanced at Dogora, who was listening without uttering a single word. *He must feel responsible for causing it because he jumped in to protect Shia.* Just as Allen was about to offer words of consolation since he had joined in on the battle as well, Shia opened her mouth.

"I see… No wonder he said that back then…"

When Muza and Allen's battle had been interrupted, the Summoner had noticed the monarch exchanging words with his daughter, though the details of their conversation were unknown.

"Wait, does that mean that Beku no longer had the right to succeed the throne by that point?" Allen asked.

Rudo frowned. He did not like to hear the crown prince of his nation being referred to so casually.

"Beku…" the rhinokin replied. "But yes. Only those who have overcome the trial given to them by the Beast King have claim to the throne."

While Allen did not know why Beku had started a revolt, Shia was a member of the No-life Gamers. The Summoner wanted her to become the next Beast King and grow more powerful—he felt no need to respect anyone who stood in the way of that.

"What are these trials?" Dogora asked.

Rudo went into detail about the trials given by the Beast King. In Albahal, the firstborn child had claim to the throne. *I guess if you're older, you automatically become better.* However, there were times when a younger sibling should succeed the throne instead. In such situations, the king provided each younger sibling with a trial, and any who overcame their trial could become the future monarch. *Kinda like how the rulers of the elves and the dark elves can be the child of an elder since it's hard for those races to have children.*

"So was there an argument because two of them cleared their trials at the same time?" Allen asked.

Discussions for the next monarch had been going on for nearly three months.

“I wouldn’t call it an argument, but as you say, two children having claim to the throne in addition to the Beast Crown Prince is rather unprecedented,” Rudo replied.

The trials given by the Beast King had included defeating the Pontiff of Daemonism, who had many followers across the world and had propagated his religion far and wide, and being the first to clear the Rank S dungeon. Needless to say, the trials had been incredibly difficult, and historically, only about one in ten people were able to overcome such tall tasks. Two people clearing them simultaneously had never occurred before.

“And what kind of opinions were thrown around?” Allen asked.

“Opinions?” Rudo inquired.

“It took so long to reach a conclusion, meaning that people had differing opinions, no?”

“Ah, I suppose so. The chancellor and the secretary of state wanted Prince Zeu to become the next Beast King.”

It seemed the Five Continent Alliance, which had been established decades ago, impacted the internal affairs of Albahal. With the Empire of Giamut standing at the helm, the Alliance had been requesting aid in its fight against the Demon Lord Army while shutting out less cooperative nations. The chancellor and secretary of state must have wanted someone with a gentler attitude who also had friendly ties with Giamut to deal with its leadership. Beast Prince Zeu fit both criteria, so there was a chance he could pry open their occluded national affairs.

“Are you saying that Zeu didn’t become the next Beast King?” Allen asked.

“Precisely,” Rudo replied. “Lady Temi was the first to go against the idea.”

“Huh? So the divination changed?”

Until now, Temi had divined that Zeu would be the next king.

“More accurately, there was no result at all,” Rudo said.

The chancellor had accused Temi of being irresponsible for having allowed such a thing to happen, and though the meeting had continued after that, a compromise had never been reached. The situation had reached the ears of the nobles, and they had begun discussing the fate of the future monarch as well. Ultimately, many had settled on the idea that the next

monarch should not be chosen just yet. *Temi's divinations are really influential in Albahal.*

Beast King Muza had not agreed. He had continued to insist that he was going to abdicate the throne and forced discussions to continue, adamantly claiming that a new Beast King would be announced to Albahal by the designated date. Today was the fateful day of the announcement, and Muza had gathered the ministers early in the morning to finalize the result. He had declared that no one was allowed to leave the room until his successor was chosen. In the middle of this meeting, Beast Crown Prince Beku's soldiers had taken up arms and started a revolt. *They started just as the Beast King and all the ministers gathered in one room. Maybe they were waiting for this opportunity.*

"But if Beku's revolt was suppressed, that means he failed, right?" Allen asked.

"I'm not exactly sure if 'failed' is the right word," Rudo replied. "If we claim that His Highness tried to claim the throne, then indeed, his attempt failed. He injured His Majesty rather gravely, however..."

"What?!" Shia cried. "You said that His Majesty was fine now!"

"He is, of course. He suffered from a deep wound, but he managed to cling to life, and his condition has stabilized. That's what I've been told."

"I-I see... That's good news. And what happened to my brother and his soldiers?"

"The Beast King Corps managed to capture almost all of the soldiers under His Highness. However, he took the Symbol of the Beast King."

"No! Why did Beku steal that?!" Allen shouted.

The Symbol of the Beast King was a set of three equips: orichalcum knuckle-dusters, orichalcum armor, and a Holy Orb from Holy Bird Quatro. The golden gleam of the orichalcum paired quite well with the golden Holy Orb of Quatro, serving as perfect accessories for the Beast King. Allen had already assumed that they would go to Shia. *It's like the time someone stole Freyja's divine vessel, though it's probably not on that grand a scale.*

The year prior, the invasion of Rohzenheim had been used as bait to attack the temple of Freyja in the Heavenly Realm and steal her divine vessel. Gushara had then used it on his followers to transform them into daemonic incarnations. While Allen could

understand the cause of the revolt in Albahal, Beku had basically stolen the tokens of the Beast King.

"We immediately sent soldiers to chase after him," Rudo explained. "But it seems the crown prince had expected this and flown away on a magic ship."

Huh. So Beku didn't think he could become the Beast King by killing the current monarch. I mean, it is *Muza we're talking about, so I don't blame him, but he still couldn't give up on the throne. He needed another plan.* Allen tried to understand the mind of the crown prince. The moment Zeu and Shia overcame their trials and earned the right to claim the throne, the probability of Beku being crowned the king had dropped to nearly zero.

The current Beast King had enough power to clobber Hero Helmios; Beku had no chance of winning against such a foe. How else, then, could he become king? Beku had proceeded to steal the Symbol of the Beast King, implying that the items signified that he was the monarch. Surely, the items themselves did not make one king, though. What process was needed alongside the gear to claim the crown? *If I were in his shoes…*

"Does he have an ally somewhere? Maybe in Giamut?" Allen surmised.

I don't think his personal soldiers would've been able to do much. The Corps and the Ten Heroic Beasts were probably stationed at the royal castle. While the size of Beku's army was unknown, the Beast King had his personal Corps that protected his life. Even a sneak attack would not have been able to get through the tight defenses of the castle. Each member of the Corps had at least a two-star Talent, and Beast Hammer King Rudo had once been stationed there. General Hoba and a few other members of the Ten Heroic Beasts were members of the Corps—for Beku to have suppressed them while stealing the Symbol of the Beast King, he would have required an ally.

"There…have actually been a few reports of people spotting a large group of merfolk soldiers," Rudo said.

"Merfolk?!" Shia yelped in surprise. "Are you saying that Crevelle is behind all this?!"

She's been in negotiations with them for a while. No doubt she feels some level of betrayal from them. But I didn't expect this. Did they decline us in writing last time because Crevelle was connected to Beast Crown Prince Beku behind the scenes? Crevelle was the kingdom of merfolk. Allen had repeatedly asked that he be

granted entry into the Prostia Empire, and he had recently received an official letter formally declining his request.

"We can't be sure," Rudo replied. "When we inquired about it with Crevelle earlier, they seemed befuddled. It seemed they didn't fully comprehend the situation either."

When Crevelle was contacted, they had replied that they wanted to confirm the current state of affairs.

"Interesting," Allen said as he tried to determine the mastermind behind this ordeal. *If Crevelle's telling the truth here, then there's only one other nation with merfolk that could lend their aid.*

"It can't be!" Shia gasped, implying that she had reached the same conclusion.

"Yep. The only other culprit is the Prostia Empire," Allen declared, and everyone gulped nervously.

After hearing Rudo's report, Allen and his party teleported back to Hardcore User Island and dispatched a Bird A straight for the Crevelle Kingdom, which was their next destination. The King Me'd Bird A had 25,000 Agility, so it reached Crevelle in about an hour. It then made a Nest and used Homing Instinct, teleporting everyone to the kingdom of merfolk.

The Gamers had learned of the revolt a little past noon, and it had taken a good while for them to make the necessary preparations, so the sun had already set by the time they arrived in Crevelle. Even so, the Crevelle royal family had decided to welcome them, and they were guided into the meeting room of the royal palace. Pelomas had tagged along this time around. He was dying to head to the Prostia Empire for Fiona and had instantly agreed to tag along for a Crevelle visit. Shia, meanwhile, looked to be in a daze. It was like she was not all there.

"Shia, you can head back if you're worried," Dogora said.

"No, I'm fine. This is my duty as a member of the royal family," the Beast Princess replied. "But thank you."

The Albahal royal castle had been invaded by the crown prince himself. Not only had her father, Muza, been under attack, but many familiar faces must have been dragged into the mess as well. Even if that had not been the case, Beku's army and the troops defending the castle had clashed. Many must have gotten injured, and much blood must have been shed. Despite her worries, she knew there were other matters she needed to tend

to, so she desperately suppressed her anxiety and kept a pensive expression on her face.

After a while, a merfolk appeared and guided everyone to a separate room. *Huh. I guess we're all allowed to go. If there were too many of us, I'd planned on going with only Shia and Pelomas.*

Luke was also with them. Allen had decided to extend everyone in his party the courtesy of an invitation to go to Crevelle, and Luke had been more than happy to tag along. It was not clear just how much he understood about what was going on, but this experience might prove indispensable to the young future king of the dark elves. Either way, Allen had planned on letting the Crevelle royal family dictate the terms of his audience with them, so he was grateful that they were willing to allow his whole party to attend.

They were guided into a spacious conference room where the Crevelle royal family was waiting for them. The king was sandwiched by his queen and Princess Carmine, all three of whom were facing a long desk, in front of which sat another desk. Beside the queen were two merfolk dressed rather splendidly—likely chancellors or ministers. Behind them were a host of royal guards, tasked with protecting the merfolk.

"Thank you for coming all this way," the king said as Allen sat down.

"I apologize for intruding at such a late hour," Allen apologized, "but there's something I need to confirm as soon as possible."

"Ah, yes. Beast Princess Shia, I have heard about the unfortunate incident back in Albahal. If there's anything we can do, we shall lend a hand."

"I cannot express my gratitude enough for your generosity," Shia replied with a deep bow as tea and snacks were placed in front of the Gamers.

"It seems Beku, the one behind this revolt, had some sort of ally," Allen, who was sitting in the middle of his group, said, getting straight to business. It was late at night and there was no time for idle chatter. "There are rumors that the merfolk might be lending their support."

During previous negotiations, Shia had been in charge of the conversation as the princess of Albahal, but this time around, Allen was paying a visit as the commander in chief of his army. Rudo had already reported to him that the Beast King Corps had

fought an army of merfolk.

"I see…" the king replied. "As I told Albahal earlier, we are completely unrelated to this series of events."

Hmm… Yeah, I don't think he's lying. Allen used his Intelligence to closely observe the king, the queen, Princess Carmine, and the other officials, but they did not seem to be lying or hiding anything.

"Then is the Prostia Empire somehow involved?" Allen inquired.

"We…have not been entrusted with that knowledge," the king answered.

I guess they're not given accurate information. Allen had tried to look into the Prostia Empire in his own way, but he had been left with more questions than answers. He could only gauge the empire's situation from scant details he had learned from trade—exports shed light on what the empire produced, and imports gave information on what the empire could not sufficiently create.

"I understand," Allen finally said. Crevelle had been created solely so that the Prostia Empire could interact with nations above water and thus could not provide any meaningful information.

"But…" the king started, steeling his resolve.

"Yes?" Allen asked.

"I *have* heard that the Prostia Empire's army has been behaving rather…strangely as of late. These are only rumors, of course."

"Thank you for letting me know."

Prostia's army is on the move. Gotta thank the king for telling us. The king of Crevelle had leaked information about Prostia to outsiders. Realizing this, the Summoner slowly looked over at the queen and Princess Carmine, as perhaps the ladies were also steeling themselves for the future. *In any case, we have to go to Prostia one way or another.*

One thing had become clear: There was more reason for Allen to visit the Prostia Empire. At first, he had just wanted some Holy Orbs and to meet Holy Fish Macris, but now, stopping Beku's puzzling scheme had been added to the mix. The Beast Crown Prince, who wanted to eradicate humans from the world, had stolen away the Symbol of the Beast King. *And Prostia's helping him.*

While Allen still could not fully comprehend the situation, Beku had to be stopped.

“Shia, if we retrieve the Symbol of the Beast King, would that make you the next Beast King?” Allen asked, turning to the Albahalan royal. *Seems like this entire ordeal started while Albahal was deciding between her and Zeu.*

In other words, a decision about who would be the next Beast King had not been made just yet. Beku, who was born with the claim to the throne, had stolen away the Symbol of the Beast King. As its name implied, if the gear made one the Beast King, then the one who retrieved it would rightfully be seen as the next monarch in the eyes of the beastkin. Allen would provide his full cooperation in this endeavor. As she had joined his party, his power was hers to borrow.

Shia had decided to join Allen in hopes of one day making an empire of beastkin. *But a king can’t rely on their power alone. They have to rely on others at times and do whatever they can to claim the throne for themself. Which might affect Zeu’s lifespan…*

Beast Prince Zeu was a henpecked husband, forced to submit to his wife’s every whim. She believed that he would be the next king, so if he did not achieve that, his life would be in danger. *Gotta think of a way to help him out, then.*

“That’s not for you to decide, Allen,” Shia said firmly. “But perhaps the possibility is there. Still, the items Beku stole must be returned to Albahal once. And to do that…”

Shia believed that this would be the perfect opportunity to demonstrate her power as the next possible monarch. In order for her to do that, however, she required something very important. The Albahalan royal turned to the Crevelle king, but he immediately bowed his head.

“I’m terribly sorry,” he said. “We can’t issue visas for you.”

The queen, princess, and ministers gave looks of dejection. It was clear that Crevelle could not do much.

“Which visa in particular?” Allen asked. “There’s one issued by Crevelle and another by Prostia, I believe.”

One visa, issued by Crevelle, was for merfolk only. The other, issued by Prostia, was for nonmerfolk. The latter type was blessed by Aqua, allowing the person wearing it to breathe underwater.

“The one issued by the Prostia Empire,” the king replied, revealing that he had already requested Prostia for the visas. “I

was, in no uncertain terms, rejected."

"Even though Beast Crown Prince Beku was allowed in?" Allen asked.

"As I said before, we cannot confirm that."

I guess we can't pester them much more. It's not like we have hard evidence that Beku's in Prostia. No one knew where Beku had gone after fleeing the royal castle.

"This is quite the conundrum," Sophie said. "If we can't enter Prostia…"

"But, well, we have to. We're gonna need to go there sooner or later," Allen replied.

"But Lord Allen…" She felt like he was asking for the impossible.

"Your Majesty, are you able to issue a visa for us?" Allen asked.

"I can, of course, but those visas are for…" the king trailed off.

You said you can do it. I'll hold you to your word. Though Allen had received the king's word, humans, elves, and beastkin could not survive within the Prostia Empire. The rest of the No-life Gamers could not hide their confusion; no doubt Allen knew this tidbit, and yet he still seemed so confident. Did he have something up his sleeve?

"You've got a plan, don't you, Allen?" Cecil asked.

"I do," Allen replied. "I'm used to this sort of thing. I experienced it many times in the past."

I guess any world has nations like Prostia. Allen had played such games numerous times before. If he could not go to a certain area, the game had required the player to obtain a key or some other special method of transportation. There had always been a solution lying around, in tandem with the reason behind a player being barred entry.

Allen used what he had learned as Kenichi to analyze the situation. He was trying to enter a zone that was off-limits to him. Like a story that would not progress unless he entered the village of the elves, who hated humans, or an event that would not trigger until he infiltrated the Demon Lord Castle and figured out the Demon Lord's motives, he simply needed to once again use the methods he had learned in his games.

"This is probably the first time I'll be showing you guys this, huh?" Allen said. "We'll enter using the most basic method. Octo, can you use Mimic? You can use it on just me."

A massive octopus appeared from the walls of the room.

“Mimic just you, Master Allen? Aye,” Octo, the Fish A Summon, said.

The Crevelle royals, ministers, and knights gasped in alarm upon seeing the octopus, which was so large that only its face and mouth were visible. At the end of its cylindrical mouth, Octo created a bubble that was large enough for a person to stand inside. The bubble floated toward Allen and bumped into him with an amusing *plap*, turning into white smoke and enveloping his body. When the smoke cleared, a merfolk was standing in front of everyone’s eyes.

“L-Lord Allen?! Lord Allen, is that really you?! How in the world did you transform?!” Sophie gasped as she stood up.

“Heh heh heh,” Allen laughed triumphantly. He closed and opened his hands, checking his webbed fingers. *Huh, so this is how it feels to be a merfolk.*

“Hey, why are you a merfolk now, Allen?!” Cecil cried. Even she could not wrap her head around what had just happened.

Allen grinned as he confidently pointed to the ocean in the distance. “Now then, since it seems like our lovely Crevelle Kingdom royals will issue us visas, let’s visit the Prostia Empire at the bottom of the sea!”

Side Story 1: The Sacrifice and the Blood of the Beast (Part 2)

It had been ten months since Beast Crown Prince Beku's loss in the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament. Beast Prince Giru, who had dominated the match, had been crowned Beast Crown Prince of Brysen upon his return. He had also sent his request to join the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament the following year.

Beku was looking forward to the challenge. Following his defeat, he had holed himself up for a few months out of shock, but he had gradually begun to believe that he could not keep retreating. The pride of Albahal, and above all, his own pride had been tarnished, and he was not about to take it lying down. He had personally begged for the Beast King's permission and had conducted his duties as Beast Crown Prince while claiming victory in various competitions. He was training hard to exact his revenge on Giru.

As a part of his training, Beku had decided to hunt an ark spider, a Rank S monster that dwelled in dense forests. The creature, known to live for several millennia within the lush greenery of Albahal, would devour a couple of beastkin every time it awoke from its slumber.

Once, the residents of a village near one such forest had tried to defeat the monster, but they had failed miserably. The entire village had been gobbled up within a few weeks. And so, in hopes of quelling its wrath, other nearby villages had started a custom of offering a few beastkin to the spider.

Now, however, this fearsome monster was nothing more than a hundred-meter-tall corpse in front of Beku.

"Ah, Romu..." the Beast Crown Prince said, gazing at a sack that could fit in the palm of his hand. "This is a wonderful drug. Without it, I would have been in trouble."

Before his bout with the monster, Beku had swallowed a pill from inside the sack. Doing so had caused power to overflow from his body—so much so that he had just risked his life to defeat a spider the size of a mountain.

"But of course," Romu replied happily. "It's a powerful

supplement blend of my own creation. Nothing can compare to it."

Romu, a goatkin, stood behind the royal. This wandering physician had suddenly appeared one day after Beku had suffered a humiliating defeat and holed himself up. While it was unclear exactly how Romu gained the Beast Crown Prince's trust, the goatkin had begun residing in the royal castle and had eventually become his personal pharmacist. Captain Kei, a dogkin, emerged from behind Romu and pushed the goatkin aside.

"Prince Beku, I'm so glad you're safe," Captain Kei said, but he quickly noticed something amiss. "Y-Your face!" The ark spider's sharp front leg had sliced Beku's cheek, creating a deep gash that ran across his ear.

"Hmm? Ah, yes. Oddly enough, I don't feel any pain. Perhaps I have Romu's medicine to thank," Beku replied, his wound healing as he spoke. "I feel power coursing through me. I must have overcome Beast God Garm's Trial."

Due to his crushing defeat at the hands of Giru, Beku had been training hard for the next tournament. He had also changed his manner of speech, becoming more polite and adding a regal flair to his words.

"But this will scar your beautiful face, Prince Beku," Kei said, worried that the fully healed wound would leave a lasting mark. "Romu, is there no good method to prevent that?"

"I've already given Prince Beku a pill to increase his HP," Romu replied with a smile. "That pill will heal any wound, and with a good night's rest, you won't feel any exhaustion the next day either."

"I see. I trust that you're right," Beku said. "You have my gratitude."

"But it's only because you have the blood of Albahal's founder flowing through your veins. In other words, you are the rightful heir to the power given to us by Beast God Garm to protect and guide us beastkin. I have no doubt that you are the beastkin who is closest to god."

Beku's eyes glimmered. "Which means there is no reason I should lose to Giru."

A terrifying grin stretched across his face, causing Captain Kei's fur to stand on end. The captain realized that he feared his master very much. When he glanced over at Romu, the elderly

goatkin did not seem to be exhibiting the same sense of fear. On the contrary, he was smiling.

“Beast God Gillan protects the Brysen royal family,” Romu said. “However, the deity only became who he is because of Lord Garm’s whims. Brysen is no match for Albahal. When people see you awaken the power slumbering with you, Prince Beku, everyone will be reminded of this face.”

The knights surrounding Romu and Captain Kei began nodding along as they whispered in agreement.

“He’s right.”

“Giru is nothing to be afraid of.”

They served Beku, who had been thought of as a prodigy since his youth. No one was eager to admit their master’s defeat in the previous tournament. They were all passionately watching Beku prepare to exact his revenge in the next match. No one realized how excited they were about their pleas finally being answered.

“Perhaps so,” Beku said coldly to the knights. “However, this is between myself and Giru. As he is a pillar supporting Beast God Garm, I will not allow any of you to speak ill of Lord Gillan. You’d best heed my warning, Romu. If you wish to remain close to me, you must never speak of the deities in such a manner.”

The smile faded from Romu’s face as he bowed vehemently, showing his submissive side. “I-I’m terribly sorry!”

At the same time, the knights shifted around awkwardly in response to the scolding. Captain Kei noticed the change in the atmosphere.

“Let us retreat,” the captain swiftly ordered. “We shall divide into three teams. The dismantling team will retrieve the mandible and magic stone…”

The ark spider was an insect monster, so its meat was not suitable for consumption, but it was rich in materials. The knights followed their captain’s orders and split into three: One would collect the monster’s materials, one would return to the stream where they had camped the night before to make preparations, and one would report to the nearby villages that the ark spider’s reign of terror had come to an end.

These knights were the children of nobles, though they were not heirs to their families. The nobles had offered their children as proof of their support since rumors swirled that Beku was the favorite to be the next Beast King. There were actually quite a

few more knights, but Beku had only selected the best to tag along with him.

Two hours later, when the sun had set, a large bonfire illuminated the base camp as Kei served Beku inside a tent decorated with the emblem of the royal family.

“Your Highness, this is cooked to perfection,” the captain said, offering the Beast Crown Prince a chunk of skewered meat that had been seasoned and grilled well.

Beku took the skewer and took a big bite, removing a large chunk of meat with his teeth. The meat was not of excellent quality and was not in the best condition since it had been kept for days during their trip to this area. Such a dish would never be served to a royal in the royal castle, but to Beku, who had just fought a harsh battle, this was a grand feast that was second to none.

“What’s wrong?” Beku inquired. “I find it difficult to eat with you staring at me like that.”

“N-Nothing,” Kei replied as a tear rolled down his cheek. “I’m just moved by the fact that you defeated a terrifying monster all by yourself. You’ve become most splendid.”

Beku was so overwhelmingly powerful that it was difficult to believe he had been trounced by Giru in front of a crowd just last year. Kei had to give credit where it was due—this was thanks to Romu’s efforts. Not only had the goatkin helped a depressed Beku get back on his feet, but he had also generously provided the crown prince with pills that made him powerful in battle. Romu had developed the medicine specifically for Beku, who would not have been able to bounce back if it had not been for the pharmacist.

It was for this reason that Romu was allowed to be in the same tent as and even dine with Beku and Kei. Yet the goatkin never became conceited and diligently worked hard to develop new pills for Beku. Contrary to Romu’s usually excited look when developing new drugs, he looked bored while he ate his meal. Kei found the goatkin to be quite the eccentric oddball.

“Kei, it seems I’ve caused you much worry,” Beku said.

“What?! Not at all!” the captain hastily replied, acting humble.

“You’ve always been worried about me. If I were to have an older brother, I would choose you, Kei.” The captain froze in astonishment at the sudden words of gratitude, and Beku continued solemnly. “Since my youth, I’ve been indebted to you

and your family, House Patrasche. The previous lord of your house passed his title to you despite your youth because you're an excellent, competent person."

Beku, like Kei, had been thrust into his role at a young age. The captain had been tasked with taking care of the crown prince ever since the two were children, and the two men had grown together. When Beku had become the crown prince, Kei had become a captain, and his hard work had rewarded him with being turned into the lord of a marquess's house.

When Beku had been granted the title of Beast Crown Prince, many nobles had flocked toward him in hopes of receiving the favor of the future Beast King. Kei's loyalty, however, was not so fragile.

"Y-You are far too kind for a man like me. As Kei van Patrasche, I shall serve you for the rest of my life, Prince Beku!" Kei then divulged his thoughts. "Your Highness, perhaps there is one more person worthy of your praise—Romu."

"Ah, indeed," Beku said.

The royal turned to Romu, who had not heard his name be called and apathetically continued eating his meal. When he noticed Beku's gaze, the goatkin hastily jumped to his feet.

"Sire!" Romu cried. "I'm undeserving of the kind words of Sir Kei, your right-hand man—no, the future Beast King Corps's captain!"

"The future Beast King?" Beku scowled. "Hold your tongue! Never say that again!" His monotonic low voice was a display of suppressing his anger.

"I-I'm terribly sorry!" Romu said, lowering his head and groveling.

"But your pills are rather impressive," Beku said cheerfully. "I cannot use them for the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, but they nevertheless enabled me to be victorious today. I'm convinced that I can win in the next tournament."

The crown prince smiled with satisfaction as the goatkin looked up at him, his eyes glimmering.

* * *

A few days later, Beku returned to the royal capital to visit his father. The Beast Crown Prince intended to request permission to enter the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament once more.

The thick doors to the audience room groaned as four knights pushed them open to make way for Beku. Inside was a long, red carpet with ministers and nobles lined up on either side of it. Sitting regally atop the throne in the center, at the end of this carpet, sat Beast King Muza, Beku's father. Beside the king sat the queen, the crown prince's mother, and on his opposite side sat Chancellor Lupu, a tanukikin. The queen's seat was the same height as the throne, while Zeu's and Shia's seats were a step below.

Beku took large strides across the carpet, Captain Kei and a few other knights following behind him. Two of the knights each carried an ark spider mandible, and two more carried in a platter with a Rank S magic stone atop it.

Noticing the gazes pointed at him avert to the items that were carried in, Beku felt a sense of satisfaction. The nobles and ministers began to chatter.

"I can't believe it. Rumors of the ark spider terrorizing the Belhina Mountains having been killed were true."

"And look at that glimmer. That's a Rank S magic stone."

"I'm shocked such a terrifying monster was defeated. Perhaps His Highness has become as powerful as his grandfather, His Majesty Yoze."

When Beku reached the end of the carpet, he slowly went down on one knee. Kei and the other knights followed suit, the items still in their hands.

"You have done well to return home, Beku," Muza said. "I've heard that you defeated the monster all by yourself. Is this true?"

The Beast King's tone was cold and stern, exactly as he had sounded when Beku had brought him the head of a king albaheron the year prior. And also exactly like the year prior, Beku's voice was brimming with confidence.

"Of course," Beku replied. "However, this is simply a prelude to the next tournament. I swear that I will defeat Giru of Brysen and get revenge for my nation."

"Oh? So you plan to enter this year as well," Muza said.

"Yes, Your Majesty! As the Beast Crown Prince, I will not allow Brysen to do as they please this time around!"

Muza gazed intently at Beku's confident expression before turning to Chancellor Lupu.

"Lupu, show him," Muza ordered.

"Yes, Your Majesty," Lupu replied. "Your Highness, please take

a look at this.”

The chancellor stepped forward and removed a piece of paper from his pocket before handing it to Beku. The Beast Crown Prince solemnly unfurled the document and scanned its contents before emitting a low groan.

“Giru…will become the Beast King?!” he cried.

Lupu nodded. “That is correct. Beast King Oba of Brysen has claimed that should Beast Crown Prince Giru become victorious in the next Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, he will be allowed to succeed to the throne.”

The nobles could hardly believe their ears. All of them were familiar with the rules of the tournament.

Basic Rules of the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament

All beastkin kingdoms within Garlesia must host a Beast King Martial Arts Tournament once a year.

The Beast King Martial Arts Tournament permits the use of weapons, armor, and magic gear*.

Note: The use of Support Magic and healing items is forbidden.

There are no restrictions in terms of participants. Even criminals are allowed to enter, and one’s birth does not matter. The royal family must not receive any special treatment.

Should the Beast King of a different nation emerge victorious in a Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, they are to be given a fourth of the host nation’s land.

Should a participant be injured or killed during the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, the involved parties are not allowed to voice any complaints.

*Magic gear refers to stat-boosting items such as rings and necklaces.

Special Rules Pertaining to Albahal, the County of Beastkin’s Beast King Martial Arts Tournament

There will be separate divisions based on weapon type.

Each division will hold preliminary rounds where contestants are free to fight as they wish. Matchups are decided by lottery, and contestants must win every match to reach the finals. The victor of the finals will be the winner of that division.

The winner of each division will fight the representative of that same division. Should the former be victorious, they shall become the new representative of the division.

The new representative shall fight against the division winner in the following year. Should the former be victorious, they will have successfully defended their title as representative.

Finally, there will be a tournament gathering the representatives of each division. The champion of this tournament will face the champion from the previous year, the Beast King. Should the former be victorious, they will become the new Beast King.

The Beast King who is victorious as per Point 9 will be the one to receive the rewards outlined in Point 4.

If Giru won the upcoming tournament, Albahal would be forced to cede their land the following year.

“Our backs are against the wall,” Muza said. “It’s up to you now, Beku. If you are scared, I will have no choice but to personally join the tournament.”

“What?! Your Majesty, you mustn’t!” Lupu hastily cried.

Were the current Beast King of Albahal to enter, comparisons to Brysen would inevitably be drawn, which would make Albahal look spineless. Muza was well aware of this, so he had chosen his words carefully to encourage Beku to enter. The Beast Crown Prince understood this as he met his father’s frosty gaze.

“No, that won’t be necessary,” Beku said firmly. “Your Majesty, please enjoy the show from your throne. This is my fight, which I started when I entered last year.”

“Oh? *Your* fight, you say?” Muza asked. “And what makes you so sure you won’t lose a second time?”

“Because that loss made me into the stronger man you see here today. I am no longer the person I was last year. This ark spider is proof of my growth.”

Muza let out a deep sigh. “Well said, Beku. I leave it to you.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

The nobles seemed relieved by Beku’s powerful response, but anxiety still loomed in their hearts. The Rank S magic stone was proof that Beku had indeed grown stronger, but they recalled just how one-sided the battle had been last year.

“Then shall we end it for today?” Muza asked, his voice booming throughout the room and cutting through the awkward silence.

“No, Your Majesty,” Lupu said. “There is actually one more issue to tend to. It involves His Highness, the Beast Crown Prince.”

“And what would that be?”

“Last month, His Highness suggested increasing the head tax on those with Talents. Each minister has considered the idea and submitted their thoughts on the matter.”

The nobles turned stern, and with good reason. Beku had spent ten months drafting a proposal, which went as such:

Beku’s Proposed Increase in Head Tax for Talented Individuals

Once a Talented person reaches adulthood (15 years of age), they must pay increased taxes.

Beast Pugilists will pay double the normal tax.

Beast Fist Masters will pay triple the normal tax.

Beast Fist Lords will pay quadruple the normal tax.

Beast Fist Kings will pay quintuple the normal tax.

“Chancellor Lupu, what opinions were there about my draft?” Beku inquired.

“While there have been many differing opinions, Your Highness, they have all agreed on one point,” Lupu replied. “By submitting a law that seemingly punishes Talented individuals, it will only encourage them to leave our kingdom.”

“What are you saying? Do you not understand that this tax aims to have precisely the opposite effect? Without money, they

cannot leave our kingdom.”

The fur on Lupu’s face bristled with fear and confusion. “Y-You would be controlling those with Talents!”

“‘Controlling,’ you say? Those who can mutter such words have never even begun to imagine how controlled and suppressed the Talentless feel.”

The nobles began to chatter in confusion.

“‘C-Controlled’?”

“What in the world is the Beast Crown Prince on about?”

Beku cast them a sharp glare, silencing them all immediately. “This will be the perfect opportunity. Why don’t I tell everyone here what I saw and heard with my own eyes and ears? After I graduated from the Academy, I toured Albahal as an adventurer. Wherever I went, people were shivering in fear, terrified of monsters. Why do you think that is? Because none of them had Talents. Simply because they were born Talentless, they became a part of the weak, and they shuddered in fear both day and night! That is all they know of life!”

Ninety percent of newborn beastkin in the Garlesian Continent were Talentless. Many of them were never able to leave their hometowns. Beku had spent his days in the royal capital, entered the Academy, and accrued vast knowledge about the world without ever having known that such people existed.

But after leaving the Academy and becoming an adventurer, he had been hailed a hero simply for killing a mere Rank C monster that had been terrorizing nearby villages. At first, he could not figure out the reason behind this phenomenon, but he eventually reached a conclusion: The Talented had a duty to protect the Talentless; they were capable of such a feat. In other words, if those without Talents were suffering, it meant that those with them were not fulfilling their duties.

Following that, whenever Beku had been thanked for defeating monsters, he had wondered if the people would have been freed from their suffering sooner if there were another adventurer like him. If there had been another person who had also faced those risks, he would not have been the only one being showered with praise.

Upon his return to the castle, he had realized that there were indolent Talented people crawling about. Then, after having received his title of “Beast Crown Prince,” Beku had first wanted to take away the extravagant wealth that allowed the Talented to

indulge in their lazy lifestyles. He had felt that it was high time for them to fulfill their duties.

Beku passionately yet quietly conveyed his thoughts to everyone in the room, earning him a sigh from the Beast King.

“I understand where you’re coming from, Beku,” Muza said. “However, you’re also one who should fulfill this duty you speak of. Surely, that is not lost on you.”

“Of course not,” Beku replied. “The royal blood of Albahal flows through our veins; thus, we must fulfill the most important duties of all. Hence, Beast God Garm has bestowed upon me the Talent of Beast Fist King. Please give me the chance to prove that I’m not merely spouting pretty words.”

“You heard him, Lupu.” Muza turned to his chancellor. “What say you?”

“Your Majesty,” Lupu replied anxiously as he glanced at the ministers and nobles throughout the room. “With all due respect, the ministers of home affairs, foreign affairs, and justice are all against His Highness’s draft.”

“I’m the one who made Beku the Beast Crown Prince,” Muza replied. “After journeying around our kingdom, this is the conclusion he reached. I advise that you discuss this carefully.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

With that, Beku would officially enter the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, and preparations got underway.

* * *

The Beast King Martial Arts Tournament kicked off, and Beku decided to ignore both the previous year’s results and the fact that he was the crown prince. He chose instead to take part in the preliminaries. However, no one could hold a candle to the man who had defeated a Rank S monster by himself. Beku swiftly won his matches and made it to the finals of the knuckles division.

The night before the final match, Zeu and Shia visited their brother’s room. The two younger siblings had tried to visit Beku many times before but had been turned away at the door by Captain Kei.

“Princess Shia, Prince Zeu, as I said yesterday, His Highness Beku is currently trying to focus his mind for the next match,” Kei said. “He isn’t able to meet anyone today.”

“But he’s going to fight Giru tomorrow, isn’t he?” Shia asked. “I want him to take this as a good luck charm.”

She took out a Beast God’s Guardian Cord, a magic tool from Garm that allowed its wearer to survive an otherwise fatal blow. Beku had only managed to walk away from his grisly match against Giru the year prior thanks to the item. But unlike back then, Kei did not readily accept the gift from the Albahalan princess.

“Princess Shia, it pains me to reject your offer once more, but…” Kei started.

“Please, Kei. I beg of you as well,” Zeu insisted. “Shia isn’t the only one worried about what may happen to our beloved brother. I am as well. Couldn’t you at least give this cord to him? I’m sure he’ll understand just how worried we are for him.”

The captain had no choice but to give in. He reluctantly took the cord from the pair and said, “I shall tell Prince Beku about how worried you two are.”

“We’re counting on you.”

Kei watched the siblings leave before stepping into Beku’s room. The crown prince was alone with Romu, who was rubbing ointment that eased exhaustion onto the royal’s back.

“Whatever is the matter, Kei?” Beku, who was lying face down, asked.

The captain hesitated and fiddled with the cord in his hand.

“Did Shia give you something?” the crown prince inquired.

“The Beast God’s Guardian Cord, Your Highness,” Kei replied. “She wanted you to have it.”

“The trash can’s over there.”

The captain could not believe his ears. Anyone born in Albahal knew the effects of the Beast God’s Guardian Cord. While it was understandable that Beku did not want to wear it, throwing it away was a shocking decision.

Before Kei could speak, Beku, still facing down, opened his mouth once more. “There are limits to the magic tools we can bring in. I have no room for defensive items.”

“O-Of course,” Kei replied with a bow. “Strengthening your defense will not help you attain victory against Giru.”

He placed Shia’s cord inside a drawer and gazed at Beku’s gear, which had been placed on his bedside table. Beside the battered adamantite knuckles and armor was a necklace that boosted Agility. The Beast King Martial Arts Tournament allowed

participants to use magic tools, but they were limited to two rings and one necklace. Participants could choose to equip more, but they would not see the effects of those items due to the rules cast by Isiris.

Beku had told Kei that Agility and speed were essential to beating the powerful Giru. If he were to equip the Beast God's Guardian Cord instead, Beku could be protected in a fight, but he would sacrifice his Agility. He would be no match for Giru then.

"All right. I suspect you'll be able to use your full power tomorrow as well!" Romu said.

"Good," Beku replied as he sat up on his bed.

The goatkin thrust his hand into his pocket and took out an item. "And I would like to give you this pill. Please take it."

Both Kei and Beku glared at the goatkin.

"Romu, do you understand what you're saying?" the crown prince growled. "Healing items are not—"

"I am aware," Romu interjected. "This pill will not be found by the Analyzer's spells. And while its effects won't last very long, there will be no traces of it having been used either. It can bring out the full potential that's slumbering with you, Your Highness."

He seemed elated to explain how the pill worked, ignoring the looks he received from Beku and Kei.

"Romu. I will overcome my father and guide Albahal to greater heights. I cannot accept such unfair tactics and cheats to win." The crown prince's voice was filled with quiet rage.

"But there are no guarantees that Giru will retreat this time," Romu countered.

"Even so, using the drug in such a crucial tournament will cause me to lose something far more important than my life. Something I *must* protect."

"Is it more valuable than your citizens, who will either be chased from their homes or be scorned if they stay when Giru seizes the land? Does this important something you speak of outweigh the tears they will shed?"

"What?!"

"Hold your tongue, Romu!" Kei shouted, hastily jumping in to protect his confused master. "Do you realize who you're speaking to so insolently?!"

The goatkin gasped in surprise and immediately kowtowed. "I-I'm terribly sorry."

As the elderly pharmacist visibly shrank and trembled in fear, Beku spat, “I see that you’re merely worried about both me and this kingdom. I shall excuse your words this time around, but never speak like that again. Is that clear?”

“Your wish is my command, Prince Beku!”

Neither Beku nor Kei could see the expression on Romu’s face.

* * *

The next day, Beku could hear the crowd shouting from the waiting room in the depths of the Albahal Central Arena. He had never heard such deafening clamor. The stone building trembled at the cheers and stomping of the audience.

“I wish you the best of luck!” Kei shouted at the top of his lungs, hoping that his thoughtful prayers would reach the Beast Crown Prince over the crowd.

“Heh,” Beku smirked. “If I’m making you wear such an expression, no doubt I’m still the cause of your worries.”

“N-Not at all! I trust that you can defeat Giru and avenge last year’s blunder!”

“Prince Beku, you have the blessing of Beast God Garm on your side. I believe that you will win,” Romu said. In contrast to the energetic captain, his voice was feeble, frail, and small. Yet despite him having been whispering, his words reached Beku’s and Kei’s ears clearly.

“Indeed. Kei, Romu, I shall be off.”

With that, the crown prince left the waiting room. He walked through the dimly lit hallway and entered the arena, the sun’s rays beating down on him.

“Don’t blink! Prince Beku has emerged—no, he’s *returned* to the arena!” a rabbitkin reported, using an amplification magic tool to project their voice throughout the area. “We’ve all been eagerly awaiting you!”

Thunderous cheers practically drowned out the voice as the building quaked.

“Prince Bekuuu!”

“Please bring home the victory this year!”

Beku paid no heed to the audience as he slowly stepped onto the sands of the arena. His eyes were focused on the shadow emerging from the opposite end of the ring, glaring at the figure

he had faced a year prior.

The Beast Crown Prince had not held back even in the preliminaries. He had used his full power to tear through each of his opponents and was confident in the display of overwhelming might he had put on. However, the same could be said of his opponent. Giru had shown crushing strength against his opponents and won his way to the top. Thus far, he was unmatched.

The two men faced each other in the middle of the arena.

"Don't think that you can become Beast King this year, Giru," Beku said.

Giru smirked, just as he had done the year before. "Hmph. What's wrong? You seem to be more serious now. Have you gotten a little stronger?"

"You'll find out soon enough."

Analyzers approached them to use their Analysis Magic and quickly examine their bodies.

"No Support Magic detected."

"No usage of healing items detected."

"No healing items found."

Once they had finished their investigation and reported their findings, the judge raised an arm in the air. A leopardkin on standby at the edge of the arena, their burly body rippling with muscles, raised a massive mallet high in the air and swung down with all their might.

GOOONG!

"Begin!" the judge roared.

Beku used his skill the moment the fight began. "Beast Mode! Graaar!"

Giru smiled fearlessly as the Albahalan royal transformed. "Starting off strong, are we? Then I'll do the same. Beast Mode! Raaaaah!"

As a howl escaped his throat, Giru grew larger as well. Beku moved at an astonishing speed, putting his yearlong training behind his fists.

"Both fighters immediately activated Beast Mode!" the rabbitkin reported, unable to keep up with their speed.

"Super Heavy Blow!" Beku and Giru shouted in unison.

Their fists collided, sending a massive shock wave through the arena. The two then leaped away from each other. When all was said and done, Beku's face twisted with pain, while the

beastly, transformed Giru looked as calm and composed as ever.

"What?" Giru asked. "Did you think you were the only one who underwent rigorous training? Ha!"

"Graaaaar!" Beku roared furiously as he charged once more.

Giru stood unmoving and allowed Beku to punch and kick him before launching a barrage of his own. Beku jumped away and dodged the attacks, trying to flank his opponent and find an opening, but Giru froze in place and took up a stance, covering any blind spots. It left Beku with no choice but to launch meaningless attacks. The two crossed fists, and their legs sliced through the air as loud rumbles reverberated throughout the arena.

"Is this the power of royal families?!" the rabbitkin announcer shouted.

Just then, Giru leaned to the left, dodging Beku's high kick. The Brysen royal crouched low and launched a feint at the right side of Beku's stomach before burying the toes of his left foot into the left side of Beku's stomach.

"Gah?!" the Albahalan royal gasped.

He tried to jump back to regain his posture, but Giru followed him like a shadow. The wolfkin once again feinted, pretending to punch at Beku's face before twisting his lower body and landing a left knee into Beku's side.

"Ugh!" Beku grunted.

The impact was so intense that he crumpled to the ground, but just as he managed to stand back up, Giru's shadow fell over him. The Brysen wolfkin landed a front kick to Beku's chest, forcing him onto the sand once more. This continued for about an hour, and when Giru finally turned his back on Beku to casually stroll away, the Albahalan royal, whose Beast Mode transformation had come undone, lay pitifully on the sand.

"Th-That's the match!" the judge cried, his voice quivering. "Giru is the winner!"

Giru proceeded to walk toward the exit of the arena, but he froze when he heard voices echoing from deep within the hallway that led to the waiting room.

"Brother! H-Hurry! We must cast Healing Magic on him!" Zeu and Shia cried. They swiftly ushered some healers over when they noticed Giru standing there. Shia, who was standing at the front, glared at the wolfkin, tears filling her trembling eyes.

"Beast Princess Shia. Good day," Giru said. "It seems you didn't

give your brother a Beast God's Guardian Cord. How very unfortunate."

Shia paled upon hearing those words, and for the first time today, Giru was confused.

"You're cruel!" Shia shouted, wiping away her tears.

"Cruel? I haven't the faintest clue what you're talking about," Giru replied. "But should your brother die, you two will be next."

"What did you say?!"

As Shia yelled back, Giru noticed Zeu staring at him with frightened eyes. The Brysen royal huffed and walked past them.

"Brother!" Shia and Zeu cried.

In the shadows, Giru turned around and watched the two young Albahalan royals head for Beku, who had had every bone in his body shattered and was lying in a pool of his own blood.

And so, the winner of the spiked knuckle division was decided. Giru proceeded to fight against the victors of other divisions, but no one stood a chance against him. General Hoba, the one who had defended the title of Beast King for the overall tournament for a decade, was no exception.

"Hngah?!" Hoba grunted as he slammed against the wall of the arena, his massive body having been blown back by a roundhouse kick.

"This is the one who defended his title for a decade?! Beku put up a better fight!" Giru roared triumphantly.

"And the winner...is Beast Crown Prince Giru of Brysen. He has claimed the title of Beast King this year," the judge announced, their voice filled with despair. It sounded as though they were sentencing someone to death.

The following year, Albahal's land would surely be seized.

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As he had promised, Beast King Oba gave up his throne to his son, Giru, who had been victorious in the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament. The first thing Giru did after accepting his new role was declare that he would enter the tournament the following year. He also stated that he would continue to enter until he had recovered all of Brysen's land that had been taken by Albahal.

Beku had left the governing to the chancellor and ministers, practically abandoning his duties and post as the crown prince to go on a journey. He wandered around Albahal as part of his

training to become even stronger, defeating powerful monsters along the way. Rank As were the norm for him, and he even risked his life to challenge Rank S monsters as a way to test his skills.

Another year passed in the blink of an eye, and he finally returned to the royal capital the day before the deadline to announce his entry into the tournament. Just as he had done last year, he hardly met with anyone other than Romu and Kei, spending the rest of his time holed up in his room. When the tournament began, he silently won his way up from the preliminaries.

“Prince Beku is once again the winner of the knuckles division!” the rabbitkin announced.

The crown prince turned his back to the crowd and returned to the waiting room. Normally, he would fight with the previous year’s winner for his next battle, but since Giru had become the Beast King, Beku would need to fight all the other division winners before he would get the chance to face the Beast King.

Captain Kei and Romu were waiting for the royal in the waiting room. As usual, Beku lay on the bed as Romu used his special ointment blend to massage any stiff muscles. It was then that there was a loud banging on the wooden door, so intense that the door looked like it would crack at any moment. Beku furrowed his brow and stared at the source of the noise with suspicion.

“I shall get the door,” Kei said.

The moment he grabbed the handle and undid the lock, Shia barged into the room, pushing past the captain.

“Brother! I’ve brought a good luck charm for you!” she cried, clutching a Beast God’s Guardian Cord. “This year, I had Lady Temi weave her special art into the cord, so…”

She stuck out her arm to offer it to her brother, who was lying on the bed.

“Princess Shia, please stand back,” Kei said, gently placing his hands on her shoulders. “Prince Beku does not want to see anyone—”

“Do not touch me so casually!” Shia roared.

She shook him off her as a sharp pain ran through Kei. One of the claws on the princess’s free hand had the dogkin’s blood dripping from it. Shia could not hide her shock at what she had just done.

“Your Highness, please forgive me,” Kei apologized.

“N-No, I’m the one at fault here. I’m sorry,” Shia replied.

When the captain knelt down to ask for forgiveness, the princess looked down at him, completely at a loss for what to do. She felt her older brother’s rugged hand gently rest on her shoulder. When she turned around to face him, her shock from hurting Kei dissipated.

“Please take this with you,” Shia said. “If you don’t, Giru might kill you this time, brother.”

Beku gazed down at the Beast God’s Guardian Cord and slowly shook his head. “Do you think that I will lose?”

“It’s better to be safe than sorry. That’s all I’m saying.”

“But those worries may become shackles when I risk my life in battle. Over the past year, as I fought against monsters, I learned that as long as I’m arrogant enough to believe I can escape with my life, I will never stand a chance against Giru.”

Beku gently patted her head, and she looked up at him, anxiety plaguing her heart.

“I will gratefully accept Zeu’s and your thoughts, but I will fight with the gear that I have been using,” Beku said before he noticed Romu toying with the equipment on the table. “Hmm? What’s wrong, Romu? Ah. I knew that you were no normal pharmacist, but did not think that you could polish weapons and armor.”

Romu turned around with surprise. “I-I can! As I journeyed around, I learned to do practically everything by myself!”

Beku nodded and headed for the table where Romu was. The crown prince wore the necklace that increased his Agility, and Kei hastily helped him put on an adamantite breastplate.

“Ah, and the increased tax for those with Talents, which I created thanks to your advice, has been rather popular. I hope you’ll continue to…” Beku trailed off as he tried to don his adamantite knuckles.

“I-Is something the matter?” Romu asked worriedly, peering into the royal’s face.

Beku tightened the belt to fasten his weapon and stared intently at the goatkin. “Ever since I met you three years ago, you have served me well.”

“O-Of course. I have only wished to serve you. I have thought that even after meeting Princess Shia.”

Shia recalled when Romu had come to serve Beku. It had all

started three years ago, when the goatkin had simply shown up one day. He was being questioned in front of the castle gates when Shia and General Rudo had appeared. The elderly Romu had then spoken with them, and the rest was history.

“Yes. Without your medicine, I never would have been able to get back on my feet,” Beku said. “As proof, my will hasn’t shattered even after suffering my second defeat last year. I shall offer you a reward, Romu. Let me see... Ah, you have served other beastkin kingdoms, have you not? And the time has come for you to serve another one. I shall write you a letter of recommendation.”

Shia and Kei shuddered at the thought. The crown prince was practically saying that he had no need for Romu anymore. But the goatkin shook his head quietly and kept his usual smile on his face.

“That won’t be necessary, Your Highness,” Romu said. “As you can see, I don’t have much longer left. You are favored by Beast God Garm, and the special blood of Albahal’s founder flows through your veins. I would like to serve you until the day I die.”

“Hmph. You still choose to flatter me, I see,” Beku said as the tournament’s messenger stopped behind the closed door. “Ah, it’s time.”

“Prince Beku, preparations for the next match are complete,” the messenger announced.

“Very well. I have just finished my preparations as well.”

As the royal headed for the door, Kei once again shouted as loud as he could.

“Prince Beku, I wish you luck!”

“Brother...” Shia said, clutching the cord in her hand.

Beku opened the door. Before he left, he whirled around to face his little sister with a smile. “Shia, don’t you worry. As one who carries the Albahalan royal blood in his veins, I shall win this time.”

“I-I believe in you, brother.”

He turned back to head to the arena, the smile vanishing from his face. His expression transformed into that of a warrior’s, prepared to risk his life for the harsh battle. When he emerged from the damp, dimly lit corridor, the sun’s brilliant rays shone upon him. The cheers of the citizens sounded brighter still.

“Whoooo!”

“Prince Bekuuu!”

“Please win this tiiime!”

Beku closed his eyes. He felt the warmth of the sun on his face and the cheers of his citizens echo throughout his body.

“Everyone trusts that Prince Beku will win this time,” a staff member murmured.

Were the crown prince to lose this year, much of Albahal’s land would be seized. And a third loss would mean the end of his life. Even if Giru allowed him to live, he had sworn on his pride as a member of the Albahalan royal family that he would sooner die fighting than live with that humiliation.

Beku opened his eyes and gazed at the crowd. Many citizens from remote areas all over Albahal had rushed to the tournament to cheer for the crown prince. They were people he had met, who had celebrated his victory over monsters, over the last two years as he journeyed across the country.

“I will win even if it costs me my life,” Beku said. “I believe that is my duty. You should do yours.”

“Yes, Your Highness!” the tournament staff member replied.

The battle would be meaningless if it was not fair. Beku told them to cast aside their personal feelings and focus on their work as he headed to the center of the arena. He was all by himself, but the deafening cheers reminded him that Albahal was on his side. He stopped and turned to the nobles’ seats. Two Beast Kings, Muza and Oba, and their families were sitting side by side. Beast King Oba had his wife and his daughter, Princess Rena, beside him. Beast King Muza had Beku’s mother, Zeu, and Shia sitting close to him.

“The whole family is here. How the tables have turned,” Beku muttered. “No, it is because our strength made us complacent. That is why we find ourselves so tripped up.”

Before he knew it, he was bowing to them. He displayed his gratitude to his parents and his affection for his siblings, and he sent a challenge to the Brysen royal family. When he looked up, he locked eyes with a worried Shia.

“Prince Beku, this year’s overall division winner, has emerged!” a rabbitkin announced. “The entire kingdom is waiting with bated breath for your battle against last year’s Beast King! Is there anything you’d like to say to the citizens before the big match?”

Beku took the mic and said, “I promise to win this time.”

He then bowed toward the audience stands as the cheers

grew louder.

“Splendid words from our crown prince!” the rabbitkin shouted. “Ah, and last year’s Beast King is entering the arena!”

Beku turned around, looking between the nobles’ seats and the audience’s, where a special seat reserved for the prior year’s Beast King was located. Giru stood up from that seat, removing his golden cape and crown. He crouched down and then leaped, forming a gentle arc before landing in the arena.

THUMP. Sand flew into the air as he landed, and when it settled, his slender yet muscular frame stood in the ring. He slowly walked toward Beku. The audience was shocked by his grand entrance, but they soon gathered themselves and started booing the man. Giru did not seem to care. He merely smirked while standing in front of Beku.

“It seems the residents of Albahal can only chirp like insects, but when they’re all gathered in one place, I can hear them rather clearly,” Giru remarked. “What’s wrong? Don’t stand there silently with a frown on your face. Why don’t you say a word or two?”

Beku remained silent and observed Giru. The Brysen royal, who had become the king of his nation, was wearing the same adamantite gear as last year. His necklace and rings also had not changed much.

“It seems you let being king go to your head,” Beku said.

“Do I seem that way? Or do you just want me to be that way?” Giru inquired. “You’re just jumping to conclusions to suit your viewpoint. Did you perhaps down a pint before the match to hide your fear? You look disoriented.”

“I’ll only drink after I beat you.”

“So you’re sober? You have foolishly chosen to stand in front of me not just twice, but thrice. Perhaps the beating I gave you made you slightly crazy.”

“No. Quite the opposite, actually. You opened my eyes. I admit that I lacked the resolve last year.”

“This again? I’m tired of hearing about your resolve. And your younger siblings will surely spout the same silly nonsense. But don’t you worry. I’ll send you and your siblings to hell so that you can keep showing one another your resolve like the friendly family that you are.”

“What a cheap provocation.”

As the two chattered, the finals to choose this year’s Beast

King proceeded. Analyzers stepped onto the field and swiftly checked the two combatants, sternly checking for any signs of cheating.

“No Support Magic detected.”

“No usage of healing items detected.”

“No healing items found.”

Once their reports were made, the judge nodded and raised their arm high. As they did, Beku gripped his knuckle-dusters.

“Begin!” the judge roared.

GOOONG!

A leopardkin swung his mallet, filling the arena with a metallic ring. Right away, just like last time, the two fighters activated their skills.

“Beast Mode! Graaar!”

“Beast Mode! Raaah!”

A massive Giru charged at his foe. “Why don’t we review last year’s program? Super Heavy Blow!”

Beku had also turned colossal, and he, too, threw a punch at his opponent. “Super Heavy Blow!”

The deafening clash of fists drowned out the sound of the gong before the two mighty forces leaped away. They whirled through the air and landed back in the ring.

“Your skills have improved quite a bit. I’m impressed with your training,” Giru smiled.

While both fighters were blown back, it was clear that Beku had been pushed back farther than Giru. Beku had spent the last year training hard, and he knew that he had become stronger, but it seemed Giru still had higher Attack and skill levels. The wolfkin had more power. But that did not deter Beku as he charged in.

Much like in their past two battles, they launched a barrage of skills at each other, and once again, Beku found himself on the back foot. He crouched to dodge a kick that was aimed for the side of his head and tried to utilize that opening to land an attack. He aimed for his opponent’s chest, but Giru whirled around and swiftly used a spinning back kick.

“Super Pulverizing Kick!” Giru roared.

“Gh!”

Beku crossed his arms in front of him and jumped back to minimize the impact. He was blown back, but he still managed to land on his feet. Giru rushed in and unleashed a flurry of attacks,

preventing Beku from striking back.

“Prince Beku has been blown back again, but he stands right back up!” the rabbitkin reported, trying their best to encourage the royal. “The future of Albahal rests on his shoulders, and he refuses to give up!”

Unfortunately, Giru possessed greater Agility as well, and he continued to attack. Beku had used up much of his energy, so he could not do anything but take the blows. Despite having trained so hard that he had often been drenched in his own blood, sweat, and tears, he felt like he had not shortened the gap between him and Giru.

“It seems you’ve been training every year, but it’s just not enough!” Giru roared. “Your so-called resolve will be the perfect stepping stone to allow Brysen to prosper!”

“Hah, hah…” Beku panted. “I won’t lose!”

The Albahalan crown prince stepped back, but he was clearly staggering.

“You spout the same words not once, not twice, but three times!” Giru exclaimed. “You are a fool! I shall hammer reality into your body!”

He raised his fist to land the final blow on the staggering Beku. As he rushed in, Beku stood in place, gazing at his enemy in a daze as the wolfkin’s massive body drew near.

“I am one who wishes for Albahal to prosper. Farewell…” Beku said under his breath.

“Die!” Giru shouted, having heard his opponent’s words. He cut through the air and swung his mighty right fist, burying it into Beku’s left side.

Crack! Crack! Beku had not defended himself at all, and his left arm shattered to the point that it was almost completely severed from his body. His ribs also snapped.

“You!” Giru spat, realizing he had fallen into a trap.

Beku practically flung his entire body at his foe and mustered the last of his strength to swing his right fist at Giru’s throat.

“Beast King Zen Punch.”

Realizing that Beku was using his own life as bait in order to land his counter, Giru used his left fist to gouge out Beku’s right side.

“Lupus Death Blow!” he roared.

His fist was ever so slightly faster than Beku’s.

“Gah?!” Beku cried as blood gushed from his mouth, dyeing

his breastplate red.

The two-pronged attack from Giru destroyed the clasps of Beku's armor, causing both the front and back pieces to fall off him. A moment later, Beku himself collapsed, landing face-first on the ground.

"You're not the only one with an ace up your sleeve. And that's precisely why you're so naive." Giru grinned, wiping the blood away from the wound where Beku's Beast King Zen Punch had scratched him.

Beku tried his best to get up. Despite his best efforts, however, he could not get to his feet. It was all he could do to hold himself up on his hands and knees.

"D-Damn it..." he grunted. "Hmm?"

While Beku was down on all fours, a bright red pill fell from his chest. He widened his eyes and gasped.

"Wh-Why is this here?" he mumbled. He then recalled that Romu had fiddled with his gear.

"Prince Beku, would you like to continue?" the ratkin judge inquired.

Beku instinctively put his hand over the pill, shielding it from view.

"What will you do?" Giru asked. "If you can't stand and fight, I'll just end you here."

But the Albahalan crown prince could only think about the pill hidden beneath his palm. His armor had been obliterated, and the powerful blow from Giru had shattered his bones. Beku also knew that his organs had been damaged and that his life was on the line. And yet, there was a way out of this predicament. It was literally in his hand.

"I... I..." Beku said.

He felt his heart and will waver. If he swallowed the pill, he felt like he would lose the pride he had spent his life building up, as well as the dignity of the Albahalan royal family. All he had to do was crush the pill and stand up as though nothing had happened. However, that would mean that he would lose this match. Should he die with pride or win with disgrace? His chest tightened, causing more pain than the wounds on his body, and he found himself on the verge of tears.

"Prince Beku! Please stand up!"

"Thank you for defeating the ark spider for us!"

"And you defeated the ogre general! Thank you so much!"

Cries of gratefulness reached his ears, and he raised his head. Citizens from rural areas were in the front rows of the audience, showering him with gratitude.

“Prince Beku, thanks to you, heroes with Talents have begun hunting monsters near our village!”

“We’re here today in hopes of expressing our gratitude!”

“Please don’t lose!”

Beku had saved these people during his travels around Albahal to become stronger in hopes of beating Giru. The Albahalan Beast Crown Prince locked eyes with these residents as they called his name, their voices converging into a roar. They were all rooting for him.

“Prince Beku!”

“Prince Beku!!!”

“Prince Bekuuu!!!”

“Such deafening cheers!” the rabbitkin shouted, barely audible over the crowd shouting Beku’s name. “You can hear them all the way outside the arena!”

Aurora Vision displays installed throughout the royal capital conveyed the scene to everyone in Albahal. Over a million beastkin raised their fists to cheer for their crown prince.

“Hmph. Fools,” Giru growled. “This royal capital will eventually belong to Brysen. They must be reeducated.”

Beku gasped. If he lost, would his people be in danger? Even if it meant sullying his name, he had to protect those who believed in him.

“I must protect them,” Beku muttered. He clutched the pill as Giru stood behind him.

“We’ve done this thrice. It’s gotten old,” Giru said. “Why don’t we just end it here?”

The Albahalan crown prince had already swallowed the forbidden item by the time Giru reached out to grab his head. He let out a deep breath, much to Giru’s surprise, and a hard, rugged hand gripped the Brysen Beast King’s wrist. The power the Beast Crown Prince was exerting was unbelievable; within the arena that trembled under the cheers of the crowd, Giru could hear his own wrist creaking.

“Y-You!” Giru shouted.

Beku was on all fours, but he still managed to fling Giru aside with one arm. The Brysen royal whirled through the air and landed on the sand as Beku stood up, crouched low, and emitted

a low growl.

“Grr... Graaaaah!”

After a massive roar, Beku’s bones began to creak and groan as his bulky muscles writhed under his skin. This was no normal Beast Mode transformation. Nevertheless, Giru widened his eyes and howled happily.

“So, you finally took Romu’s pill, did you?!” the wolfkin sneered. “Everything is going as planned!”

Beku shot out like a golden arrow, charging straight at the Brysen Beast King.

“Graaah!” Beku roared, raising his right arm high and outstretching his claws to swing down at Giru.

“I won’t go down to simple attacks!” Giru shouted. “Hmph!”

The wolfkin slid his arm under Beku’s, hoping to change the trajectory of the Albahalan’s attack. But before he could do so, Beku snapped his arm with a disgusting *crack*.

“Gah?!” Giru cried.

“Graaaaar!” Beku roared, his right arm digging deep into Giru’s breastplate. He attacked with his left fist as well, burying it into Giru’s right side, denting the armor horribly.

“Wooow!” the announcer shouted. “Prince Beku has finally gone all out! Did the audience’s voices reach him?!”

The cheers of the people sitting in the very front of the crowd drowned out the announcer, causing the arena to shudder once more. As Beku continued his relentless attack, Giru could only go on the defensive, using the slightest of openings to retreat.

“Hah, hah... I don’t believe it!” Giru said with haggard breath as he tried to regain his composure. “Even I didn’t gain this much power after taking it!”

Beku drew near, once again forcing Giru to defend himself. Behind the rampaging Albahalan, the wolfkin spotted the small figure of Romu, smiling from within the hallway that led to the waiting room. As Giru dodged a punch and used his kick to parry an incoming leg, he huffed through his nose as though to deride himself.

“Hmph. It seems I’m the one who’s been tricked,” Giru muttered. “But I’m the strongest beastkin in history!”

“Graaar!” Beku roared, bloody specks of foam forming in the corners of his mouth.

“Taking that pill for the first time has made you excited, no doubt. But!”

Giru blocked Beku's fist, placed the Beast Crown Prince's arm under his armpit, and drew near. Then, gluing himself to Beku's side, he opened his maw and went for the throat.

"What?! Giru just bit down on Prince Beku's neck!" the announcer cried. "Huh?! Wh-What's going on here?!"

Just then, Beku turned his neck to bite down on Giru's throat as well. As the two sank their fangs into the other, they continued to use their arms and legs to launch a flurry of attacks. They tumbled across the sand like animals, forming one massive lump. The audience was taken aback; this sight was too beastly even for them, and they all fell silent, forgetting to call their crown prince's name.

Clouds of dust were kicked up, and as the two rolled around, silence suddenly filled the air. Everyone felt like they could hear blood spurting. Then, they spotted Beku lying limp and motionless on the ground. Giru slowly stood up, but a moment later, blood sprayed from the wound on his neck. The spectators were deathly silent as they watched the gruesome scene.

"Impossible... If I consume the soul of one who swallows that pill, I should become the strongest beastkin in the world," Giru murmured. "But I've never seen anyone become this strong from taking it. This isn't what I was told... Why do you think I backed him into a corner?"

Giru took one staggering step, then another as he continued to mutter to himself, his body slowly reverting from Beast Mode. He gradually returned to his normal form as he fell forward into the sand.

"Did I win?" Beku wondered as he slowly sat up. "G-Giru?! What?! How?! Why did I..."

The Albahalan royal hastily got to his feet, maintaining his massive lion form. Amid the silence, a young lady's high-pitched shriek could be heard.

"Giru! Nooooo!" Beast Princess Rena of Brysen screamed.

"Hold her back!" Muza ordered.

The royal guards hastily suppressed Rena, but she put up a fight, her screeches reaching Beku's ears.

"How dare you?! He's my older brother!" Rena shouted. "I-I'll kill you!"

"I see... So I killed Giru," Beku muttered, slowly comprehending his situation. "Huh? My body feels like it's on fire!"

There was a sickening *crunch* as Beku, who was still in Beast Mode, grew larger once more. Unable to maintain his balance on two legs, he fell forward, turning into a massive, quadrupedal beast. His eyes glittered as they focused on the bloody corpse that was Giru.

“Graaaaawr!”

Beku unleashed a thunderous roar, tears of blood streaming from his eyes. His voice was filled with confusion and despair; it contained no trace of happiness over his victory.

“Total Beast Mode…” Beast King Muza murmured.

The audience, Shia, and Zeu were all frozen in astonishment as they heard Beku practically crying for help. There was one person, however, who was cackling with glee from the shadows.

“Hee hee hee! I did it! The first step for inheriting the bloodline is complete! Demon Lord, preparations for the sacrifice are going smoothly!” Romu exclaimed, a sinister smile stretched across his elderly face.

Side Story 2: Olbaas's Resolve and Majestic (Part 1)

The round, pale moon illuminated the desert, which was devoid of anything but sand and darkness. Even the air was still, serving as a reminder of how lifeless the area was. A young Olbaas kicked up the fine sands, shivering in the cold of the night as he desperately searched for something.

The vast desert, lit up by the frosty moonlight, gave Olbaas no clues to aid him in his hunt. When he turned around, he saw that his footprints had disappeared completely. The young dark elf was all alone on the dunes. As that realization struck him, anxiety started to set in. He swiftly glanced around, trying to discern the direction he had come from, but the desert looked the same no matter where he looked. He had no idea where he currently was. He took a shot in the dark and tried to retrace his steps, but when he took a few steps and turned around, he once again saw that his footprints had vanished. Fear gripped his body as despair flashed through his mind.

Olbaas stood there and trembled. He understood just how terrifying it was to be alone, and he could not move his legs. No one was there for him. He had nowhere to go.

Warmth streamed down his cheeks. When he realized that it was tears, the emotions he had kept bottled up came gushing out in the form of sobs. He cried as loudly as he could, but his wailing disappeared into the sands. He just wanted someone—a certain someone—beside him. All the young boy could do was curl up atop the night-veiled desert and weep.

* * *

Olbaas awoke to the chirping of the birds and the gentle rays of the sun trickling in from the wooden window. Realizing he was in his bed, he slowly sat up. When he pressed a finger against his cheek, his fingertip turned damp. It had been nearly a millennium since that night, yet he still had nightmares about it.

That night, young Olbaas had woken up in the middle of the night in his bedroom and found that the shrine was eerily quiet.

Equal parts curious and scared, he had visited his father, Rehzel, who was supposed to be slumbering next door, but the man's room had been empty. This had worried Olbaas, leading him to frantically search the shrine for his missing father. The boy had then exited the shrine and made his way outside Fabraaze. For some reason, there had been no guards stationed at the gate that night, which had allowed Olbaas to leave the village to wander the Muharino Desert. Yet he had still been unable to find Rehzel.

Young Olbaas, lost in the desert in the middle of the night, had curled up into a ball and wept. Before long, he had fallen asleep, and the next morning, the village residents had noticed the disappearance of the two royals. They had quickly searched the desert, where they had found Olbaas in nothing but his pajamas. The harsh, frosty night had nearly frozen the boy to death, and for the next week, he had been on death's door.

When he had finally regained consciousness, Rehzel still had not returned. Olbaas had not seen his father since.

A year later, the young dark elf boy had been crowned king in lieu of the missing Rehzel. He had been forced to form a contract with Faable, the Sovereign of Spirits and defender of Fabraaze, by the village elders. They believed that only high dark elves with the blood of Rehzel were worthy to become the Oracle of Prayers, who protected the massive sapling that would eventually grow into the World Tree.

Since then, Olbaas had been shackled to his village. Not once had he left it.

"Is something the matter, Your Majesty?" the king's attendant inquired, their voice filled with worry.

"Nothing at all," Olbaas replied, doing his best to sound calm despite lying dazed in his bed.

"Breakfast will be ready soon."

"Very well. I understand."

Olbaas stood up and changed out of his messy pajamas, tying a sash firmly around his waist before sliding the door open and stepping into the hallway. The attendant quietly followed him as he headed to the dining area. Sensing his attendant behind him, he let out a small sigh.

By the time he had finished breakfast and returned to his room, his pajamas and bed had already been cleaned up. It was then that the attendant handed him a parchment.

“Today, you have a meeting with the elders. This is its program,” the attendant said.

Olbaas scanned the paper and was internally impressed to see just how many topics needed to be discussed in this small, cramped village. While he was doing so, a guard donning leather armor approached him.

“Everyone has gathered,” the guard reported.

“Very well. Let’s go,” Olbaas replied.

Sandwiched between his attendant and the guard, the king headed for the grand reception hall, the wood-walled room where the meeting would be held. There, the elders and generals awaited his arrival. Olbaas was familiar with all the faces at the meeting; there had only been a handful of replacements in the past millennium.

Much like elves, dark elves had long lifespans. Ever since the dark elves had left Rohzenheim and immigrated to a different land, barring a few exceptions, their numbers had only grown throughout the years. Rehzel, Olbaas’s father, was among the exceptions, as he had vanished without a trace.

Olbaas gazed at the crowd of familiar faces as he took his seat that was higher than the rest. The moment he crossed his legs to sit on the mat, a small shadow bolted from a corner of the room and curled itself up in Olbaas’s lap as it closed its eyes. This shadow was the nimble weasel Faable, the Sovereign of Spirits and the defender of the village.

“I apologize for keeping you all waiting. Please begin,” Olbaas said.

The elders and generals remained seated and bowed to their king before the elder to his left opened his mouth to speak.

“Now then, let us begin today’s meeting.”

“First up is the Central Continent, correct?” Olbaas said. “I hear their movements are rather concerning as of late.”

“The Demon Lord’s forces have been closing in on the Central Continent from the Forgotten Continent,” the elder in charge of intelligence reported. He had gathered information from his spies. “They plan to take over the northern region, then invade the continent of the dwarves and Rohzenheim. The humans have noticed this and are trying to form a group called the Five Continent Alliance.”

Spies were lurking throughout the Galiatan Continent, where Fabraaze was located, gathering information on other

continents.

“Your Majesty, the Union is rallying others from Galiat in hopes that they will unite under this cause,” a general wearing leather armor reported. “They would welcome us with open arms.”

Olbaas furrowed his brow in confusion. “I don’t understand. I’ve stated multiple times that we will not associate ourselves with the Union more than necessary. Why did they bring this offer to us? Surely, you’ve gathered information regarding this?”

“Most certainly,” the elder in charge of intelligence replied. “It seems Rohzenheim has suggested that we be invited into the Alliance.”

The atmosphere in the room immediately grew tense.

“Rohzenheim?!” a general spat. “Just what are they planning?!”

“It seems Rohzenheim will become one of the leading nations of the Alliance, along with the Empires of Giamut and Baukis,” the elder said.

“Those wretched elves… Can’t they simply leave us alone?”

“Your Majesty, we should refuse this invitation!”

The elders and generals hurled insults at Rohzenheim and its people. Many went so far as to suggest staying out of the Alliance out of hatred toward them.

“I know,” Olbaas replied. “But despite our firm intentions being vocalized, we have still been encouraged to join the Alliance. We cannot simply turn them down. Why don’t we tell them that we shall consider the offer?”

As the leader of the race that had been chased out of Rohzenheim long ago, there was no way Olbaas would join a group that the elves were also a part of. However, since Fabraaze was physically located in Galiat, he had to maintain the bare minimum of connections. He thought it would be best to delay providing a firm response.

But this sort of response is fitting for a village holed up in the desert, waiting for the Guardian Tree to grow into a World Tree, Olbaas thought, the irony of it not lost on him. But the elders could not read his mind, so they merely nodded along, satisfied.

“Indeed. I believe it’s best to provide a vague response and avoid being too harsh,” an elder agreed.

“Continue gathering information in regard to this ‘Five Continent Alliance,’” Olbaas ordered. “And remain wary of Rohzenheim. Also, don’t let any details about the Demon Lord

slip past you.”

“Most certainly,” the elder in charge of intelligence replied with a nod.

As though he had been waiting for that conversation to end, the elder in charge of trade was the next to open his mouth. “I would like to report on the news I heard from merchants now.”

He spoke of the people trekking across the Muharino Desert to buy and sell wares. They sold salt and crops that could not be produced in Fabraaze, though not everyone was permitted to trade with the dark elves. Only a select few who had built trust over the years were granted the privilege. Just the other day, these merchants had brought salt they had purchased from regions near the ocean and traded it for the herbal antidote that could be found in the village of the dark elves.

“Huh. I believe we’ve just finished negotiating with them,” Olbaas said. “Did they mention something, then?”

“Precisely,” the elder replied. “In the rocky mountains in the eastern region of this desert, a Rank A monster known as a king albaheron has been hunted down.”

“Ah, so a king albaheron lived in the mountains. I hadn’t known. And the legendary albaheron… It’s been a millennium.”

Albaherons were bird monsters, and their power and size changed as they matured. Every now and then, one that had managed to survive and defeat several enemies would become a Minor Deity known as a legendary albaheron. These usually flew around the world, making them difficult to track, but it was rumored that they would roost in Lehmciel Valley every thousand years to lay rainbow-colored eggs. During that time, the lesser albaherons and other bird monsters would flee in hopes of escaping the Minor Deity’s wrath.

“That’s right,” the elder said. “Of course, perhaps a king albaheron just managed to cross the ocean and take up residence in the mountain, but should there be multiple of these monsters, they may attack the village in search of water.”

“Noted,” Olbaas said. “General Bunzenberg, increase the number of archers within the ranks of our guards and keep a close watch on the sky.”

“Your wish is my command,” the general replied. “I shall increase the height of our watchtowers so that we may gaze into the distance. Also, Your Majesty, as albaherons are rather active at night, I would like Spirit Users to work in three shifts. Do I

have your permission to do so?”

“Yes. I leave the formation to you.”

As Olbaas tried to move on to the next topic, the elder in charge of trade opened his mouth once more. “Your Majesty, please wait. I have one more thing to discuss with you.”

“What is it?”

“The adventurer who slew the king albaheron sold the precious king’s beak to one of the merchants. They would like to exchange it for our village’s elixir.”

Olbaas and the rest of the dark elves grimaced.

“Foolish humans,” one said. “They’re still on about that?”

“We have no elixir that grants eternal youth,” Olbaas stated. “Did you tell the merchant that the rumors are false?”

“Of course,” the elder replied. “But it seems the merchants believe that tale…”

“It’s not just the merchants,” the intelligence elder chimed in. “I periodically receive reports of such rumors swirling around this continent’s major cities.”

The elders and generals sighed in exasperation. It seemed the residents of the Galiatan Continent believed that the dark elves lived for so long due to an elixir of eternal youth.

“I suppose the existence of the Demon Lord makes people anxious,” Olbaas said. “Very well. Next time those merchants arrive in our village, call for me.”

The elders shot him a weary look, and one said, “Your Majesty, please leave any outside affairs to us.”

“But surely it’ll be more convincing if the king personally dispels these rumors,” the king countered. “Do you not agree?”

“You have a duty to protect this village. I understand your interest in foreign affairs, but I would like you to refrain from getting involved.”

“Indeed. At the very least, finding a wife and giving birth to an heir must—” another elder started before he gasped and stopped himself. “I apologize. I’ve said too much.”

The muttering elder was clearly thinking about Olbaas and Rehzel. However, Olbaas knew they were all aware that touching on the topic hurt him deeply. After all, the man was still haunted by his past. None of them had welcomed Olbaas as the next king for their own gain, and they were simply worried about him, but even so, keeping him confined to the village for a millennium simply for its and the dark elves’ future was far too heavy a

burden for Olbaas to bear alone. He was exhausted. If he left the village, perhaps he could find the very thing that he yearned for somewhere out in the world. But he knew that wish would never be granted.

"Now then, what must we discuss next?" Olbaas inquired, switching topics.

* * *

After lunch, the meeting continued, only ending when the sun was about to set behind the desert sands. Olbaas ate dinner and headed back to his bedroom when he noticed that the sky outside his window was already dark. The gentle moonlight brushed over the branches and leaves of the massive tree, its soft beams painting the village.

Olbaas sat on his bed, staring at the scene through the open window. Fabraaze was the only dark elven village in the world, and he was glad its nights were so peaceful. Yet he was aware that somewhere in his heart, he was not fully satisfied, and he was afraid of the dissatisfaction he felt.

If he left the village one day, there was a chance he would never want to return. What, then, would happen to the village and its people? Was it best for him to have a wife and child so the village could maintain order even if he was gone? *But wouldn't they end up in the same situation as I did with my father? No, I* know *they would. And then my child would feel the same pain, suffering, and loneliness that I feel. I can't bring a child to this world with my feelings all muddled like this.*

Before he knew it, he had fallen asleep. He was startled awake by frantic shouting.

"Bandits! Chase them away! Chase them away!"

"Your Majesty, a gang of bandits have entered our village!" a chamberlain cried, throwing open the door to the king's room and rushing inside. "Please make haste!"

"Don't mind me," Olbaas ordered. "Prioritize protecting women and children."

The chamberlain nodded.

"The king is safe! He's unharmed!" he shouted through the open window. Then, he closed the window and stood between it and the king, serving as a shield until Olbaas finished preparing himself. Once he did so and left the room, General Bunzenberg

and several guards approached.

“Capture the bandits,” the king ordered. “Let them know what punishment awaits them for daring to intrude upon the village of the dark elves.”

Olbaas moved to the reception room. Half an hour later, soldiers dressed in black leather armor entered to give status reports.

“We’ve captured the bandits!” one said.

Olbaas stood up. “Well done. Now then, I shall pay them a visit, I suppose.”

“That would be far too dangerous,” an elder said gingerly.

“What are you on about? I must personally show them the terror of the village of the dark elves. I will decide whether to lop off their heads or leave any survivors to spread the tale of our might to other criminals.”

“Of course.”

The elder bowed his head, and Olbaas followed the general who had a torch in hand. He left the shrine and crossed the bridge over the lake. Soldiers were at the ready when the group arrived at the clearing in front of the village gate, where five figures of varying sizes were sitting on the ground, surrounded by the light of the soldiers’ torches.

“Is this all of them?” Olbaas inquired.

“They may not be many, but they’re all experienced in combat,” Bunzenberg reported.

Olbaas thought back to the rumors that the elder of trade had mentioned in the afternoon. “Who are they and what are their goals?”

“We believe they’re adventurers, Your Majesty.”

Bunzenberg offered the king a piece of paper he had jotted a few notes down on. Olbaas used the fire of the torches to scan its contents.

“Hmm… I see…” the king mumbled. “It seems they’re quite experienced indeed.”

Names, Species, and Talents of the Bandits

Makkaron, human, Fist Lord
Istahl Kumes, human, Greater Saint
Yoze, beastkin, Beast Fist Lord
Nenebee, dwarf, Talos General
Gressa, human, Shaman Archwizard

Olbaas glanced back at the captured bandits. A wind spirit was restraining their wrists, and an earth spirit was keeping their feet glued to the ground. However, while there was some dirt on their clothes, there were no wounds or blood. It seemed the criminals had been captured without a fight. The fact that they had readily shared their names and Talents proved that they meant no hostility.

Why had they intruded upon the village, then? If not to steal or harm, why had they slipped into this place using the darkness as a veil? But before Olbaas could speak, the party members started bickering with one another.

"Excellent plan, my ass, Makkaron!" the dwarf lady shouted. "Look how vigilant they are!"

"If you wanna go there, Nenebee, you're the one who said these defenses didn't stand a chance against you," a burly human male replied. "You dwarves are always so greedy, driven by whatever's right in front of your nose. That's why you miss all the important details!"

"Are you or are you not the party leader?! *You* should be the one to notice these important details! Did we allow you to be the leader for nothing?!"

"Lord Elmea, please forgive me, Istahl Kumes, for being unable to scold the irresponsible actions of my friends. It's all due to my ignorance..." a tall, frail human man said with his head bowed as the two began quarreling. It seemed he was a clergyman with the Church of Elmea.

"Oh? We're calling it 'irresponsible actions' now, are we?!" Makkaron shouted. "Why the hell did you tag along, then, Istahl?!"

"You've got a bad habit of blaming others," a lionkin pointed out.

"You wanna treat me like a villain too, Yoze?!"

"Yoze... Is that not the name of Albahal's Beast Prince?" Olbaas muttered. He was familiar with that name.

The human male twitched upon hearing those words and looked up at the dark elf king. "Th-That's right! Who do you think is in front of you?! You're in the presence of Beast Prince Yoze of Albahal! Undo these bindings and release us, or face his royal wrath!"

"How suspicious," Olbaas replied. "Albahal should be far away in the Garlesian Continent, near an ocean. Why is someone from

that nation—the Beast Prince, no less—in this faraway village? I trust the Albahalan royal isn't foolish enough to sneak into our village under the cover of the night."

Despite his words, a different thought filled Olbaas's mind. *But what if this lionkin really* is *Albahal's Beast Prince?* No one seemed to grasp his innermost thoughts, however, and the captured human male and lionkin started to panic.

"Look at what you've done, Makkaron! Because of your incessant babbling, we're under greater suspicion!" the lionkin roared.

"You revealed your identity a few minutes ago!" the human shouted back. "Besides, they were gonna find out sooner or later. Not like they believe us anyway. And it's all because you lack dignity as a Beast Prince."

"What?! You dare ridicule me?!"

"Oh dear... My friends are fighting, but I feel so powerless. Please forgive me, Lord Elmea," the frail human said.

"Can it, Istahl!" the dwarf yelled. "Isn't this one of those 'Trials of Lord Elmea' you never shut up about?! Then you know praying will get you nowhere! It never has in the past, has it?! Goodness gracious!"

"But Nenebee, this is different from prior predicaments. This is what one would truly call a conundrum. There's no way out."

"That nonsense again? Do you *ever* shut up?!"

"Enough! Be silent!" Bunzenberg roared, his voice echoing throughout the area, and the rowdy bandits immediately went quiet. "Before you stands the king! If you remain noisy, I shall cut off all of your heads!"

"H-Hey, c'mon... I mean, um, perhaps that's a little *too* extreme, good sir?" the human male said cautiously.

The general became quieter, but his voice carried a certain weight to it. "This is not a place that you can waltz into without permission," the general continued. He was no longer yelling, but his words still had a certain weight to them. "In fact, for the past millennium, we haven't allowed a single outsider to set foot into our village. You intruders must experience for yourselves how foolish your actions are."

"But to kill all of us? Seriously? I think that's still a bit much..."

"Hmm. Makkaron, was it? You may live and return. The rest shall die," Olbaas said.

Makkaron began panicking. "Huh? No, uh, I'd feel bad for the

rest of my friends."

"Not to worry. You'll only be allowed to live so that you may spread the word of what will happen to any intruders who dare to set foot in the village of the dark elves. Everyone will learn of the consequences. We will use our special Spirit Magic to put a curse on you—one that's immune to Healing Magic. We will cut the tendons in your arms and legs, gouge out your eyes, and turn you into a pitiful shell of your former self. But we can show benevolence as well. Once you have spread word of the terrors of our village, we can send you to join your friends."

Makkaron paled, but the dwarf lady laughed through her nose.

"Ha ha! Classic! Hey, Makkaron, you've got an important role as the leader of our party."

"Indeed you do," Yoze agreed. "Had you not said anything foolish about catching a glimpse of the dark elves' rumored elixir of eternal youth, we never would have gotten into this mess. Die. No, live pathetically and repent for your sins!"

"Uh, hello? Yoze? I remember a certain Beast Prince saying, 'If I can get my hands on the elixir of eternal youth, I might be able to become the Beast King!' We're in this together, if you ask me!" Makkaron retorted.

The pieces in Olbaas's mind began to click, and he started to make sense of the situation. But before he could discuss future steps to take, Makkaron and his friends began to screech and shout again.

"That's why I suggested that we use the entrance and ask them politely," Yoze claimed. "*You're* the one who said we'd get turned away and suggested we sneak in and negotiate directly with the king! Your foolishness is to blame!"

"Well, that's 'cause Nenebee said, 'The village of the dark elves has, like, no guards.' I thought it'd be a cinch!"

"Oh, so now you're blaming this all on me?!" Nenebee shrieked.

Bunzenberg gazed at these adventurers wearily before turning to the king. "Your Majesty, perhaps they are the ones who defeated that king albaheron."

"I believe so," Olbaas agreed. "They must be the ones who traded the beak to that merchant. And they must have believed the merchant's nonsensical tales." He turned to Makkaron. "Unfortunately for you lot, the elixir of eternal youth doesn't

exist.”

“What?! R-Really?!” Makkaron cried.

The other intruders gazed at the dark elf king in astonishment as silence blanketed the area.

“I told you that that story was fishy…” a frail young woman said, her voice cutting through the tense air. She had been quietly transfixed on the ground ever since her capture.

“Did… Did you really, Gressa?” Makkaron asked.

“I did. I even suggested that we aim for the legendary albaheron’s egg instead.”

“I thought you were just giving an alternative… Rgh, why didn’t you assert yourself more?!”

The lady maintained her gaze on the ground, but she pouted as Makkaron yelled at her. “Even if I did, it’s not like you listen to me anyway.”

“She’s not wrong. You’ve got no right to blame her,” the dwarf added.

“Ugh… Now what?” Makkaron sighed. He looked around and locked eyes with Olbaas. “Are you gonna gouge out my eyes?”

“You guys seem rather young,” Olbaas remarked.

“Well, yeah. We became Rank A a mere three years after forming a party. Everyone’s heard of the mighty Majestic!”

“I’ve never heard of you.”

Makkaron looked disappointed. “Damn, I guess the dark elves don’t know of us.”

“But I know of the Adventurer’s Guild. I’m not sure just how impressive a Rank A is, but I’d like to avoid killing you, lest I earn the ire of the Guild. Naturally, I wouldn’t like to cross blades with Albahal either.”

Makkaron’s face glimmered with hope. “So you’ll set us free?”

“But you have intruded upon our land. That is not something I can overlook. Even as king, I cannot break those laws.”

“That’s a no, then. Well, I guess Majestic ends here,” Makkaron said glumly. He sighed once more before glaring at Olbaas. “Guess there’s nothing I can do. If you’re gonna kill us, can you just kill me and let everyone else go?”

“Oh? Why the sudden change of heart?”

Makkaron looked casual. “I mean, I’m the leader of this party, y’know? And as its leader, I’ve gotta take responsibility during times like these and protect my friends.”

“How laudable. I’ve taken a liking to you.”

“What?”

Makkaron looked surprised. But it was the king’s next words that shocked everyone else.

“I will join your party. That way, I can invite you into this village as my friends. What do you say?” As silence fell over the group, the king pressed on. “I don’t think this is a bad deal for you.”

“I get it now,” Makkaron said. “But are you in your right mind, Your Majesty?”

“We don’t have the elixir of eternal youth you so desire. I presume, then, that you and your friends will go off in search of the legendary albaheron’s egg. I will go along with you. I’ve been meaning to leave the village soon anyway, as I need to search for something.”

As Olbaas began speaking about his desires, one of the elders cried, “You intend to search for your father?!”

He had hit the nail on the head. But Olbaas had expected that answer and had another one prepared.

“No,” the king replied.

“Then what’re you looking for?” Makkaron asked.

“What does it matter to you?”

Despite the monarch’s wrathful glare, Makkaron maintained his composure and explained, “I’m the leader of Majestic. If you can’t convince me, I can’t allow you to join our party.”

“Are you really in a position to negotiate, Makkaron?” the slender-framed man inquired.

“Listen, Istahl. At this rate, we’re probably all gonna get our heads chopped off. But wouldn’t it be way more interesting if we had a Beast Prince and the king of the dark elves in our party?”

“No, I’m saying I don’t think we have the right to make demands of them.”

“Now, now. Look a little closer. The dark elves are just as curious about it. We’re all dying to find out what you’re searching for, Your Majesty. Why don’t you just tell us?”

“King Olbaas, this affects the future of our village,” an elder said. “If you have a plan in mind, I beg you to enlighten us.”

Olbaas had an answer prepared. The time had come for him to say it. He took a deep breath before he said, “A bride.”

Everyone stared at the king in astonishment. No one could believe their ears, and they reflexively gasped, struggling to comprehend what he had just said.

“Huh?”

“What?”

“A bride?”

Olbaas nodded. “Indeed. To protect the future of my village, I require a bride to support me, and I’ve been searching for one. However, I haven’t been able to find anyone suitable. Why is that? My guess is that everyone in this village, myself included, knows nothing about the outside world. We know only of our village; therefore, I have no choice but to welcome a bride from outside our land. And it’s best that I personally search for such a woman.”

Suddenly, a high-pitched laugh rang through the air, commanding the attention of everyone present.

“Aha ha!” Gressa cackled. “Your Majesty, you sound absolutely ridiculous! But it’s so very amusing!”

“Gressa… I’ve never seen you laugh before,” Makkaron murmured, his eyes wide. He soon grinned at everyone. “But I agree. This is gonna be interesting, Your Majesty. All right, I’m in! Are we cool with that, guys?”

The other three party members smiled and slowly nodded along.

“Very well. My name is Yoze. Let us see which one of us attains our goal first. Will you find a bride before I become the Beast King?”

“I’m Nenebee! But you better think twice before you join our party, Your Majesty. With a leader like ours, there’s no telling when we’ll be able to search for a wife for you!”

“Nenebee, that’s a trial this person must overcome. I, Istahl Kumes, and the power of Lord Elmea shall surely be of assistance. Let’s overcome this trial together and find you a lady of hope who can bring a brighter future to your village!”

“Thank you. I am Olbaas, the king of Fabraaze. And I shall be your friend from today onward.”

Makkaron already had his sights set on his next goal. “All right, now let’s hunt for that legendary albaheron egg!”

* * *

The members of Majestic had their restraints undone. For the first time in centuries, guests were welcomed into the village of Fabraaze. Needless to say, the elders and generals were tasked

with keeping a close eye on the visitors, but Makkaron and the others did not do anything rash. The village did not have the elixir of eternal youth anyway.

From that very night, Olbaas's dreams began to shift. His younger self in his dreams, wandering around the desert, became more confident. Every step he took across the sands was firm, and when he looked behind him, he saw that his footprints remained—a trail that showed where he had been. Beside his own set of footprints were five more left by the invisible friends walking with him.

Side Story 3: Hell Mode Spin-Off—The Heroic Tale of Helmios (Part 3): A Natural Gift, Act 2

Five years before Allen was born, five-year-old Helmios had just finished his Appraisal Ceremony. The Empire of Giamut had been unable to stop the invasion of the Demon Lord Army, and following a bitter battle, the situation was looking grim.

As though to answer the citizens' cries of distress, Helmios had been born with the Talent of Hero. The very day his Talent had been appraised, he had been shipped off with three other kids from his village to Howlden City, the capital of the fief, without having even been given time to pack his things. With only the clothes on his back, he had been pushed onto the carriage and forced to leave his hometown of Cortana Village. A few hours had passed since he had departed.

A hundred knights surrounded the carriage, protecting it as it raced across the plains. Vice-Captain Zeine was at the front of the group.

"Hurry!" he shouted. "The sun will set before we reach Zozonoe Village!"

"Roger that!" the knights replied.

Captain Maxil, who had the final say in any decisions, nodded silently.

"Awesome! They're so cool!" Gatsun shouted as he peeked out the carriage window, his nose running and his eyes sparkling. "Helmios, did you hear that?! These are *knights*! And the cavalry unit! 'Roger that!' they said! Wow!"

As Gatsun imitated the knights and tried to vocalize his respect, one of the cavalry units noticed him and raised his voice.

"Hey! Brat! Keep your head inside the carriage!" the knight scolded. "Don't make me keep saying it!"

"Huh?! S-Sorry!" Gatsun said.

For the umpteenth time today, Gatsun promised that it would not happen again, and Helmios sighed.

"You should calm down already," Dorothy said.

"Have you calmed down a little, Dorothy?" Helmios asked.

“What? I’m not depressed or anything. Just a little sad.”

She puffed out her cheeks as she complained. The little girl had looked glum when she was torn away from her parents, but watching Gatsun romp around so innocently as they rode along had cheered her up a little. *Thank goodness Dorothy looks more energetic. And what about this girl? I don’t know her. I hope we can get along,* Helmios thought. She had mussed, chestnut-colored hair that went down to her shoulders and had been shoved into the carriage with Helmios and his friends.

“Excuse me. Um, what’s your name?” Helmios asked with a smile.

“Huh?! I-I’m Ena.”

“Cool! Do you have any siblings?”

“An older brother and a younger sister.”

“I see. Then it must be lonely, huh?”

“Mm-hmm…”

“What about your mom and dad? What do they do?”

Helmios was sociable and managed to keep the conversation going. He learned that Ena had been born to and raised by a serf family. In Cortana Village, children of commoners almost never mingled with the children of serfs. The farming region, where serfs resided, was far away from the commoners’ residential area. Furthermore, serfs tended to their crops as a family. When the children of commoners reached a certain age, they were allowed to play around outside, whereas serf children who reached that age were sent to work and help their parents. They were not given much time to themselves.

“I see,” Helmios said, wanting to use this opportunity to learn about her Talent. “Ena, can I ask what Talent you have? I hope you don’t mind me asking.”

“Um, it’s Bow Master,” Ena replied.

“Bow Master?! What’s that?!” the large-bodied, spiky-haired Gatsun asked, leaning forward.

“Huh?!” Ena gasped timidly.

“Stop that. You’re scaring her,” Dorothy scolded. She had been smiling, glad to see that Helmios had managed to speak to Ena.

“Sorry, sorry,” Gatsun apologized, scratching his head.

“That’s okay,” Ena said with a nod. She flashed a nervous smile. “Um, I just heard that it’s better than Archer.”

“Wow! Then it’s a rare Talent!”

“Seems like it,” Dorothy added. “It’s a little frustrating.”

“This isn’t a competition or anything,” Helmios said.

“I guess a Hero is allowed to act so carefree.”

“What even *is* a Hero anyway?” Gatsun asked. “Is it better than a Swordsman?”

Helmios got the impression that the children of serfs and commoners wanted Swordsman as a Talent. He was not sure if he could live up to high expectations, so he chose his words carefully.

“I think so,” he replied.

Talents of the Four Children from Cortana Village

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Helmios: Hero (five stars)
Dorothy: Mage (one star)
Gatsun: Swordsman (one star)
Ena: Bow Master (two stars)
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The way Helmios steered the conversation as Gatsun spoke his mind and Dorothy scolded him for it made Ena begin to feel more at ease. In the blink of an eye, the four children became friends.

The sun set in the distance, shrouding the road in darkness, but the knights quickly used magic tools to light their way. The carriage continued to rush through, and an hour after sunset, it arrived in Zozonoe Village.

Thick, cylindrical logs surrounded the village, serving as a defensive wall, and a heavy door made of horizontally stacked logs opened, ushering the knights and the carriage inside.

“Wow, we really made it here in a day,” Helmios murmured.

“Whoa,” Dorothy said. “Hmm? Wait, Helmios, have you ever been to Zozonoe Village?”

“No, but my dad said it takes two days to get here.”

His father, Lucas, served as a guard for merchants and had many stories to tell. One of the things the man had told him was that one would never normally make it to a neighboring village this quickly. It was no wonder, then, that they had been so hastily ushered out of Cortana.

“Who cares? We get to sleep in an inn today!” Gatsun shouted.

“So? You said it might be fun to camp outside,” Dorothy pointed out.

“Did I? In any case, how long do we gotta wait? I expect a nice meal at our inn. I’ve got a Talent here, you know.”

“Maybe they won’t let us off…” Ena muttered.

Helmios gazed out the window and spotted the knight captain and vice-captain calling a few other knights to gather.

“Looks like they’re talking about something,” Helmios observed.

We didn’t get much to eat for lunch. I’m no Gatsun, but I’m still pretty hungry… As Helmios focused on the knights outside, he managed to catch tidbits of their conversation.

“How did Zozonoe go?”

“We’ve got three kids. I’ve told their parents to gather them in the village square tomorrow morning.”

I guess we’re not the only village that had its Appraisal Ceremony.

“I see. There were four kids in Cortana. Can I leave you guys with the night shift?”

“Of course, sir!”

“Captain, perhaps leaving only one squad is cause for worry. We should offer a squad for assistance as well.”

“Vice-Captain, I appreciate your kindness, but I believe you’re set to leave first thing in the morning. If you intend to reach the next village before the day ends, it’ll be best to get a good night’s rest.”

“Quite so, but we also have reasons for offering our aid. Is that not so, Captain Maxil?”

Maxil nodded slightly, and the knights of Zozonoe Village lowered their voices. “I knew it. I knew there was a reason behind a squad of our size being dispatched.”

“I will provide you with the details upon our return to the city. There’s been a slew of dangerous cases recently, so as Vice-Captain Zeine says, we shall have two squads stand guard throughout the night. I leave the bodyguard task to you.”

“Yes, sir!”

Once they had voiced their assent, the two squad leaders nodded and faded into the darkness. The captain and vice-captain then turned back toward the carriage, and Helmios swiftly averted his gaze, feigning ignorance.

“Right. Let’s head to the village chief’s residence. Get the kids.”

Helmios and his three friends were guided off the carriage and over to the village chief’s residence amid the peaceful night. The house, illuminated by a magic tool, had several villagers waiting out front for them.

“Ah, it must have been quite the journey! Please, come inside.

I know it's late, but we've prepared a meal for you," an elderly man said. He was likely the village chief.

"Yay! Grub!" Gatsun shouted energetically, paying no heed to his surroundings.

"Hey, stop!" Dorothy cried, hastily clasping her hand over his mouth.

"Mph, mmmph!"

Helmios heard the knight captain let out a gentle sigh before saying, "These kids haven't eaten yet either. I apologize for the inconvenience, but could you deliver food to their rooms as well?"

"Of course," the village chief replied before he turned to a middle-aged man. "Please guide these children to their rooms."

"Yes, sir," the man replied, then opened the log door.

Helmios turned around and looked up at the knight captain, who gave a nod. And so, the boy entered the village chief's residence. Gatsun, Dorothy, and Ena followed. The middle-aged man locked the door behind him and walked past the kids to guide them down the front hall. *He looks like the village chief. Maybe they're father and son.*

As Helmios was thinking about the man's face, the villager stopped, opened a door with a loud *clack*, and encouraged everyone to head inside.

"Here we are," he said. "Wait inside. We'll bring you food and hot water. If you would like to use the restroom, head farther down the hall. You'll find a door at the end."

The kids gingerly stepped inside and saw a table with a lantern that illuminated the room. There was a single bed, as well as three hemp sacks filled with straw and three blankets to place atop them. It seemed that three of them would have to sleep on the floor.

"Okay. Um, mister?" Helmios asked.

"Yes?" the middle-aged man replied.

"If we can't have separate rooms, I'd at least like a divider or something…"

"Huh? Precocious brat. Fine."

With that, he left the room.

"All right! I call the bed!" Gatsun declared, diving face-first onto it.

"Good grief. There's no arguing with you," Dorothy said.

As the daughter of a clergyman, Dorothy aimed to live a

frugal life, and money was always tight for Helmios because of his mother's medical fees. Ena, of course, had never led a life of luxury as the daughter of a serf. In contrast, Gatsun, as the son of the sole pharmacist in the village, had led quite a privileged life. Dorothy was well aware of this, and she sighed wearily but did not stop him from claiming the bed. Just then, the door opened, and the middle-aged man entered with baskets hanging from both arms.

"Here's some bread and molmo," the man said. "I'll bring some hot water later and place it in the next room, so use it as you wish. Don't dirty the towels too much."

The kids peered into the baskets. One contained four chunks of bread, each as large as their faces, while the other had several molmo fruits.

"Aw. No meat?" Gatsun, who had slid off the bed and was looking into the baskets from next to Helmios, grumbled.

"What was that?" the man asked. "Hmph. Any more complaining and I'll have you skip breakfast."

"Ack! I'm sorry!"

Gatsun apologized profusely, and the middle-aged man gave a weary sigh before leaving the room. Helmios took a hunk of bread and a molmo, offering them to Ena.

"Here you go. This is your share," he said.

"Thanks. Can I take all this?" Ena asked.

"Of course you can."

As Helmios and Ena smiled at each other, Gatsun and Dorothy took their shares from the baskets.

"Hey, I'm not the type to take other people's food," Gatsun said.

"I wonder..." Dorothy said as she bit into the fruit. "Oh, it's sweet. This is a good one."

The kids quickly polished off the bread and fruit. When the hot water arrived, Ena and Dorothy used it first, followed by Helmios and Gatsun. The room had a pail that was large enough for Helmios to fit inside, but the kids all hesitated to needlessly use water and soak in a tub. They decided to use towels soaked in the water to wipe themselves clean.

They returned to their sleeping area with nothing to do. Wanting to conserve the oil in the lamp, they decided to turn it off and head to bed. A while later, quiet sobbing filled the dark room.

“Ngh… Mommy…” Ena murmured, trying her best to stifle her sniffles.

“Hey. We should be nicer to her,” Gatsun whispered.

“Yeah, you should take your own advice,” Dorothy countered.

“All right, all right. Ena can take the bed next time.”

Helmios closed his eyes as Gatsun and Dorothy whispered to each other.

The next morning, the middle-aged man—presumably the village chief’s son—arrived to wake them up. They were scheduled to head out immediately, and the knights were already waiting for them.

“Where’s breakfast?” Gatsun asked as he jumped out of bed.

“Packed in the carriage,” the man replied. “There’s lunch too.”

“Nice! Is there any meat?”

Gatsun immediately looked happier, but the man did not answer. He merely shot the boy a withering look and left the room. Helmios then wriggled out of his sleeping area, and when he glanced around the dimly lit room, he noticed Dorothy still curled up in her blanket.

“Dorothy, wake up. We need to leave soon,” he said.

“But I’m still sleepy…” she murmured.

Unfortunately, she was not allowed the luxury of more sleep. They all woke up, swiftly cleaned up the room, and left the village chief’s residence. A pair of knights was waiting out front, and when they spotted Helmios and the other kids, they guided the group to the village square while guarding it from the front and rear. Two carriages awaited them. Since there had only been one when they left Cortana Village, Helmios suspected that the second carriage was for the Talented children of Zozonoe Village.

“Yes! We’re the first ones here!” Gatsun crowed. “Oh! And there’s meat! They listened after all!”

The energetic boy climbed into the carriage, and Helmios spotted the two large sacks Gatsun was gazing into. They had been placed on the seats next to the carriage door. Each contained enough large chunks of bread, molmo, and pieces of dried meat for four.

“The food is for more than just you,” Dorothy said as she stepped into the carriage. “Don’t take all the meat.”

“I know!” Gatsun replied, and he immediately began gnawing on the dried meat.

Helmios helped Ena climb into the carriage, and he boarded

last. Just as he was about to close the doors behind them, he heard the knights and villagers talking to one another, and he turned around. A villager was desperately clutching the captain's cape. Meanwhile, the captain looked troubled.

"Captain, please," the villager implored. "Can't you bring my child with you?"

"As I said before, we cannot bring Tailors with us," the captain replied.

"Please. My child is very intelligent."

I guess some Talents aren't allowed to head to the city, Helmios thought.

One of the knights managed to peel the villager away from the captain, and the poor man sank to his knees. The captain glanced at the villager before turning to the knights on horseback to give out orders. Then, the two carriages headed out.

Helmios stuck his head out the window beside the door and spotted the carriage in front of him clattering ahead. He saw the children stick their heads out the window and gaze at their village as it receded into the distance, just as he had done the day before. They were on the verge of tears. *I probably looked exactly the same yesterday.* As Helmios thought about his parents, his chest started to ache.

That day, they took several breaks during the carriage ride, and by nightfall, they had arrived in Ponce Village. Just like the night prior, the village chief offered his residence to the kids. However, the room they were given this time was not as spacious as the previous one, and the trio from Zozonoe Village were told to sleep in a separate room.

The next morning, the kids were given sacks filled with their breakfasts and lunches, and they left the village chief's residence. There were now three carriages stationed at the village square. While they rattled down the road, Dorothy gazed out the window.

"We're heading north," she remarked.

"Which means we're going to Gorasso Village," Helmios concluded.

Thanks to his father, Lucas, Helmios knew where all the villages within Viscount Howlden's fief were located. The eastern region was home to Cortana, Zozonoe, Ponce, and Gorasso Villages. Cortana, Helmios's hometown, was at its easternmost

point, and that was where their journey had begun. They had proceeded to the nearest neighboring village, Zozonoe, before heading for Ponce, located at the center of the fief. Howlden City was due west, but if they were heading north, only Gorasso Village was nearby.

"If there are other kids with Talents, maybe they thought it was better to round them all up, even if it means taking the long way around," Helmios wondered.

"Huh. I don't really care, but sitting all day is bad for my hips," Gatsun grumbled.

"You sound like an old man," Dorothy remarked.

"What did you say?!"

Ena finally giggled and smiled as she watched the two kids bicker.

They reached their destination late into the night again, and they were welcomed through the gates of Gorasso Village, just as Helmios had guessed. Once again, the kids were separated into rooms by village, and they all spent the night.

The next morning, at the crack of dawn, there was another carriage stationed in the village, making four in total. Helmios gazed out the window, the sky turning brighter as the hours passed, and saw that the carriage was trying to climb a mountain.

There were two routes leading from Gorasso Village to Howlden City. One headed back south, following the path they had come down, before heading west. The second extended west along the southern side of the mountains. The carriages were clearly taking the latter route, so Helmios assumed that it was shorter and faster. He did not know why, but it was clear that the knights did not want to make camp here. To that end, the carriages began climbing a path, and after traversing a flat road, the path became bumpy.

Clack, clack.

"It's shaking a lot. Can't they go a bit slower?" Gatsun wondered.

"It really is tough for us," Dorothy said. "Ena, are you okay?"

"Yeah. Thank you," Ena replied.

Helmios stared out the window. The carriages were traveling west on the south side of the mountains, and one could gaze down at the plains extending from their base. Helmios turned to his left and looked west, hoping to catch a glimpse of Cortana

Village. He had no idea how far he had traveled over the past three days, but there was no trace of the village to be seen.

The vehicle clattered along the flat road and started its descent.

"Right!" the vice-captain ordered from the front of the group.

Helmios spotted a fork in the road, the left path delving deeper into the mountains. The carriages took the right path, heading north. *Wait, what? They didn't get lost or anything, did they?* The boy started to grow suspicious, and one of the knights likely thought the same, shouting to the front of the group.

"Vice-Captain! That's the wrong way!"

"This is faster. Just stay quiet and follow my orders!" the vice-captain replied.

The knight captain heard this exchange and spurred his steed, stopping alongside Helmios's carriage.

"As I thought, they're on the move..." the captain murmured. "Stay quiet in the carriage. There's nothing to worry about."

"Huh? O-Okay," Helmios replied, confused.

WHOOSH! A loud sound whizzed through the air as an item struck the neck of one of the horses next to the carriage. The horse neighed loudly in alarm and stood up, forcing its rider off its back.

"Whoa! What's going on?!" a knight cried.

Rough-looking figures appeared, their brandished swords and daggers glistening under the sunlight.

"Heh heh, it's just like I heard!" one said. "There are a lot more here. Kill all the knights!"

"Don't harm the kids in the carriages!" another man ordered.

They were lying in wait to ambush us. Helmios recalled what the captain had just said.

"Talent hunters!" the captain roared. "Protect the carriage!"

A man behind Helmios emitted a mighty roar.

"Hyaaah!"

"Get 'em!"

Even the knights could not hide their panic. Some of them lined up beside the mountain, next to the carriage.

"They've got us trapped!" a knight said anxiously. "Damn! There must be at least a hundred of them!"

"Captain! Your orders, please!" one of the squad leaders requested.

"All right, now!" the captain shouted. "Sound the alarm!"

The next moment, three shrill whistles rang through the air from around the carriages. *FWEEEE! FWEEEE! FWEEEE!*

"What's going on?" several Talent hunters asked.

Helmios noticed the earth near the mountains rumbling and shaking the carriage. Just then, a booming battle cry echoed from above.

"Raaaaah! Save the children! Kill the Talent hunters!"

A host of knights raced down the mountain on their steeds.

"Shit! Knights were hiding behind the mountain?!" a Talent hunter shouted.

"What?! Were we tricked?!" another cried.

As the assailants began to panic, the horses galloped down the mountain before anyone could flee. The tables had turned in a flash.

"Damn it, Zeine, you bastard!" one of the Talent hunters roared. "You tricked us! Don't think you can leave unscathed!"

"What?!" the vice-captain screamed. "No! I didn't know about this either!"

He's the one who suggested everyone take the right route earlier. But the vice-captain's next words shocked Helmios.

"T-Take that carriage!" Zeine shouted. "The brat mentioned in the letter to the viscount is inside!"

Who is he talking about? All the while, the clangs of weapons drew nearer.

"We won't have to work ever again if we do this!" a hunter said. "Get them!"

"Right!" the assailants replied.

Helmios whirled around to face Gatsun, Dorothy, and Ena. His friends turned pale, and he steeled his resolve as he heard screams coming from the coachman's seat beyond the walls of the carriage. Suddenly, the vehicle spurred forward.

"Huh?! No! Stop that carriage!" the captain ordered from the back.

Helmios put two and two together—the Talent hunters had taken over their carriage. Without hesitation, he kicked the carriage doors open, then turned to Dorothy and Gatsun.

"Jump!" he shouted.

The vehicle had not picked up much speed yet, so he guessed that they would not sustain any major injuries if they jumped off now. But the two kids were too scared to move. They huddled themselves in the far corner, frozen with fear. Helmios then

turned to Ena. When the two locked eyes, the trembling little girl slowly stood up and stepped toward him.

Thud! The right wheel of the carriage rolled over the stone, causing it to tilt violently to the left. Ena lost her balance and fell forward, inadvertently pushing Helmios off the carriage.

“Whoa!” the boy cried.

Realizing that he was now in the air, he instinctively put his hands out in front of him to grab at the carriage door. However, after a brief fall, his back hit the ground. He had quickly twisted his body while falling, though, and was mostly uninjured as he rolled onto the dirt. When he stood back up, the carriage with the other three children was quickly driving away, weaving between the battles between the knights and the Talent hunters.

Helmios looked around and spotted the knight captain, but when they locked eyes, the boy could hardly believe his ears.

“The boy’s still here,” the captain said. “Strengthen our defenses. We’ll abandon that carriage!”

“Yes, sir!” the knights replied.

“What?! No! Why?!” Helmios cried. “Th-The carriage!”

As the knights began retreating toward him, the boy quickly determined that his friends had been left for dead. Unable to bear the thought of it, he chased after the carriage with all his might. He grabbed an abandoned sword along the way and ran past the shocked knights, who could only whirl around and watch. The boy was too small and nimble for the Talent hunters, and he slipped past them, leaving them in the dust. *I have to chase after them!*

“Wait!” the captain shouted from behind him. But Helmios paid no heed and continued running ahead.

Just then, a burly Talent hunter barred the boy’s path.

“What’s this brat doing?” he boomed.

“Move!” Helmios shouted, swinging his sword upward.

His swing managed to overpower the burly man, pushing him away. Helmios then charged in and headbutted the man’s stomach with all his might. The hunter fell onto his back, and Helmios trampled him as he ran ahead.

“Gah!” the hunter cried.

Helmios managed to catch up to the retreating Talent hunters and even run past them. Because he had hunted down numerous monsters while gathering herbs with his father, he had the strength to outpace even horses.

“What the hell is this brat doing?! Huh?!” the hunter gasped.

He could hardly believe his eyes. A boy had not only caught up to the horses but overtaken them. And when the hunter saw where the boy was headed, he gasped again. A thirty-meter gap had appeared in front of him as though the mountain had suddenly stopped. A bridge made out of logs and ropes hung over the gap, but it suddenly leaned to one side.

A Talent hunter on his steed noticed that the stolen carriage had already made it to the other side. His comrades were using an axe to hastily cut the ropes holding the bridge up. Of the two ropes, one had already been completely severed, and as the bridge began to swing about wildly, the Talent hunters crossing it cried out in desperation.

“Hey, we’re still on here! Stop! Ahhhhh!”

They all fell to the valley below, and the frightened hunter on horseback stopped his steed just before the gap. But a small shadow did not stop. A boy weaved between the horses and continued running, heading for the gap. *I have to catch up to the carriage!*

Steeling his resolve, Helmios snapped his eyes open, increased his speed, and stepped onto the bridge. It was practically sideways now, but he managed to run along its edge, which was about as wide as the palm of his hand. He showed no signs of slowing down as the hunters hacked away at the last rope. Their axe went halfway into it, but before they could swing down again, Helmios took a small leap forward. He then kicked off the bridge, jumping as far as he could.



The rope was cut, and the bridge went down, slamming against the side of the mountain. The Talent hunters and knights were trapped on the other side. However, a small figure had managed to jump midway, flying fifteen meters through the air to grab the ledge on the other side.

"Impossible!" the knight captain gasped, shocked by what he had just seen. He was wearing heavy armor, so he had no chance of doing the same. Instead, he glanced around, then roared, "Head back! We'll use the other route at the fork in the road! Follow me!"

Helmios heard the captain's voice as he pulled himself up on the other side. He did not look back as he started running again. The Talent hunters who had spurred the carriage onward and cut the rope whirled around as they noticed a small boy quickly approaching them.

"Where the hell did this boy come from?!" the one in the rear cried. Immediately after, Helmios jumped and kicked him off his horse. "Gah?!"

Helmios had wanted to get to the man before he could talk, but he had not made it in time. The other Talents hunters turned around when they heard their comrade cry out. Helmios leaped from horse to horse, knocking them down as he jumped ahead. A Talent hunter on a steed alongside the carriage turned to the man beside him.

"Derakel! Now's the time to earn your pay!"

A man dismounted his horse and barred Helmios's path. His long hair flowed behind him, and he wore a bandanna, leather armor, and a pair of threatening brass knuckles. He swung a fist down at Helmios, but the boy maintained his speed and charged right in.

"Hah!" the man shouted.

"Gah?!" Helmios gasped.

CLANG! Helmios managed to use his sword to parry the man's attack, but he was blown back, unable to brace himself against the mighty swing.

"Oho! Not bad, defending against my punch!" Derakel said.

Helmios fell on his bottom, but he quickly rolled onto his feet, wary of any follow-up strikes. The adult man grinned proudly as he stood in place. *This is my strongest foe yet...*

"What is that power?" Helmios muttered, the words tumbling out of his mouth unconsciously. He gripped his sword, which

was now dented from that previous attack.

"Come back here, boss!" the man boomed. "The one you're looking for is right here!"

Helmios did not understand what the man was talking about. He racked his brain to find a way to attack. As he was doing so, the carriage clattered back, along with the band of Talent hunters. Helmios gazed at the adults suspiciously. At the same time, a man stopped his horse beside the one with brass knuckles.

"Ah, this boy must be the one with unusual abilities who was mentioned in that letter," the man on horseback who had been called "boss" said. "And he chased us all the way here. I should be grateful to him for sparing us the trouble. I don't mind if we have to break a leg or two. Let's silence him."

Before Helmios could figure out what was going on, the man with the brass knuckles replied, "Now, now. You left *me* to clean up this mess. I'll handle it."

"You're right. Don't kill him, though."

When the response left his lips, Helmios pounced. His opponent had brass knuckles that could dent a sword, so he thought it unwise to clash several times. His goal was to end the fight in one swift blow. But as he drew near and made to pierce the man's heart, he hesitated. He was not about to kill a monster, but a human. And the man was not about to miss that opening.

"Hmph! Blast Punch!" Derakel roared. He launched a hook and pounded the sword, shattering it.

"Gah!" Helmios cried.

Only the hilt remained in his hands, which were painfully numb from the impact, and when he flinched, the man planted a kick into his chest, knocking him onto his back. Both took considerable damage, and he coughed up blood. The man then shoved the toes of his leather shoes into the boy on the ground, rolling him over like a log.

"M-My sword... Gah..." Helmios coughed as he was pummeled by kicks. He spat out more blood as he used his elbows to prop up his body.

"It seems like you were blessed with a decent Talent, kid. But you're outta luck," the man said. "I'm a Fist Master. Unlike you, I don't need a weapon. I can fight with my bare fists."

Just then, the doors of the carriage burst open and Gatsun jumped out.

“Helmios!” he shouted as he ran toward his friend.

“Hey, Gatsun!” Dorothy yelled, following the boy.

“I-I’m here too!” Ena cried.

But the Talent hunters emerged from either side of the carriage and restrained the three children immediately.

“Hey! Let go!” Gatsun roared.

“Don’t touch me!” Dorothy shouted, tears in her eyes as she glared at the Talent hunters.

“Ugh, what a pain,” the boss said. “Kill those kids. This brat alone will earn us all enough to retire.”

“Yeah? If you say so,” one of the Talent hunters said, unsheathing their sword and pointing it at Ena.

“Nooo!” Ena screamed as tears streamed down her cheeks.

Helmios writhed in pain, but her shrieks reached his ears.

“Hey, stay still,” the Talent hunter said. “This won’t hurt for long.”

They placed the point of their sword on Ena’s back. Through her clothes, the girl could feel the cold, sharp steel as she visibly shrank with fear. Gatsun and Dorothy were watching from the side, fear filling their faces, as the Talent hunter prepared to strike using a backhanded grip.

That was when Helmios jumped up to spring to action. However, he almost fell forward from the excruciating pain that coursed through his stomach. *I have to save Ena!* His face twisted with pain, but he managed to get on his feet and head to the girl. The man with brass knuckles, who was silently watching the scene, sounded exasperated.

“Come on, now. I hit you with my best move,” the man said. “If you push yourself, you’ll die.”

“Shut up!” Helmios shouted.

“Jeez, this is why brats who don’t understand differences in power are so oblivious.”

The man with brass knuckles slowly raised his fists as rage filled Helmios’s heart. *If only I could fight without a weapon like he can!*

Helmios glared at the man. *Vwoom.* Just then, a glowing frame appeared in front of him, obscuring his vision. The boy could not hide his shock as glowing letters appeared within the frame.

“Huh? What? Huh?!” Helmios gasped.

Helmios made his choice. “I would!”

When the boy shouted as loudly as he could, the man with

brass knuckles stared in confusion. He soon turned serious, noticing that Helmios's hands had started to glow.

"What? You still plan on fighting?!" the man cried.

He raised his fists, remaining wary of Helmios, who had seemingly gained a mysterious power. The man swung down as the glowing frame produced new letters in front of Helmios.

Suddenly, power coursed through Helmios's body, and he thought he saw a glowing dot in the middle of the man's fist. *I'll aim there! Like this!* The boy thrust his own glowing fist at the man. He twisted his hips, his chest turning to the side as his shoulder jutted forward. Power flowed from his hips and into his fist, his punch as sharp as a spear—headed straight for the glowing dot that only he could see.

"Blast Punch!" Helmios shouted.

The man's brass knuckles shattered. *Crack!* His fist was parried, and he fell backward as he cradled his destroyed hand, curling up into a ball with fear.

"Gaaah! M-My hand!" Derakel cried.

"What?! Derakel lost?!" one of the Talent hunters said in a panic.

"This brat... Is he a Fist Master too?!" another gasped.

"Boss, we don't stand a chance against him!" a third exclaimed.

The Talent hunters lost their will to fight and stepped behind Derakel. Helmios firmly stepped toward them despite the damage he had sustained mere moments before, and the assailants turned to their boss for help. But their boss merely sat atop his horse, completely lost for words.

"Shut up!" he ordered. "It's only one kid! If we all attack together— Huh?!"

Loud rumbles cut him off. The knights had caught up to and surrounded the Talent hunters.

"The boy's safe! Kill the Talent hunters!" the captain commanded.

"Yes, sir!" the knights replied, cutting down the hunters.

"We're saved," Gatsun said.

"Ena, are you okay?" Dorothy asked.

"Y-Yeah," Ena replied.

Though they were trembling, the kids cried with joy, knowing that their lives had been spared. Helmios walked toward his friends.

“H-Hey, you all right?!” Gatsun cried, approaching Helmios.

The battered boy looked at Gatsun, then at Dorothy and Ena. He smiled and fell forward. Gatsun hastily caught his friend as Helmios closed his eyes, a smile still on his face. He breathed serenely, implying that he was fast asleep.

Side Story 3.5: Hell Mode Spin-Off—The Grimoire and an Inquisitive Mind

A long-haired man in a white clerical garment was seated on the sofa in the middle of the room. In front of him stood a man with curly, brown hair, a glowing halo above his head, and wings growing from his back—First Angel Merus.

The man in the white clerical garment—Elmea, the God of Creation—watched Merus look up and down repeatedly. A screen was placed on the wall in front of Elmea, and Merus was watching a control panel as he tried to focus on a certain scene, confirming the location numerous times.

Elmea averted his gaze from Merus and stared at the screen. He watched a grisly battle unfold on a mountain pass, let out a deep sigh, and turned to the thick book in his hand. The word “grimoire” was written on the cover, and the deity flipped through its pages before raising his head.

“The effects are just as designed,” Elmea said. “It went well.”

“It seems he’s gotten the gist of it,” Merus replied, looking up at the screen.

A passed-out Helmios was being carried away by a worried Gatsun and Dorothy. Behind them, the knights were tying up the Talent hunters who were still alive.

“Are you saying that Helmios’s Extra Skill, Natural Gift, is working as intended?” Elmea asked.

“Precisely, Lord Elmea,” Merus said. “What do you think? It might be a touch complex, but I believe it functions the way you wished it to.”

Elmea replied with a heavy sigh. He closed the grimoire, placed it on the table beside him, and grabbed a cup. After taking a sip of his drink, he opened his mouth.

“What makes you think this functions the way I wished it to?”

“Huh? What?” Merus said in befuddlement as he whirled around to face the deity. “I believe the settings are exactly as noted in the documents in front of you, Lord Elmea.”

“Not at all,” Elmea replied firmly. “Merus, have you learned nothing over the past one hundred thousand years? That

method couldn't have possibly conveyed our rules to Helmios."

Merus finally realized that Elmea was upset not about the effects of Natural Gift but about how the effects and usage of the Extra Skill were conveyed to the young boy. Helmios would need to make several leaps of logic in order to make heads or tails of his newfound skill.

"Indeed. I agree that there might have been better ways to convey that," Merus said. "However, I believe we had no other choice in that precarious situation. And that frame I sent to appear in front of Helmios was a virtual window made by Lady Isiris, the Goddess of Magic. It's still in its testing phase, or so I'm told."

"Letters simply floating in the air cannot be seen as a divine revelation," Elmea explained.

"I understand. Let's see..." Merus thought for a while and came up with an idea. He gingerly said, "What about making a glowing stone tablet fall from the sky? One inscribed with glowing letters."

A quick glance at Elmea's face immediately silenced Merus. He hastily glanced around the room, searching for a new idea. The angel's eyes landed on an item Elmea had placed on the table beside the sofa. The God of Creation lifted it up.

"A...book?" Merus asked.

Elmea nodded slowly. "A book is a conglomeration of words meant to convey information from one person to the next. And if it looks this lavish, I'm certain it will enchant the people of the world. Instead of using a plain and dull method of having letters appear in the air, surely this method is more elegant?"

"But we've never had the idea of conveying our messages to mortals through books. If we were to create a new setting like that, we'd have to make sure there are no discrepancies with the settings we currently have. It'll take several years to get this up and running..."

"I've said this many times before, but you must spare no effort in this project. Continue to tweak Helmios's Extra Skill, and have Isiris begin production of this book. It shall be a grimoire."

"Your wish is my command."

No matter how unfeasible the deity's requests were, Merus had learned to accept them without argument. Naturally, the angel had no way to execute all of these plans, but he nodded for now and kicked the can down the road, praying that Elmea

would forget about this whole thing one day. Indeed, Merus had already received orders that numbered into the triple digits.

Elmea sank into the sofa and sighed. “If only Helmios were more curious and had a more inquisitive mind. Then we wouldn’t have to worry this much.”

“I’m sure there must have been a few events that would’ve served as hints, but it seems he does as he pleases,” Merus replied.

He had been watching over Helmios. The boy had swiftly learned how to wield a sword and had mastered Healing Magic after practicing for merely half a day, but not once had he assumed that he had extraordinary abilities far beyond what his peers were capable of. All he had ever done was act delighted in his findings.

Helmios was kind and humble. With every power he gained, he wondered if he could use it to help other people. Not once had he questioned why he had been blessed with these abilities, nor had he wondered just how unusual his skills were.

“That’s quite a problem,” Elmea said, frowning as he watched the screen that showed Helmios sleeping contentedly. “Merus, do you truly believe that Helmios will be able to skillfully wield his Natural Gift?”

“I’ve created the power exactly as you requested,” Merus replied.

“Then I suppose I have no other choice,” the God of Creation said. His following words shocked the angel. “Bring Helmios’s soul here. Since he’s sleeping, this will be the perfect opportunity.”

“Huh?! Um, do you intend to explain the skill to Helmios personally, Lord Elmea?”

“Precisely. He is the hope of humanity that was finally born into the world. We must raise him properly. Make haste, Merus.”

Elmea stood up. Unbeknownst to Helmios, a grimoire was in the works.

Afterword

Thank you for picking up the ninth volume. This is the afterword that you've all been waiting for. The main part of the volume ended when Allen decided to head to the Prostia Empire on the ocean floor. This closes the curtains on the Allen Army and island development arc.

Allen's party gains more friends, and he now has both an army and island residents who will act with him. How will his choices affect the story? Please look forward to future arcs. I've added a few spin-offs and bonus stories pertaining to Pelomas's love life, but it finally made it into the actual story. What will happen in his quest to make Fiona love him? It's a story of romance—the kind of tale that Allen doesn't have. The merchant has no power or weapons, only courage as he marches forward. Please look forward to his journey!

How did you like the three side stories? They focus on Beku, Olbaas, and Helmios. They're all important to the history of the *Hell Mode* series, but they're written from their points of view, which makes them a bit different from the main story.

For those who don't quite know how to interpret Beku's story, I wrote it from the perspective of someone who was lauded and praised by everyone for their excellence. Such people have their own conflicts as well, so I hope that clarifies it a bit.

Much like with Pelomas's tale, these side stories don't run parallel to the main story, so please look forward to seeing how they connect to it.

From here on, I'd like to speak a bit about my past, when I bid my father farewell.

When I, Hamuo, was a little boy, I attended a school that was far away and spent my time daydreaming about a story of my own creation. I dropped out of college after obsessing over games and worked part-time night shifts at one of the companies where my father worked. Fifteen years passed while I was there.

A memory I have of my father is that I hadn't helped much with harvesting bamboo shoots when I returned home. In 2019,

I got engrossed in writing my own stories and was caught up with creating *Hell Mode.* At the end of March 2020, a certain event made me snap back to my senses, and I called my dad. We usually touched on this topic when we went bamboo shoot harvesting, and I thought I should report the good news.

"Hey, what's up?" my dad said when he picked up the phone. "It's rare to get a call from you."

"Yeah, I got a promotion," I said.

I was wrapped up in writing my novel, so I didn't care much about the promotion, but I thought I should tell my father about it since I often went to him for advice about work.

"Really?! That's great! What's your title at your company again?" my dad asked. He seemed ecstatic, contrary to my own feelings.

"I'll become a subsection chief in April," I replied.

"You really worked hard, huh?"

"And I think I told you about writing novels during the New Year, but the story I'm writing now will become a published book."

My publisher was talking about making *Hell Mode* into a bona fide book. When I'd returned home during the New Year, I'd told him that I was currently engrossed in writing my own novel.

"Wow, a book?! That's amazing, champ!" my dad cried.

I don't remember ever being praised so much in my life. Honestly, I had no idea how to respond to my father's compliments.

"Thanks," I replied.

"Hey, can you come home next Sunday?" my dad asked.

"Huh? Yeah, I think I can. Why?"

I was a bit hesitant to return home. I was neck-deep in my writing and wanted to spend every bit of my free time on it.

"I wanna talk with you!" my dad exclaimed. "Oh, and it'd be great if you could help out with the fields. My arms are getting weaker, and I can't dig deep holes."

"The fields... Yeah, all right. Sure."

To be honest, it felt like a huge pain to me. But when I heard my father sounding so happy, I couldn't refuse. I never said no to requests anyway. A few days passed, and I received a call from my father.

"Hey, dad. What's up?" I asked.

"Sorry, but it seems like it'll rain this weekend," my father said.

“Can you come home the following week? We can’t dig holes in the rain.”

“Sure, okay. The following week.”

“Sounds good.”

To this day, I couldn’t tell you what the holes in the field were for. As he’d said, it was pouring rain that weekend, and there was no way anyone could go out on the fields.

That was the last time I spoke with my father.

In early April, I received a call from home. My dad had been transported to the hospital. When I rushed there, my dad had already lost consciousness, and a few days later, our family gathered to bid him a final farewell.

At midnight, the doctor came to deliver us the news. It seemed my dad was in a worse state than I’d thought. He had lived far past his life expectancy already. A funeral was held, and four years later, I’m finally able to publish this volume.

I heard later that my dad was far happier about my promotion than I’d expected him to be. He was practically jumping with joy. Unfortunately, I don’t think I’ve been able to repay my gratitude to him. I can’t call myself a devoted son.

Thanks to *Hell Mode* reaching its ninth volume, I’ve finally been able to write about my memories of my father and bid my final farewell to him in this afterword. I cannot thank everyone enough. Thank you to my publisher and to everyone who’s supported this series thus far. I’m sorry to use this afterword as a journal or diary of sorts. Dad, you’re my pride and joy. I hope you can rest in peace.

For the past few years, I’ve been starting to get some royalties from my books, so I’d like to at least be devoted to my mom. I’d like to share a little story of when I mentioned something like that to her.

“Hey, mom. Is there anywhere you’d like to go or anything you’d like to eat?” I asked. I knew it was a vague question, but I thought it was best to listen to a person’s wishes first.

“Ooh! There is!” my mom replied.

There is? I wonder what it could be.

“And what would that be?” I asked.

“I’d like to ride the *Seven Stars!*”

“Whaaat?!”

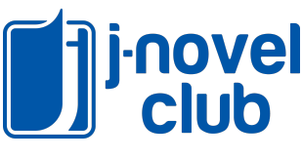
She was referring to a deluxe, super luxurious excursion train run by JR Kyushu. Can Hamuo at least grant his mother’s wish?

Please stay tuned.

This is where I wrap up the afterword. Next is the big double-digit volume. What awaits Allen at the bottom of the ocean? Please look forward to reading it.

If you would also support the manga version of *Hell Mode*, that would make me as happy as can be. Till we meet again!


Thank you so much
for having me on the
9th volume too!
See you in the next one!
-Mo



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Hell Mode ~The Hardcore Gamer Dominates in Another World with Garbage Balancing~ Volume 9
by Hamuo

Translated by piyo
Edited by Adam Haffen

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