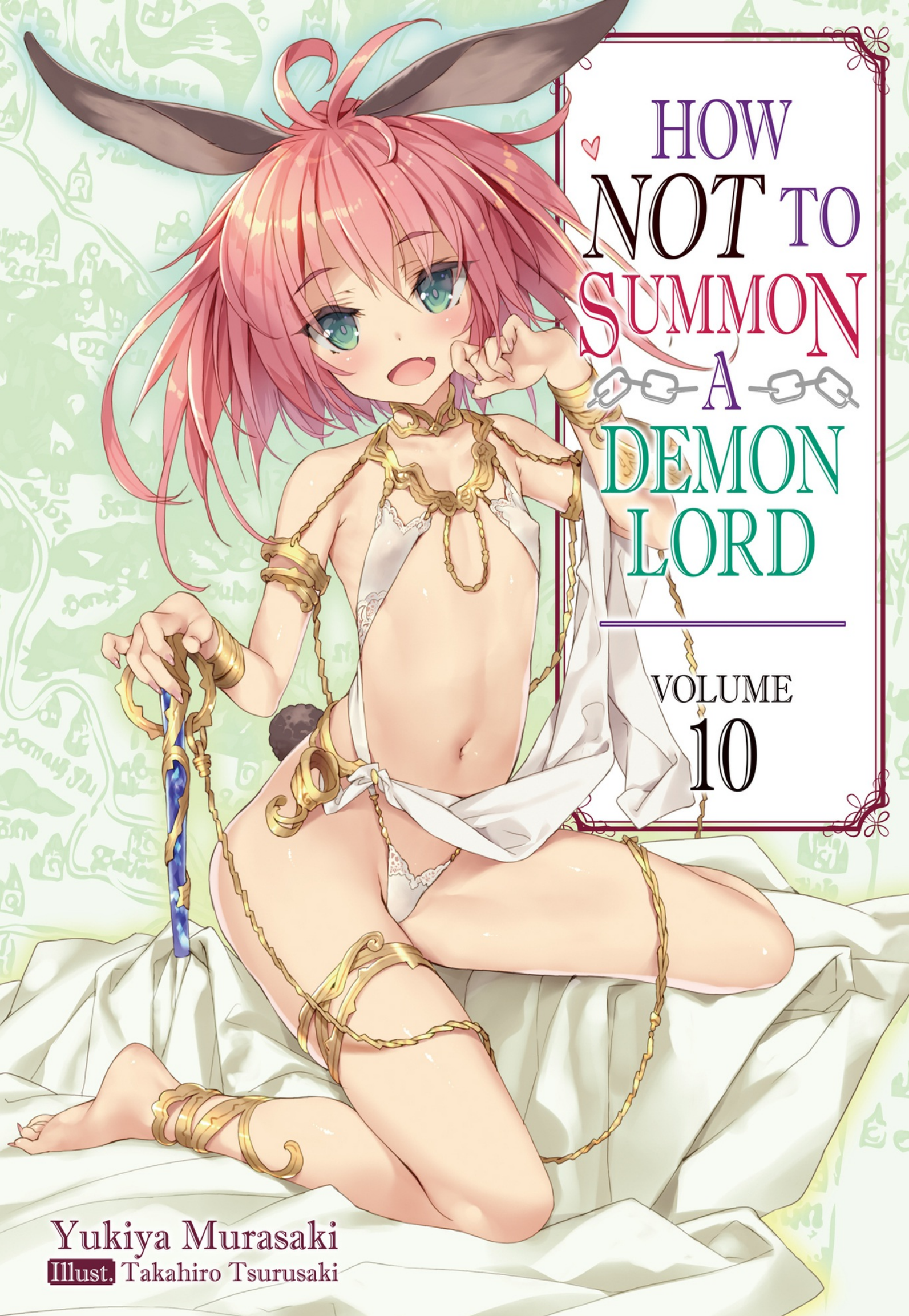

HOW NOT TO SUMMON A DEMON LORD
VOLUME 10
Yukiya Murasaki
Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki


Diablo experienced a soft, pleasant sensation as Sylvie continued cleaning his ears.
“Does it hurt?”


It was an oddly nerve-wracking experience.
The tips of their tongues were on the verge of touching it, so minusculely close, when...


Diablo moaned some more, overcome by three distinct sensations mixing together into a blend of pleasant, sensual pain.
“Ehehe, heheheee~ Mmm, nnn, schlurp...”

CHARACTERS



Diablo

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



Rem Galleu

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



Shera L Greenwood

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

登場人物紹介



The High Priest who stands as the highest authority of the church. Diablo saved her from the Cardinal Authority's devious plots, and she has worshiped him as an avatar of God ever since.



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



Guildmaster of Faltra's Adventurer's Guild. Being a Grasswalker may give her the appearance of a child, but she's an experienced veteran.

A thief who had her level increased to 80 by a Subjugation Contract, but decided to study at the mage academy out of admiration for Diablo. Possesses a Holy Grail housing a level-up goddess.





The Thirteenth Swordmaster. Has such unprecedented talent that she made her predecessor go mad with envy. Her hobby is making soba noodles.

c o n t e n t s

The Story so Far

Prologue

Chapter 1
Being Summoned to the Capital

Chapter 2
Conquering the Viridian Cathedral

Chapter 3
Going to the Capital (Again)

Interlude

Chapter 4
Detective Horn?

Interlude

Chapter 5
Stopping a Ritual

Epilogue

Cover Art & Illustrations / Takahiro Tsurusaki
Design / AFTERGLOW
Editor / Satoshi Shoji

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

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

Then, one day, Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like *Cross Reverie*! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his Summoner: Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn't talk with other people if his life depended on it. After struggling over what to say, the words that came out of his mouth were from the Demon Lord role play he had used in the game: "Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo."

Diablo soon after found himself foiling an invasion of one hundred Fallen, led by a Fallen named Edelgard, as well as an attack from within itself at the hands of the Fallen, Gregore. Diablo then later found himself the recipient of a quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the elven kingdom of Greenwood had demanded Shera be returned to him, threatening open war with Faltra against the country of elves should compliance fail. The details of Galford's quest were simply to find a way to avoid the war. The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight Alicia was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions.

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

her.

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

Peaceful days passed by...

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

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

Located in the perilous expanse of the former Demon Lord’s Domain, Diablo’s group of Adventurers accompanied her as bodyguards. After a long journey, they arrived at their destination, and were greeted by Batutta.

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

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

But they could not celebrate their victories, however. Having been informed that the elven king, Shera’s father, had passed away, the four traveled to her homeland where Shera was already engaged to a pig-faced elf called Drango (for the sake of the country, of course). Diablo attempted to prevent the

wedding, giving her a wedding ring and assuming the throne as the new king of Greenwood.

Afterward, to prepare for his upcoming battle with the Demon Overlord Modinaram, Diablo set out to meet the legendary swordmaster and level up as a warrior, only to find (to his great surprise) that the current swordmaster and heir to the previous is none other than a dwarven girl called Sasara.

The previous swordmaster, revealed to be Sasara's stepfather, Graham, sought to master the blade with such zeal that he transformed his body into that of an oni. But, despite his efforts, Sasara struck down Graham, proving once and for all her overwhelming prowess.

At the same time, the Demon Overlord Modinaram was marching its armies upon Faltra. By using the Demon Lord Cannon, they leveled the ground near the city walls, causing it to partially collapse, cutting off the Fallen-warding barrier in the process. The governor, Galford, and other adventurers including Emile were severely injured in combat. Even Klem and Edelgard suffered bitter defeats at Modinaram's hands. The races teetered on the brink of defeat.

Arriving on the scene in the nick of time, Diablo fought Modinaram, with Sasara and Rose taking up the vanguard. With the help of a gacha item Diablo had held onto, Modinaram was successfully defeated. Diablo rescued Rem, who'd been manipulated by the Demon Overlord, and gave her his second wedding ring...

Three days after the battle with the Demon Overlord— The Fallen-warding barrier was once again erected over the city of Faltra. Galford declared the battle a victory, and the town was revived in celebration.

Diablo took refuge in the Peace of Mind Inn - Hideout, resting the days away, when suddenly, Rem and Shera crept onto his bed, both clad in white dresses.

"...This is all your fault, you know... I've been waiting for you, but you wouldn't come to my room once these past three days."

"That's right, it's all your fault, Diablo." Shera nodded. "I never knew you didn't actually do it properly."

The two girls' lips drew toward Diablo's. Rem and Shera were breathing more

heavily than usual, as their lips...

Prologue

Lyferian calendar, twelfth month, twenty-eighth day— Today, the races rejoiced in jovial celebration over their victory. There wasn't a single cloud in the clear blue sky, and the sun shone down brightly. Despite it being the height of winter, the heat was almost overbearing.

The main street and square of the citadel city of Faltra were lined with stalls. Since it coincided with the new year celebrations, they were also bustling with never before seen activity. So much so that even the merchants who couldn't find a spot to set up in time and had to open their stalls outside the gates were getting steady streams of customers.

Every day was like a festival, and the townspeople owed it all to a single hero who had felled the Demon Overlord Modinaram. And this very hero, praised and sung of by the people, was currently...

...cowering and panicking on top of his bed.

"I was... I *am* a busy man!"

Diablo struggled to come up with an excuse, but Rem and Shera ignored him as if doing so was a given. He'd been loitering about in his room for the last three days, so any claims he made to being "busy" were unconvincing at best.

The two crept closer. He turned his eyes to the right, only to be met with Rem's gaze. She was staring at him fixedly without so much as a blink, her cat ears twitching excitedly. Her black tail was wagging and slapping his leg repeatedly.

"...This is all your fault."

"That's right, it's all your fault, Diablo..."

Turning his gaze to the left, he found his sight obstructed by Shera's bosom. Every time she moved and stirred, her breasts jiggled, her swellings round, large, soft, and visibly within arm's reach... This fact rammed itself into Diablo's thoughts and blew back all notions of common sense. Shera was blushing, too, but regarded him with an amused smile. She may well have had no idea of what

was supposed to happen next. A sweet aroma mixed in with an animalistic smell and the scent of grass.

Diablo felt a shiver run down his spine.

“Aaah... Uuu...”

He was bad at talking to people. He always became concerned with how the other person saw him and would freeze up. *What if I screwed up? What if they think I’m stupid? Maybe they hate me?* Such thoughts made any escaping words cling to his throat. That was why he had to role play a character, and right now, he was a Demon Lord. A feared Demon Lord everyone shrank away from out of fear, which was precisely why he went with such a profile. So, believing that what others said weren’t about his true character underneath, he spoke freely.

Right now, however, he didn’t have that freedom.

Cat ears, those lips, the boobs, elf ears...

If he wasn’t careful, his embarrassment could scream through his expression, and no Demon Lord was ever that lame!

...But, on the other hand, it felt like it wasn’t right to let the two’s advances go unanswered.

But how do I do that...?

Forget a girlfriend, he never had *any* female friends to hang out with on his days off...or male friends, for that matter.

Lying on the bed helplessly, Diablo jerked his left hand’s middle finger.

Click!

...Sadly, there was no mouse to respond to the gesture, and imagining one didn’t result in, well, anything. He didn’t exhibit the charisma or technique of a visual novel protagonist who’d proactively take the lead in such a situation.

“Guh...”

But if I imagine the game, I can still cast magic!

In this world, when Diablo imagined he was casting a spell just like in *Cross Reverie*, the magic activated as it would in the game. He didn’t know how it

worked, but that was why he'd imagined a mouse to click just now. However, *Cross Reverie* wasn't a visual novel and didn't have any bedtime scenes, and so, of course, it didn't have any features that would help Diablo in his current plight on top of the bed.

In the end, all he could do was stiffen up like a board. He was perfectly still, as if he'd been petrified. Would they take his silence as consent? Or maybe they'd think he didn't really have a say in the matter after he gave the both of them wedding rings. Whatever the case, Rem's and Shera's lips were closing in on his. Their breathing was much heavier than usual.

As the tension rose, a certain premonition came over Diablo...

Whenever something like this happens, doesn't...

The door swung open with a thud.

...There it is.

The one who flung the inn's door open was none other than Sylvie, a redheaded Grasswalker who was the guildmaster of Faltra's Adventurer's Guild.

"Diablo, we have trouble!"

Hmph... You dare disturb my slumber, Sylvie? Do not expect to leave unscathed if it is merely a trifling matter.

...Was what he recited in his mind, but he couldn't actually put it into words with the two girls bearing down on him as they were.

"...We're busy, Sylvie." Rem directed a lethal glare in the Grasswalker's direction.

"That's right!" Shera raised her voice as well. "We're doing something really important!"

"Huh?" Sylvie faltered. "No, but..."

"It can wait."

"Just wait a bit, okay, Sylvie?"

Rem rejected her firmly, while Shera earnestly implored her.

"Aaah... Y-Yeah... Well, if you insist..." Sylvie retreated with surprising ease.

Are you really that cool with this, guildmaster of the Adventurer's Guild?!

The door closed, leaving the three of them alone once more.

I didn't think they'd actually get her to leave...

Diablo thought the tension had gone down, but Rem and Shera looked at him with tense expressions.

"...I get the feeling that if we let you get away now, we'll never get another chance like this."

"Right!"

"R-Really? Maybe we should take this a little more slowly and think this thr—"

"Sit still, Diablo."

"Don't move!"

Yes, ma'ams...

Their bodies were nearly upon him, to the point where any movement would lead to him rubbing against all sorts of...places. He couldn't budge. Rem and Shera brought their lips closer to him, Diablo feeling their breaths against him. As the two girls became the only thing in his sight, Diablo squeezed his eyes shut.

A soft sensation pressed against his lips.

Shera kissed him lightly, with Rem pecking at him, wet noises resounding in Diablo's ear. Both of their faces were redder than before. Diablo also felt a little heat spread across his cheeks too.

"...Ah."

They kissed him. The feeling of intoxication that had filled his mind sank its fangs even deeper than ever before. Diablo's discomposure only accelerated from here.

"Is that it?" Shera asked Rem. "Are we done?"

"...No, this is only the first part of the beginning phase. It's like we're still only at the start. Besides, if kissing were enough, we'd already done so when we first summoned him."

“Oh, right, the Enslavement Ritual. We did do that, huh?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t expect the collars to appear on us though!”

“...And I never expected myself to be in this...situation with the person *I* summoned.”

Rem reached out her hand, moving things along to the next step in the act. Shera followed her example and reached out as well. Their fingers made contact with Diablo, prompting them both to jolt in surprise.

“...I-It’s hard...”

“Wow, it’s so solid...”

Being on the receiving end made him sit still as if he were petrified, with even his breath frozen in his throat.

“...This is Diablo’s...” Rem whispered huskily with excitement.

“It’s so smooth...” Shera commented as she caressed it.

“...Indeed...” Rem patted the tip while Shera’s fingers crawled over him. It was somewhat ticklish...

“...We need to...lick this...” Rem said after a few caresses, as if steeling her resolve.

“Wait, is doing that all right?!”

“...I’ve never done this before so I don’t really know, but...according to the book I’ve read, it should be...”

“Lick Diablo’s...”

“Yes...”

“M-My horn?!”

The two of them were touching a horn atop Diablo’s head. He was a bit nervous they might end up removing his headgear, the Distorted Crown, but given it had never came off once, not even during battle, it would likely be all right. The Distorted Crown had an HP regeneration effect which made it quite

valuable, but it also had the secondary cosmetic effect of making it appear as if there were horns growing out of the wearer's head. Were they mistaking it for something else, perhaps...?

Rem and Shera extended their tongues toward his horn. It was an oddly nerve-wracking experience. The tips of their tongues were on the verge of touching it, so minisculely close, when...

Another, stronger knock rapped at the door. It didn't seem like it was Sylvie this time.

"Diablo, are you there?!" a man's voice called out from the other side. "Please, this is urgent!"

Diablo racked his brains in an attempt to recall the man's name. He could easily memorize pages of game lore, but was helpless when it came to attaching a name to a face or voice.

"...Boris?" Rem asked before he could remember. "We're occupied at the moment."

Right—the man shouting from behind the door was Boris. He was one of Faltra's garrisoned troops, a subordinate of Galford.

"The lieutenant general's at this inn!"

"What?!" Diablo called out despite himself.

If that were the case, this really was no time for intimacy. The lieutenant general Boris spoke of was none other than Faltra's governor, Chester Ray Galford, an accomplished warrior, and a man Diablo couldn't afford to be careless around. It seemed Diablo's time of loitering about on his bed had reached an end...

Chapter 1: Being Summoned to the Capital The group moved to the Peace of Mind Inn - Hideout's first floor. This hall was meant only for serving food to the guests and didn't function as a restaurant, so it looked more like a noble's dining hall. It was a wide room with an elongated table in the middle with several chairs around it. The walls were adorned with flowers and portraits, and there wasn't anything resembling a menu in sight.

Sitting on the furthest chair was the governor, Galford. Boris and the other soldiers were waiting outside the room. Sylvie was also seated opposite Diablo's group.

I didn't do anything wrong...did I?

Not that he recalled, anyway... He felt the sort of pressure a student would feel when they were called to the student council office after being caught making out behind the gym.

Never thought I'd be in this situation when I can't even talk to a girl properly!

His lack of confidence only made it harder to stay.

As he stood silently, Rem parted her lips to speak first, asking, "What business brings you here today, Sir Galford?"

"I sent a decree calling for your urgent presence the other day. Did you not receive it?"

Diablo barely recalled the inn's poster girl, little Mei, delivering him some exaggerated letter to which he said he'd read later...and proceeded to throw it

off the side of the bed. This tendency of his to leave things he didn't quite care about for later was part of why he couldn't blend in with normal society...

"...Diablo is not subordinate to you, and neither are any of the other adventurers. What authority do you have to summon his presence?"

"*Royal* authority. All citizens of Lyferia are obligated to abide by the king's word and order."

"...The king's orders...?!" Rem yelped with a daunted expression.

"But of course."

"...How odd... It's natural for the king to become interested in Diablo after he defeated the Demon Overlord, but it's only been three days since... Wouldn't news of the victory only just arrive in the capital now?"

If the summons from the king had already arrived now, it meant that they'd known of the triumph for well over three days.

Galford shook his head. "This isn't something a mere adventurer should know of, but...there is a special method of communication we employ when dealing with matters pertaining to the country's survival. Let's just say that all that happened during the battle with the Demon Overlord was reported in excruciating detail to the capital."

"That sort of communication exists?!" Even the usually calm Rem was taken by surprise.

"It was made only recently, and was used for the first time during this battle."

"...That's a fascinating bit of news, but...let us return to the topic at hand. What did His Majesty want?"

"His Grace sent out a decree upon learning of the death of the Demon Overlord, demanding Diablo go to the royal capital... That was three days ago."

It seemed they'd stalled until now, claiming he needed time to heal and rest, but that excuse was beginning to wear thin.

"Your accomplishments are just too big to hide this time, Diablo." Sylvie shrugged. "When you defeated the army of a hundred Fallen, we covered it up by saying all the adventurers had done it."

“Indeed...” Galford nodded. “Modinaram’s power was overwhelming. It was even capable of forcing through the barrier that has held other Demon Lords in check in the past. When we fought the Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros, thirty years ago, I was able to put up a good fight, but this time, even I was powerless...”

“There wasn’t much you could do. We didn’t have a hero’s buff, either.”

“If we were to report that we pushed back such a formidable foe simply with the aid of Faltra’s garrisoned troops and adventurers, it would lead to the kingdom making misguided decisions regarding its internal defense system in the future. As such, we came to the realization that keeping your existence hidden would only harm Lyferia’s national interest.”

Galford had basically admitted to keeping Diablo’s existence hidden from the king until now, but Diablo decided that pointing that out would be more trouble than it was worth. Diablo hated politics; he didn’t think much about it and had no desire to get involved now.

“I am merely an official who’s been entrusted with governing this land,” Galford said. “A direct order from the king carries an entirely different weight.”

“...True. Ignoring the king’s orders would be considered treason against the crown. We wouldn’t be allowed to remain in Lyferia any longer if we did so...”

“Indeed. His Grace is a wise man, but can be overcome with emotion when things do not go as he orders. It would be safer to avoid unnecessary friction with him.”

That doesn’t sound like a wise king to me. If anything, that sounds more like a child throwing a tantrum...

“It’s not all bad, Diablo!” Sylvie said encouragingly. “Meeting the king is a great honor for a commoner, and you may even get a reward for defeating the Demon Overlord!”

“Is Diablo really a subject of the kingdom of Lyferia though?” Shera tilted her head. “Am I? Greenwood is part of the elven kingdom.”

Rem shrugged. “So long as you live in Lyferia’s territories, even if you belong to Greenwood, you must still abide by your duties as Lyferian subjects. It says as

much on a placard outside Faltra's city gates."

"It does?"

"...You're obligated to pay taxes, too," Rem candidly advised Shera, who evidently hadn't read the placard.

Incidentally, Diablo had never read it either, if only because he couldn't read this world's language yet.

"I understand what you're trying to say," Diablo scoffed. "That I must pay the king of Lyferia a visit."

Galford nodded. "We can have a military carriage prepared for you if you need it. I will assign bodyguards for you as well."

"I'll come with you, too, Diablo." Sylvie leaned forward.

It seemed they'd all assumed that Rem and Shera would naturally be joining him as well. Diablo, however, rose from his seat.

"Laughable! If he wishes an audience, let the king come to *me*!"

Everyone stared at him in surprise, stupefied.

I don't doubt disobeying the king will cause trouble, but a Demon Lord obeying a king's invitation would be so lame!

All things considered, Diablo couldn't hold a conversation without his role play. He'd surely slip up and say something bad if he didn't keep it up. Going to the king would land him in hot water, but *not* going would land him in an equally big mess. In which case, he may as well avoid doing anything bothersome. And so, abiding by his shut-in NEET way of thinking, Diablo put that decision into words worthy of a Demon Lord.

"If he wishes to have me submit to him, let him beat me into submission first! No matter how many soldiers he brings, they will not fell me!"

"...I thought as much." Galford crossed his arms. It seemed he assumed Diablo wouldn't obediently follow orders.

"Can't you reconsider, Diablo?" Sylvie asked with a concerned expression. "You'd have to waste away your life in this town at this rate."

He certainly didn't want that. But if he did go, he could easily predict what he'd end up saying in the presence of the king...

"I am Diablo! A Demon Lord from another world!"

Even if he were to manage to somehow not fumble his self-introduction, he'd let slip some Demon Lord-ly line somewhere along the way. Then his life in Faltra wouldn't be a problem, because his literal life would be on the chopping board. All this led Diablo to the simple conclusion that he was better off not going to the capital in the first place.

If he would've thought things through more, he may have come up with a better solution. But if he had that kind of forward thinking attitude, he would've surely lived a more fulfilling life in his original world. He wouldn't have been so devoted to online gaming to the extent he'd gotten the moniker of "Demon Lord."

If I knew how to entertain important people like that, I wouldn't be stuck with this communication disorder, would I?!

"Rem Galleu, Shera L. Greenwood...do you agree? This is not a wise choice, if you were to ask for my opinion."

"Ahaha..." Shera laughed. "If it's what Diablo decides, I'm fine with it. I'm the queen of Greenwood, so if we can't stay in Lyferia, we'll just go back home."

"What foolishness. The king will simply declare war on Greenwood if you do so."

"Huh?! I-I don't want that..."

Diablo clicked his tongue, now realizing that that was a possible outcome. But Shera was never one to think things through, for better or worse...

"Even so, if Diablo's decided, then it's fine, isn't it? He's the king of Greenwood, after all."

Galford's gaze warned that this was out of the question.

"And what is *your* take on this?"

"...The same as Shera's, more or less. I'll abide by whatever Diablo decides." Rem's cheeks then flushed. "I'm...Diablo's wife, after all."

“Huh?!” Sylvie widened her eyes and stood up, knocking her chair back. “Rem, is that for real?! You and Diablo got married?!”

They had, it seemed. Not that Diablo could really believe it. How *did* he get himself into this...? However, the fact remained that he’d given her a wedding ring. He was terribly embarrassed by it all, but denying it too much might end up slighting Rem’s feelings. Most of all, these things required he properly admit to them, and verbally at that. Not to mention that role playing required he prepare himself, days ahead if need be.

“Hmph...” Diablo puffed up his chest. “I am a Demon Lord. My belongings are free to call themselves as they wish!”

Nailed it!

...Or so he thought. It had taken him half a day just to come up with that one line.

“Are you really okay with this?” Sylvie asked Rem in an admonishing fashion.

What’s with that, “What the heck do you find in him?” tone? Do you have any idea how soft and brittle my Demon Lord nerves are? What are you gonna do if I cry, huh?!

Diablo flinched inwardly.

“...My feelings are already decided.” Rem nodded. “Still, not going to the capital would be disrespectful... I will go in his place. I am his wife, after all.”

That last remark was intentionally repeated.

“Oh, then I’ll go too!” Shera leaned forward. “I’m his wife too!”

“...Weren’t you going back to Greenwood?”

“If Diablo isn’t going back, I’m not going either!”

Diablo had no intention of going back to Greenwood at the moment. He didn’t dislike the elven kingdom, but this world was already lacking when it came to entertainment. By contrast, Faltra had a variety of cuisine, and one could enjoy street performances and plays. If he’d just go ahead and learn the language already, there were books to enjoy as well. The elven kingdom only had fruit and music. While those were wonderful and refined in their own ways,

too much of any good thing would eventually make it tiresome.

“Hmph...” Galford began voicing his conclusion. “In that case, Rem Galleu and Shera L. Greenwood will both go to the capital as representatives. You are his ladies...and one of you is even royalty. His Majesty will save face if that’s the case. You have no objections, yes?”

Diablo was asked for confirmation, responding by turning around in disinterest.

“Hmph... Go if you must. I have no reason to stop you. Do as you wish.”

As he left the inn behind him, Diablo was cheering them on in his heart with a, “Good luck, and thanks, you two!”

†

The next morning— Rem and Shera traveled aboard a military carriage, with thirty regional knights given to them as escorts. Quite the heavy guard.

“...I’m getting queasy...” Rem said anxiously, peeking her head out of the carriage’s window.

“It’s not even moving yet. This army carriage is larger and heavier than ours. I don’t see it shaking too much.”

“...I hope so.”

Rem was prone to motion sickness, the calm before the storm getting to her.

“We’ll buy you tons of souvenirs, Diablo!” Shera, on the other hand, seemed excited.

“Don’t. It’s unnecessary.”

“Oh, and we’ll get to see Alicia and Horn and Lumachina for the first time in forever. I’m looking forward to it!”

“Hmm.”

Phones didn’t exist in this world. There was a postal network, but it was time consuming and expensive to use, so it wasn’t commonly used. Because of this, none of them had a grasp on what Alicia was up to in the capital. Diablo hoped she was doing well.

Oh, right, didn't Galford say something about a communication method between him and the capital? I wonder if it's based on magic...

That same man, who was present, walked up to Diablo and whispered in his ear.

"I didn't think you'd entrust these two to me... Do you not remember how we fought over Shera L. Greenwood when she was but a princess?"

"Hmph..."

It felt like it happened ages ago... Soon after Diablo had rescued Shera, who had been abducted by Prince Keera, Galford tried to take her away. Diablo had to fight him to save Shera once more.

"It's ironic, isn't it... If I'd have outwitted you back then, the Demon Overlord would've burned Faltra to the ground right about now."

"This is merely a whim on my behalf. Do not expect more of me the next time."

"But you *are* fine with entrusting them to me, yes? There is room for one more in the carriage."

"Leave me, you stubborn fool."

Being here almost seemed like he was about to accompany them and set off as well. Instead, Diablo raised a hand and made to leave. Shera waved back, while Rem looked at him anxiously.

"We're off~"

"...I'll send you a letter when we get there."

He bid them farewell, for now. He was anxious himself without them by his side...but it'd be for the best if only the two of them met the king. If nothing else, there was no chance of them blurting out any Demon Lord role play lines in front of the king.

"This carriage carries the queens of Greenwood, setting out to hold an audience with His Majesty in the capital," Galford told the soldiers. "In the name of Faltra's honor, make sure they are delivered to their destination safely!"

“We will guard them with our lives!”

“We’ve only repelled a fraction of the army of Fallen. Do not let your guard down, even within the kingdom’s borders!”

“Yes, sir!”

After such a pretentious exchange, the carriage set out. Hearing a trumpet sound behind him to rouse the troops, Diablo went back to the inn.

†

Climbing up the staircase of the inn, Diablo found a maid standing in the hallway. It wasn’t one of the inn’s workers, but Rose, the magimatic maid. Looking at her from the front, his eyes were naturally drawn to her large chest... But looking at her from behind, the back of her dress was open and exposed. It was a very unique type of maid outfit.

There was a reason for her outfit’s peculiar design, though. A Dimensional Transcendence Device was loaded in her back, which was in charge of pulling a weapon called the Magimatic Sol from the interstice between worlds. She was quite powerful, but also extremely heavy. Her other flaw was that she couldn’t be healed. Her left arm still had a crack running through it—a wound she’d received in the battle earlier. It would’ve been a fatal wound for one of the races, but she was mechanical, so the harm wasn’t nearly as bad.

“Welcome back, Master.”

“Can your arm be fixed?”

“If Rose can remain at Master’s side, this sort of damage does not even register as a hindrance.”

While it seemed like she’d answered the question, the answer meant absolutely nothing.

“So you have to go back to the maintenance bed again...” Diablo sighed.

“...Yes.” Rose nodded sadly.

“Stay strong,” Diablo said, putting his hands on her shoulders. “I’ll have need of your strength in the future.”

A shiver ran through her body. “Aaah, how kind of Master! But Rose could only answer that kindness by...by being damaged by such a trifling foe! Rose is ashamed... Please, verbally abuse Rose to Master’s heart’s content!”

“N-No...”

The “trifling foe” was the Demon Overlord Modinaram. That night, the people of Faltra fought to defend the city from the Demon Overlord’s charge after it went berserk. Diablo wasn’t there to see that battle, but from what he’d heard, Rose’s contribution to the fight was enormous.

“Anyway, just take the time to rest.”

Rose bowed deeply, then, surprisingly enough, changed the topic of her own volition.

“Heheh... Master gave those two the wedding rings.”

“Huh?! Well, yes, I did...”

This magimatic maid held an eccentric level of devotion for Diablo, bordering on psychotic at times. Diablo was concerned as to what she might do if she found out he’d gotten “married,” but to his surprise, Rose took it rather well.

“What a joyous occasion! Rose must give the two Rose’s blessing.”

“R-Right...”

“Heheheh...”

Something felt off... Rose had sworn total obedience to Diablo and only ever cared about his happiness. This was all fine and well, except for the fact that her idea of what counted as “Diablo’s happiness” didn’t necessarily align with Diablo’s idea of the same.

“Answer me, Rose...” Diablo asked cautiously. “Do you truly bless the fact that I married both Rem and Shera?”

“Rose does not understand Master’s question.” The mechanical doll tilted her head, as expressionless as ever. “Is that pair of wedding rings not currently equipped on the Pantherian and the elf?”

“Huh?” Diablo called out with his true voice by mistake. He was that

surprised.

“In that case, the ones who are married are those two. That is truly, truly joyous news.”

“Wh-Whadidyousay?!”

“Rose sees those two set out on a journey together. A honeymoon, yes? How envious. Now, Master, shut yourself within the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth with Rose!”

“Hey!” Diablo grabbed Rose tightly by her shoulder. “Don’t I have more wedding rings?!”

“...Master only had that one pair in the vault.”

“Ugh... Figures...”

In *Cross Reverie*, wedding rings were useless items that gave no effect when equipped. That was why only couples equipped them, as proof of them being normies. It was a gross, saccharine sort of item, but Diablo being a collector, he obtained a pair and threw them in his vault, never thinking to touch the wretched things again.

I never imagined I’d be summoned to another world and end up giving those rings away to two girls!

Back when he played the game, he of course never expected such a situation to happen.

“I thought *I* married them.”

“Master did marry them, to each other. Congratulations, Rose says.”

“Uuugh...” Diablo cradled his head in his hands.

Does this mean Greenwood doesn’t have a king again? Or is Rem the king now? Does having two queens work? Never mind that, what would Rem think when she finds out...?

After a long moment of introspection and pondering, Diablo came to a verdict.

I’m an idiot and *a moron.*

“Aaaaaah!”

As Diablo fell to his knees, Rose nestled against him. “Master has Rose, and Rose has no need for a wedding ring to swear Rose’s eternal loyalty to Master.”

For a moment, Diablo was almost moved to tears. But that wasn’t the problem here. Even a shut-in, socially inept NEET like him felt some tinge of responsibility for this world. He couldn’t neglect the kingdom of Greenwood, and he didn’t want to step over Rem’s feelings either.

“I must do something before they find out!”

And so he declared something rather pedantic again.

“Master is so lovely despite being so laughable!”

...I am?

Diablo never could get a handle on Rose’s sense of values...

For the time being, he’d decided to take the damaged magimatic maid in for repairs within the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth.

“Let’s go, Rose.”

“As Master wishes.”

Shera and Rem had only just departed for the royal capital, and would return in half a month at best. Before they did, Diablo would have to think of a way to fix this mess...

†

Using teleportation, Diablo escorted Rose to the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth. Resting on the maintenance bed would repair all the damage she’d sustained thus far. Diablo had no idea how it worked, though...

His teleportation magic allowed Diablo and his party members to travel to any town he’d visited before (in Rose’s case, she counted as one of his items). Now, this begged the question as to why he didn’t teleport Rem and Shera to the capital?

Simply put, the capital’s portal—the point they’d teleport to—was in the royal palace. Rather, that was how it worked in *Cross Reverie*. If they were to appear

in the middle of the palace all of a sudden, they'd be treated as suspicious trespassers; the very image of criminal scum. In the game, where teleportation was common, the palace was open to everyone, but would it be the same in this world where teleportation was rare? Diablo didn't know. In the end, it meant he couldn't teleport to the capital without risk.

After dropping Rose off, Diablo teleported back to Faltra, its portal in the center of the town square. It was a place many people passed through, so his sudden appearance startled what unfortunate folk happened to be around there. Though they took it as some new kind of street performance, as they suddenly began applauding him, no one realizing he was the hero who'd defeated the Demon Overlord.

Having fled the square and returned to the Peace of Mind Inn - Hideout, the time was already past noon. When he opened the front door...

"Hm?"

"Ah..."

A girl carrying a sword was coming down the stairs. She was the dwarven swordmaster, Sasara. She was dressed in her usual Japanese attire, and had a katana with the symbol of the crescent moon etched into its pommel sheathed at her waist. At her back was a somewhat large rucksack.

"...Where are you going?"

"Oh, good." She smiled at Diablo's query. "I couldn't find you, so I was going to ask Klem to deliver you the message."

"What message?"

"We've defeated the Demon Overlord, and things are finally settling down around town. Since I've completed my duty, I'll be going back to the mountain."

The swordmaster lived near the frontier town of Sormas, in a retreat sitting atop Mount Tenzan. Since the most recent battle had the survival of the races hanging in the balance, she lent Faltra and Diablo her strength as an exception this one time.

Diablo nodded. "So, you're going home."

“Yes. I haven’t made a grave for Father yet.”

“Ah, right...”

Just before this battle, she dueled with her father, the former swordmaster, who’d become an oni. She hadn’t had the chance to mourn him yet after striking him down.

“I’m glad I helped defend this town. I also learned that there are some really powerful monsters out there. It seems I still have much to train for.”

“Hmm...”

“I slept through most of the fighting that night... I’m so sorry. On days where I go all out, I just get so exhausted...”

You were still a huge help.

The Demon Overlord Modinaram utilized martial arts that enabled it to always hit and made each hit an instant kill. A normal warrior wouldn’t even be able to buy time against him. Sasara, however, had the ability to cut through and offset her opponent’s attacks. If she weren’t around, the losses would’ve been far greater, and the fight would’ve been that much harder.

Still, a Demon Lord couldn’t offer such honest words of thanks.

“You worked well.” Diablo crossed his arms grandly. “I praise your efforts.”

He thought his words came off as a bit overbearing...but Sasara’s eyes widened in joy.

“Really?! That’s a relief...”

“...Do you want me to escort you back with my teleportation?”

“No, I’m finally out of town, so I’d rather walk back and enjoy the travel.”

“That’s certainly an option.”

A woman traveling alone was dangerous, but on second thought, he pitied any monster stupid enough to pick a fight with a level 200 warrior like Sasara. Bandits weren’t likely to get the drop on her either.

“Take care, Diablo.” Sasara bowed politely. “You are a magnificent sorcerer, but don’t neglect your swordsmanship training either.”

“Obviously.”

“And do come over to visit every now and then. I’ll serve you some great soba.”

“If it strikes my fancy, I will.”

“Heheh... I’ll be off then.”

Sasara opened the front door and left. As the door closed behind her, the room filled with a deafening silence.

“...”

Diablo looked up at the ceiling, then glared down at his feet. After taking a deep breath...

“Sasara!”

He’d turned his body around and pushed the inn’s door open quite vigorously. She’d already tottered down the street, but turned around in flustered surprise just as she was about to make a turn at the alley.

“Y-Yes?! I-Is something...the matter?”

After hesitating for a moment, Diablo steeled himself and called out: “Thanks to you, I was able to defeat the Demon Overlord! You have my gratitude...Master!”

After standing still for a moment, Sasara’s expression turned to joy.

“Y-Yes!” Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Not thinking he’d bring her to tears, Diablo was taken aback. “H-Hey, Sasara!”

“U-Uwaaah... I-I’m so happy...I could be...helpful!”

“Stop crying, you’re a swordmaster!”

“B-But... Aaah...”

“Argh, dammit, I’m taking it back! An embarrassing person who cries in public is no master of mine!”

“Nnnng, aaah... I-It’s too late already, you called me Master and I’ll remember it forever!”

“Tch...”

“I-If anything...I should be the grateful one here. Thank you for being my pupil...Diablo...” Even with such large tears rolling down her cheeks, Sasara grinned.

“Hmph...” Diablo averted his gaze awkwardly.

From the corner of his eyes, he could see Sasara bowing deeply again, with a bashful smile on her face. This time, she really did set out, Diablo watching her retreat.



†

“So, the swordmaster went back?”

After Diablo stood in front of the inn for a few moments, Klem came out.

The Demon Lord Krebskulm... Right now, they were in the form of a young girl. As always, she was dressed in a rather flashy outfit consisting of a large hat and skirt, meant to hide her horns and tail, and had makeup applied to her by Mei, the inn’s poster girl.

“Sasara has her duties as a swordmaster to consider,” Diablo replied.

“That one is cursed by God as well. Pitiful girl, she is.”

“Cursed by God?”

“Did you really believe she became that powerful due to inborn talent alone?”

Sasara’s strength really is exceptional, Diablo thought. *It’s pretty hard leveling up in this world, and even if it’s just once a day, being able to cancel out all the damage from any attack is unusual. Just calling it a unique constitution doesn’t fully explain it.*

“You think God is involved?”

“Certain of it. God’s stench is all over her. I don’t know what God’s intentions were in giving that girl such extraordinary abilities, though.”

“Suspicious.”

This being was probably different from the God Diablo knew about in his own world, but this one definitely had an existence the people called God. They had broken the original Demon Lord into fragments and sealed Krebskulm within Rem’s ancestors. They were the one who gave Lumachina her power to perform miracles, and likely the one who granted Sasara her talent. It was truly hard to believe.

“What is this ‘God’ thinking? If They can grant that much talent to someone on a whim and are strong enough to seal the toughest Demon Lord, saving the people when they’re in need of help should be easy.”

“Who’s to say? This Demon Lord has no idea.”

Even High Priest Lumachina had said that “God’s ways are unknowable.” Perhaps that was all there was to it. Maybe God had no purpose and was simply some sort of natural phenomenon. Maybe it merely seemed like They had a will of their own. These were all entirely possible conclusions.

“Well, so be it.” Klem waved her hand dismissively. “Let us leave this talk of God behind us. It makes this Demon Lord itchy in the tail.”

“True enough... Having two Demon Lords hypothesize about another deity is an odd thing.”

“Diablo! Let’s go have lunch!”

“Very well. What of Edelgard?”

“She’s working today.”

“Hmm...”

Come to think of it, Petre’s, the bakery in the southern district, was reopening for business that day. Everyday routines were gradually returning to Faltra.

With Klem at the helm, they headed to the northern district, when Diablo suddenly became acutely aware of the people’s stares all around them.

“Klem, should you really be walking around like this? People know you’re a Demon Lord now, don’t they?”

When she fought the Demon Overlord, many soldiers had witnessed her undisguised appearance. Despite camouflaging herself now, plenty of people knew who she was. Was it because that, despite knowing this “child” was a Demon Lord, many had witnessed her fighting to protect the city and chose not banish her out of gratitude...?

“No one has appeared to challenge this Demon Lord!”

Still, a surprisingly high number of people in this world seemed to operate on emotion rather than common sense...

“...I suppose there are all sorts of people among the races. Be careful though. Even if a blundering fool approaches you...”

“Don’t kill, don’t die, and obey your orders—correct? This Demon Lord

remembers. You've got nothing to be concerned about."

Diablo shrugged his shoulders. She was acting much more mature now. Children certainly had a way of growing up fast. Though Diablo wasn't sure if calling her a child was quite apt...

They came once again to Appetissant, a restaurant in the northern district they'd visited once before with Rem and Shera.

"Welcome, Madam Klem!"

"Mmm!"

She's already being treated as a regular...

While it was still a high quality, albeit fairly inexpensive, restaurant for the northern district's price range, Diablo couldn't hide his concern at Edelgard's hard-earned cuisine expenses...

"Rest assured, Diablo!" Klem said. "This is lunch time after all!"

"R-Right..."

A dish that would cost 10,000 friths during evening hours would cost a mere 3,000 at lunch.

That's still pretty expensive, though...

For the market price of this town, one could stay at an inn for 3,000 friths a night. For now, though, Klem took a seat while humming pleasantly.

"All right! This Demon Lord is in the mood for the 'A' lunch!"

As he looked at the cheerful, small Demon Lord, Diablo checked the money he had in his pocket as a waiter approached their table.

"May I take your orders?"

"Hmph... I already ate before coming here... I'll just have some bread and water." Diablo made the most frugal order possible in the grandest manner he could muster.

†

After finishing their lunches, Klem went to Petre's, Edelgard's workplace, to

buy herself some more biscuits. She ordered Diablo to come along, but he had other things to do in the meantime.

And so, Diablo walked alone through town.

I have to do something about those rings!

He'd looked through the jewelry and magic items stores, but none seemed to sell them. Sighing heavily, Diablo prepared himself to check the umpteenth store.

"Howdy, Diablo!"

A floozy had passed him by, calling out to him in the process.

...Or rather, it was the scantily dressed guildmaster of the Adventurer's Guild, Sylvie.

"Sigh..."

"What's with the long face? Is it because Rem and Shera went to the capital?"

"No. It has nothing to do with..."

But as he spoke, a thought crossed his mind. Sylvie may look like a child, but she was a seasoned, knowledgeable adventurer with many connections.

Maybe she knows something about weddings rings? Asking her might be a good idea...

Diablo stared at her intently. Sylvie flinched back in concern.

"Wh-What's wrong...?"

It was rather difficult to ask what was on his mind while maintaining his Demon Lord-ly dignity.

"Hmph..." Diablo scoffed. "I desire a wedding ring. Hand one over!"

"H-Huh?!" Sylvie's face went red. "M-Me, give a w-w-w-wedding ring...t-to you...?!"

She'd gotten the wrong idea here!

"No! You misunderstand, Sylvie! I desire two!"

"*Two* rings?!"

Such a misunderstanding didn't seem like it would be so easily resolved...

"B-But aren't you...already married to Rem and Shera?" Sylvie asked, fidgeting nervously. "S-So, why are you asking *me*... I-It's pretty problematic for me. And there's a pretty big age gap between us... I mean, a man and a woman have to consider their positions in life, you know? B-But...well, i-if you insist..."

"Wait! Calm down already." Somewhere along the path of this upside-down conversation, Diablo had ended up being the more flustered of the two.

Left with no choice, Diablo explained things from scratch.

"T-To begin with, I already had one pair of wedding rings, but..."

Talking while standing in the middle of the street made him very uncomfortable, so he took Sylvie to an open café where they could talk in peace.



There were chairs and parasols to block out the sun in front of this small store. Some coffee shops in the central district started this new style, which other stores were quick to imitate.

“So the wedding ring you gave to Rem forms a pair with Shera’s?” Sylvie asked, holding a wooden mug in one hand.

“Mm.”

“And without either of them knowing, Rem and Shera ended up getting married?”

“Apparently so.”

“Yikes, Diablo, you’re terrible!”

“U-Ugh...”

Her words stabbed directly into his heart.

“Ahaha,” Sylvie laughed. “Well, you didn’t know, so I guess it’s not entirely your fault.”

“Nnng...”

“Now you want to do something to fix this mess before they find out.”

Diablo nodded.

“Hmm.” Sylvie crossed her arms. “Then we’d need to prepare another ring, and swap it out when Rem gets back?”

“Right.”

“...Or maybe you could just tell the truth and have them understand.”

Uh, yeah, how about no?

His crippling social anxiety was especially bad when he considered the other person might think poorly of him. Knowing he was definitely going to disappoint someone in this situation frightened him.

“Don’t look down on me!” Diablo exclaimed haughtily. “Do you think a Demon Lord such as myself would have trouble obtaining an SR rarity ring? Are you *trying* to insult me?!”

“Do you have any leads about where to obtain a wedding ring?”

“Ugh...”

If he did, he wouldn’t be consulting Sylvie...

Cross Reverie had a unique quest in place for couples who wanted to obtain wedding rings. Diablo had checked the Adventurer’s Guild here, but couldn’t find any such quest. This world was realistic to the point that it was pretty annoying.

“Well, it’s a request from the hero who saved the town, so sure.” Sylvie smiled wryly. “I’ll help you out, why not.”

Oh?!

Diablo found himself leaning forward, but quickly leaned back into a more dignified pose.

“Endeavor in my name. I’ll allow it!”

“Let’s go on an adventure then—to the Viridian Cathedral!”

Chapter 2: Conquering the Viridian Cathedral

After waiting for the next day to come— Diablo arrived at the Viridian Cathedral, located deep within the Man-Eating Forest. The shrine was half-collapsed and covered in moss. If it were the same as *Cross Reverie*, there should've been a large dungeon that sprawled across the underground space beneath it.

It was currently just before noon. Diablo had left Faltra early in the morning, his only companion right now being Sylvie.

"We finally made it, Diablo."

"Hm."

"Now, the quest here is just like how I explained in town..."

"Leave it to me."

The details of said quest were fairly simple. In the depths of the Viridian Cathedral was an enchanted metal called Eternal Mythril. Diablo simply had to obtain and deliver it to an engraver in town, who would then process it into a wedding ring.

It's just a bit different from Cross Reverie*.*

In the game, a man and a woman would form a party and participate together in a quest. Upon completion, they'd receive the wedding rings as a reward.

"If it's not a unique wedding ring, you could just get one from any jeweler."

"So it seems."

Normal rings were simple pieces of jewelry. Diablo, however, was after the magical tool called a "Wedding Ring." In-game, it was a useless item, but... in this world, it apparently had the effect of allowing one to have children with members of a different race.

"The monsters that spawn in the Viridian Cathedral are..."

"They won't be an issue." Cutting her off, Diablo hurried forward. Pushing the stone door open, he descended the staircase.

The Viridian Cathedral, First Underground Level— The dungeon was carved out of stone. The moss illuminated the caverns, saving Diablo the trouble of having to cast a light spell in order to advance.

“Diablo, no using any bombastic spells, you hear?” Sylvie said warningly. “Getting buried alive isn’t on my bucket list.”

“So annoying...”

“Heheh... It feels kinda funny♪ I think this is the first I’ve ever had to ask an elemental sorcerer to tone down the firepower.”

Elemental magics weren’t fully developed in this world. Summoning was the main school of magic that sorcerers employed.

“Well, I suppose summoning magic is much safer...”

As he traversed the dungeon, Diablo thought, *There aren’t any monsters hiding behind the pillars, right? I won’t get ambushed the moment I turn a corner, will I? Are there any traps on the walls or floor?!*

A summon would be able to scout ahead. An elemental sorcerer, on the other hand, needed to chant their spells and was weak to surprise attacks. In the game, getting ambushed and killed by a monster or dying to a trap would only result in a light penalty, but here, no matter how unfair the attack or how slight the blunder you made, death meant it was all over. That was why it was only natural for most sorcerers to lean toward summoning.

“Diablo!” Sylvie called out.

“I see it!”

Giant claws swung down on him from behind, which he avoided with the slightest movement possible. Turning around, he was faced with a bear, or rather, a monster in the shape of a fancy stuffed bear toy—a blessing bear. But its cute appearance was deceiving, it actually being a level 99 monster.

“I’ll blow you away!” Diablo brandished his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur. “Lightning Bullet!”

A bullet of light fired off, gouging a hole in the blessing bear’s torso. The monster was blown back—but a level 80 spell wouldn’t pack enough of a punch

to take it completely out. It rose to its feet, even with the hole in its stomach. Worse still, more blessing bears appeared behind it.

"Holy Wood Bind!" Sylvie called out. Glowing vines grew out from the stone floor, coiling around the group of monsters.

The monsters growled ferociously. It was support magic. Given they were level 99 monsters, it would only stop them in their tracks for several seconds. Diablo charged a spell and unleashed it.

"I'll burn you all to a crisp! Chain Lightning!"

A spell designed to hit a large number of closely packed enemies with bolts of lightning, sparks sizzled off the bears. The group of bears spasmed, and as Diablo and Sylvie charged at them, the surface of their fur became charred and black.

Diablo clicked his tongue. "They're surprisingly durable."

In this world, monsters tended to be weaker than they were in *Cross Reverie*. Perhaps they avoided unnecessary battles, too. But these blessing bears had the same HP values as they did in-game, and were terribly aggressive, too.

Is it because they're monsters created by magic?

"Ice Storm!"

A powerful gust of icy wind burst from the tip of Diablo's staff, raging around the monsters and freezing them in place. They roared in anger before shattering into ice cubes.

Finally... Diablo sighed in relief internally. But Sylvie, who'd slipped out of sight, called out more.

"More are coming!"

As she said, Diablo had defeated a few, but more blessing bears were heading out from within the dungeon's depths. They may have only been level 99, but in these large numbers, things would get tricky.

"Hmph..." Diablo's lips curled upward. "Just what I was hoping for. You keep coming out like lambs to the slaughter. There's actually something I've been meaning to try!"

Diablo created a Lightning Bullet in his right hand, generating a bullet of light inside it. He fired it from his right hand and caught it with his left, reflecting the spell. He then caught the reflected spell with his right hand, reflecting it again. Doing so, he'd trapped the shining ball of magic between both of his hands.

In this world, I know I can pull this off. The scope of what I can do is much larger here.

If all he wanted was to multiply his magic, his main weapon, the Tonnerre Empereur, was already capable of that, greatly increasing his MP consumption in the process. But by utilizing Magic Reflection like this...

"Dark Bullet!"

A bit cliché, I'll admit...

The bullet of light intersected with the Dark Bullet spell. Between Diablo's hands, the pure elemental, magical energy transformed into a different type of magic.

"Wha...?!" Sylvie, who stood beside him, opened her eyes in shock. "Diablo...what *is* that?!"

"Composite Magic!"

It was a new type of magic, one that didn't even exist in *Cross Reverie*. The tip of Diablo's finger touched the end of the magic, unleashing the torrent of energy between his hand and the flock of monsters.

A rumble shook the dungeon...

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"It blew up..." Diablo whispered.

"It sure did~" Sylvie agreed with an utterly exhausted tone.

"It was a pretty big explosion, too."

"It definitely shook everything up~"

The moment the light and dark magic came into contact, a massive shockwave had shaken up the entire dungeon.

"I didn't think it'd blow up in my hands..." Diablo sighed.

“I thought I’d get caught up in it and die, you know? Do your experiments alone next time...”

“...Right.”

He was unharmed because of the Demon Lord’s Ring’s effects, but Sylvie, who was near him, was in danger. The fact she was fine, if a bit thorny and sarcastic for it, stood as evidence of her skills as a guildmaster.

It’s a good thing Rem and Shera weren’t here for this...

In the end, his magic experiment failed, but the flock of blessing bears that may have brute forced him despite the level gap were wiped out. They were rendered into a group of charred, stuffed bears rolling on the now-blackened floor.

Blessing bears had a special skill where they would attack the enemy with tentacles that came out from their stitching. However, since Diablo didn’t let them get close enough to begin with, they never used it on him.

Damn, I wanna go home...

When his MP was low, Diablo would become apathetic to everything. Matters he thought were important began feeling trivial. All he wanted was to curl up in bed. So, Diablo took an MP potion out of his pouch and drank it down. His doubts then cleared away like a fog being lifted, and his numbed emotions returned, jolting up his sluggish thoughts.

All right. Next!

He opened a stone door which led him to a place that felt different from the stone-based dungeon they were in until now. The moss that overran everything was gone, and the sleek walls were lit up by magical illumination. Diablo compared the place to the map of the Viridian Cathedral he recalled.

“This is the deepest part.”

“That’s right. There’s a strip of exposed earth up ahead. That’s where the Eternal Mythril should be.”

“There’s no chance of it being depleted, is there?”

“I don’t really get the logic behind it, but...when a man and woman go in here,

they can always take a bit with them.”

I guess that’s the same as the game, then.

“It’s possible to leave and re-enter to take as much as you want, but the blessing bears and the other monsters are really strong. I wouldn’t have come here if I weren’t with you.”

“I see.”

Most of the adventurers in Faltra were around level 20. Not many people seemed willing to enter a place crawling with level 99 monsters.

“This is your first time coming here, right, Sylvie...?” Diablo asked, suddenly interested.

“Heheh... I am the guildmaster, after all. If there’s a quest for it, I’d explore the appropriate dungeons.”

“Right...”

“Ah!”

Diablo made to advance further in, but Sylvie raised a hand to stop him. He, too, realized it a moment later.

There’s something there...

“Ooh, so you noticed. Impressive...” a low voice spoke out. “Guess that’s what you’d expect.”

A dwarven man walked out from the pillar’s shadow. A thick beard covered most of his face, making it hard to discern his age. Though, judging by his voice, he sounded about middle-aged. He probably had dog ears and a tail, like all dwarves, but they were currently hidden by the full-body, metal armor he was wearing. He held a dark gray axe in his hands.

“I didn’t think we’d find someone ahead of us in such a high-level dungeon,” Diablo said, seemingly impressed.

“...Were you waiting for us?”

The dwarven man smirked at Sylvie’s remark. Come to think of it, there were no fresh traces of combat when they headed inside, which meant this dwarf

must've jumped down from the higher floor.

"Is there some sort of tunnel to the Viridian Cathedral?"

"Geheheh... Diggin's my specialty, see?"

So that's it...

Diablo shrugged. "There's no point coming into this dungeon unless you're a couple, a pair of a man and a woman. And I'm not one to share."

"Eh, that won't be a problem. I'll be takin' what I came here for."

"Hm?"

"I'm the king of the Gobble dwarf clan, Bulltheim!" the dwarf shouted. "An' my wish is to crush happy couples who try to get their hands on Eternal Mythril to make weddin' rings!"

"Ugh?!" Diablo jerked back, grabbing his head. "M-Me...happy? Couple...?"

He glanced toward Sylvie, who smirked back wryly.

"Mmm... You and I aren't like that, but...yeah, most people who want marriage rings are usually happy."

"Gaaaaaah!" Diablo sank to his knees.

He'd known it in the back of his mind. Compared to how lonely he was before, he now had Rem and Shera. While things were still hazy at first, at this point they were showing clear affection for him. He could also talk to Klem, Sasara, and Sylvie while doing his Demon Lord role play.

Am I...a normie?!

"Aaah... I... I deserve...to burn in hell."

"Wait, what are you saying, Diablo?!" Sylvie panicked.

Apparently, the idea that normies should burn in hell wasn't in her set of values.

Diablo then declared, as if spitting out blood:

"The sort of idiots who keep bringing their stupid romantic feelings into things should burn in hell!"

“A-Are you saying the races should go extinct?!”

What Sylvie just said made sense. This wasn’t a game, but an actual, real world. If the normies didn’t make babies, the races would end up dying out.

“Ugh... I understand...” Diablo covered his hands with his face. “I understand, but...”

“Wh-What...?” Sylvie seemed nervous.

A voice of utter resentment escaped Diablo’s throat.

“Still, I...I loathe people who can naturally talk and make out with girls!”

“Well, yikes, Diablo...” Sylvie reacted with a complicated expression. “What the heck happened in your past...?”

Nothing *happened,* that’s *the problem!*

Diablo’s very soul wailed in agony.

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As the dwarf, Bulltheim, stepped forward, his metallic armor made a clanking sound.

“The frig are you yappin’ about? Well, guess it doesn’t matter. You’ll be a stain on me Breaker Axe before long.” The dwarf pridefully presented his gray, gleaming axe.

As the dwarves were masters at making weapons, the axe seemed to be just as high-quality as he boasted. Diablo didn’t recognize the axe, which meant it wasn’t an obtainable item in *Cross Reverie*.

“A bandit?” Sylvie shrugged. “Look, we’re busy. Could you do this some other time? Still, you’re going after us, huh... You could work on your recon skills. He’s kinda panicking for some reason, but Diablo here...”

“...Is the sorcerer who beat the Demon Overlord Modinaram, yeah? And you’re the guildmaster for Faltra’s Adventurer’s Guild.”

Bulltheim’s words made Sylvie narrow her eyes suspiciously.

“Ooh. So, you challenged us knowing all that.”

“‘Course I did! If I beat a hero, everyone’ll fear me, and the other clans’ll submit to me!”

“How stupid...” Sylvie moaned.

Diablo’s mind, on the other hand, had calmed down. This dwarf knew who they were and made preparations to challenge them. This meant he was a challenger. Still, despite being an enemy, he was one of the races, so Diablo chose a weapon that wouldn’t kill him.

Diablo pulled out the Prototype Great Scythe from his pouch.

“To think there is a fool great enough to challenge the true Demon Lord, Diablo... Very well. I accept your challenge. Entertain me as you meet your demise!”

He was rather shaken up emotionally, but went right back into his usual Demon Lord role play mode. Being challenged riled up his heart. This sense of competitive pressure was something he thrived on.

“Know the taste of me axe!” Bulltheim charged at him.

He was fast!

Sword Smite III?!

Diablo blocked the axe’s blow with his scythe.

“You fell for it!” Bulltheim smirked.

What?!

The moment the weapons made contact, the Breaker Axe shone, and the Prototype Great Scythe shattered in Diablo’s hands.

“Weapon breaking...?!”

It only made sense that *Cross Reverie* had never implemented the weapon in his foe’s hands. One would spend a lot of time and effort upgrading their gear, so if there were an effect that could destroy players’ weapons and gear like this, they’d surely riot.

But the weapon-breaking effect wasn’t the only surprise. Another dwarf with a similar appearance as Bulltheim appeared from behind the dwarf’s back!

There's two of them?!

He had a gray spear in hand, which he stuck out with the intent to stab. Diablo had no weapon in hand to fight back against this attack. His only choice was to flee.

Diablo somehow managed to twist his body back, making it so the spear only nicked his shoulder, preventing a fatal blow. But then, from behind the second dwarf, a third one appeared! This dwarf jumped up, wielding a two-handed sword.

"Give up your life, hero man!"

"Don't get ahead of yourselves, you mooks! Flare Burst!"

A magical blast of fire erupted between them, but the dwarf with the two-handed sword simply laughed within the flames.

Magic doesn't affect him?!

Diablo subconsciously took a step back. If he hadn't, his abdomen would've been cut in half the next moment. Instead, a large slash ran across his chest, blood splattering onto the floor.

"Guh...?!"

The three dwarves gathered again, standing so only one of them was visible. The trick was simple: Bulltheim, who was the largest of the group, stood in front while his two comrades stood behind him. The three of them smirked.

"The hero who defeated the Demon Overlord is just a normal elemental sorcerer in the end. There's nothin' to fear! Not with our full body armor, the Ward Erase!"

Their armor had an anti-magic effect, not to mention that they were agile, unlike most dwarves. This was likely some other effect granted to them by their equipment. The dwarves' expertise was in their nimble fingers, which allowed them to create exquisite equipment.

"Are you all right, Diablo?!" Sylvie cried out.

"Tch..."

So, weapon-destroying weapons and anti-magic armor. This is a bad matchup for me...

Enemies who used their heads were the most challenging.

“Geheheh... Just wait right there.” Bulltheim threw a glance in Sylvie’s direction. “We’ll take our time tastin’ you once we finish off the man.”

“What?!” A shiver ran down Sylvie’s spine as her expression turned severe. “What are you saying? Have you people been doing things like...like this, the whole time?!”

“Ain’t you hear me? My wish is to crush happy couples. So we kill the men and make the women our playthin’s!”

The three of them made obscene smiles. Diablo felt his excitement to fight cool down rapidly.

So that’s what kinda guys you are...

A switch of sorts flipped in his mind, and he clenched his fists. He thought he’d get to enjoy a challenge for the first time in forever, but...

“You disappoint me.”

If he had to describe it, it was like opening a box that required some sort of puzzle to unlock, and he loved solving them. But sometimes, he’d lose all interest in it and want nothing more than to smash it open with a hammer. That was how he felt right now.

“You’ll die this time!”

Bulltheim charged at Diablo again. He just stood in place, as if he’d been overtaken by lethargy, and Bulltheim’s axe crashed into his side, cutting deep.

“Diablo?!” Sylvie screamed.

“...Figures. Guess that’s that.”

It hurt, yes, but Diablo’s thoughts were cold, like he’d been observing everything from a bird’s-eye view, like in the game.

Diablo’s level as a warrior is over 100 right now. Even a high-level warrior couldn’t fell him with one blow, and if his weapon has a special effect like

weapon destroying, it's not going to unleash that much damage behind it.

"I'll cut straight into your guts!" Bulltheim bellowed.

Too slow.

Faster than his opponent could pull his axe, Diablo beat the dwarf with his hand like a sword. It was the martial art Finger Blade which used SP to grant one's unarmed blows the force of a dagger. With the enemy's armor optimized for anti-magic, its physical defense was lacking.

Diablo's hand-blade pierced into Bulltheim's flank.

Your armor's anti-magic effect won't help you now!

"Matoi Izuna!"

"Gaaaaaah?!" Bulltheim screeched.

A wind and light spell, whirlwinds and lightning tore the opponent's body from the inside out. In-game, it'd continually deal damage over time while stunning the enemy, then finish them off by dealing massive damage. It packed enough of a punch to defeat a large summon beast or a high-level Fallen.

Oddly enough, the thought that he might kill the dwarf hadn't crossed Diablo's mind. His human sensibilities were more than likely completely numbed. His thoughts had already focused on the next target.

The second dwarf's spear was approaching. Diablo pulled out Bulltheim's Breaker Axe from his flank and used it to block the incoming attack.

"Whaaaaaat?!"

The dwarf's eyes widened. Both his lance and the axe that deflected it crumbled into tiny little bits. Both of them had the weapon destruction effect, the result being that the two weapons broke each other. With both of them now unarmed, the level gap became clear.

Faster than the second dwarf could stick out his fist, Diablo socked him in the face. Bulltheim's example had already taught Diablo that spells which required contact were still quite effective.

"Absolute Zero!"

He was still stiff from the Matoi Izuna spell he fired earlier, so Diablo used omission to shorten the incantation. The dwarf with the now-punched in face turned into a block of ice.

Now for the third one...

The opponent stood at the ready, his two-handed sword held overhead—Alps Fall III. His attack power increased several times over. Adding on, the dwarf shouted, “Sure Hit!” exclaiming his intent to use a martial art that allowed you to always hit your opponent, so long as they were within your weapon’s range. The two-handed sword’s slash fired at Diablo’s shoulder. The sword smashed through Diablo’s shoulder pad and cut away some clothes...

...but the attack dealt no damage.

When a warrior went beyond level 100, it meant they’d gone over the limits of what the races were capable of. And so, Diablo had stopped a slash capable of cutting a stone in half with nothing but his SP—the martial art, Rampart.

“Guh...” The dwarf grit his teeth. “One more slash!”

“I’ve got *seven*.”

Diablo pulled the Tonnerre Empereur from his pouch and transformed the staff into a magic sword, swinging it against the dwarf’s second attack. In exchange for Diablo’s MP, the attack was multiplied by seven and shattered the dwarf’s armor.

“Gaaaaaah?!”

The opponent fell to his knees, and Diablo held the magic sword up.

“Heheheh... You thought that measly piece of armor could block my magic... How about we test that theory!”

“Ahhh?!”

“That’s enough of that!” Sylvie raised her voice.

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The three wounded dwarves drooped their shoulders.

“Ugh... He was supposed to be...a normal sorcerer...”

“So, this is a hero, eh...”

“...I told you it was a piss poor idea.”

They grumbled complaints at each other. The fact that they were still standing after taking Matoi Izuna *and* Absolute Zero spells fired without mercy went to show how impressive their HP was. It seemed Bulltheim wasn’t just bragging when he called himself the king of a dwarven clan.

“Looks like Diablo won.” Sylvie glared at them with her arms crossed.

“Kuh...”

“Attacking us is a crime itself, but it looks like you have *other* crimes to answer for. We’ll have you tell us everything when we get back to town!”

That’s gonna be annoying... Diablo thought, scratching his head.

“We’re taking these fools back?”

“You just leave that to me.”

Sylvie produced a crystal the size of her palm.

Did she just pull that out from under her clothes...?

Her outfit barely covered the surface of her body and was held up by simple strings. Where she’d kept that thing stored was a true mystery...

Sylvie held up the deep blue crystal and asked the dwarves, “Listen to me carefully and answer. If you lie, there’ll be no mercy. Now, what are your true names?”

The three spoke their names...

“”””Aaaaaahhh?!”””

Then they were quickly absorbed into the ball in Sylvie’s hand. Looking closely, Diablo could see them inside.

“What’s this thing?!” Diablo asked, his eyes wide with surprise.

“It’s a crystal for trapping people in the ‘interstice.’ I don’t really know how it works... Someone who called themselves a witch gave it to me.”

“A witch, huh...”

An item capable of trapping people or characters didn't exist in *Cross Reverie*. Was its activation condition that someone had to say their name? In his case, would saying "Diablo" activate it? Or would he have to use his name from the old world?

"Don't worry, I won't use it on you." Sylvie slipped the crystal back under her clothes.

"I can never be too careful around you."

"Man, you guys never trust me... I'm really grateful for what you do, y'know? For handling these three, too. I wouldn't have beaten them if I were here alone."

Sure enough, she used support magic in battle. From what Diablo had seen, this meant warriors clad in magic-immune armor were the worst possible match for her.

"Still, I don't know what you may pull out next."

"Ahaha... There really isn't a trick to it."

Sylvie pulled a sack out from under her clothes, small enough to fit in the palm of her childlike hand. Diablo recognized it as the first item container one could obtain in *Cross Reverie*. There were quite a few items in it, too. If one were to pay to expand it, it'd become a pouch like the one Diablo carried, which would increase the number of items it could store several times over.

"...W-Wait, you're a player?!"

"'Player'...? That witch gave me this, too. She said it's an existence removed from the rules of this world."

Did this mean that witch was a player, the same as Diablo?

"Where is this witch now?"

"She passed away, a long time ago." Sylvie then presented Diablo the small sack. "If you say you can't trust me, you can have this. Would that help you feel less anxious around me?"

Even a beginner's container was an extremely rare magical tool in this world, and it likely contained extraordinary items as well.

“That is unnecessary.” Diablo shrugged.

“Really?”

“I trust no one, but I don’t fear such trifling matters either. Now forget this, an irritating obstacle got in our way. Let’s hurry on ahead.”

He turned his back and walked off. Sylvie tottered along to match his pace.

“Hehe... Thanks.”

The two reached the deepest part of the Viridian Cathedral, an area where the floorboards were missing, exposing simple earth underneath.

“Is this...?!”

“We gotta dig.”

Sylvie sifted through the ground, revealing the tip of something with a gray sheen. Diablo reached out as well.

To think I’d have to dig with my bare hands...

A lump of metal that looked like molten silver awaited them underneath...

Chapter 3: Going to the Capital (Again) Sylvie headed back to the Adventurer's Guild. Putting her work aside from the morning apparently meant she'd be overwhelmed with it in the evening. She also said she'd need to question the three they'd captured.

Diablo visited a skilled engraver Sylvie had recommended to him, a dwarf called Rombert.

Another dwarf?

Maybe it was natural. Work requiring nimble fingers was commonly done by dwarves, though human craftsmen weren't uncommon either.

"Rombert's Jewelers" was a brick structure with a metallic door that had a subtle design etched onto it. Diablo pulled this door open.

"Welcome!"

He was greeted by a woman's voice. They were a slightly older-looking woman with glasses and large breasts. Dwarven women were short, busty, and had dog ears and tails. Her ears were triangular and chestnut-colored, like a shiba inu's.

"I'm looking for Rombert?"

"Ah, that'd be me. How can I help ya?"

"Oh, a man's come to shop here? Unusual..." said a human man standing by the counter. There weren't many of them in the southern district. Maybe he was a regular client?

Diablo ignored the man and took the Eternal Mythril out of his pouch, placing it on the counter in front of the shopkeeper.

"I want you to handle this."

“Whoa, incredible!” Rombert said, putting her glasses back on. “Is this real?!”

“If you can’t tell that much, I’ll take my business elsewhere.”

“No, no, it’s fine. But for a man to bring one of these in... Is it for a wedding ring?!”

Diablo recoiled on the inside, but remained expressionless. Demon Lords didn’t get embarrassed!

“Hm.”

“My! Well, congratulations!”

Meanwhile, the human regular was staring not at the Eternal Mythril but at Diablo.

“Hm? Hey, are you... Could you really be...”

“Hm?”

“...Diablo the Hero?!”

“Ugh...”

“Yeah, you gotta be! How many demons with horns on their head could there be in this town?!”

“And if I am?” Diablo asked darkly to hide his awkwardness.

This human was either extraordinarily dense or terribly brazen, because he didn’t seem to notice Diablo’s menacing tone and approached the “hero” with a smile.

“Thanks to you, the Fallen didn’t kill us all! The whole city’s grateful!”

“Ah, hmm...”

Rombert the engraver also grew excited. “Whoa! I didn’t think I’d be getting work from a hero! Wait till the folks back home hear about this!”

Hey, that’s personal information! Haven’t you heard about confidentiality?!

Small businesses in this world didn’t seem to comply with such professional ethics.

Diablo sighed, lamenting at how being a hero brought him nothing but

trouble.

“I’m only here to discuss my request. When will it be ready and how much will it cost?”

“Aww, I can’t take money from the hero who saved the town,” Rombert said with a smile. “I’ll put the rest of my work aside and get started on it right away. It’ll be all ready for ya tomorrow morning!”

“Hm.”

...Hey, being a hero’s pretty cool.

“Ehehe...” The human man took a medal out from under his jacket. “This here’s a business a buddy of mine runs. Stop by if you get the chance. If you show them this medal, you’ll get in for free.”

“Hmm?”

Having been poor for so long, “free” enticed Diablo. He accepted the medal without hesitation.

The medal itself only looked to be worth about a copper coin or so. A mermaid was drawn at its center and letters (that Diablo couldn’t read) were written around its circumference.

“What type of place is it?”

The man snickered, and whispered as if sharing a secret: “A monster girl café.”

“...Wh-Wh-Whaaat?” Diablo stared at the man’s face, dumbfounded. His snickering smile gave the impression he was like a kid telling a dirty joke.

“It’s in the royal capital, though.”

“The capital...”

“It’s a place where you can get reaaal up close and wet with monster girls.” The man swung his hips pliably.

“Disgusting!” Rombert scolded him with a frown.

“Aww, c’mon. I got you an order from that place, you know?”

“You can’t send a customer who showed up to buy a wedding ring to a store like that!”

“You just don’t get how men work, Rombert.”

“...A *hero* at that!”

“Heroes have battles to fight in the bedroom too.”

Leaving the two to their squabbling, Diablo left the jeweler’s behind him, medal in hand.

A monster girl soapland?! It’s got such an indecent ring to it!

He was filled with the kind of excitement he’d feel when standing before a new, unexplored dungeon.

†

Five days after the new year’s festival— The carriage rattled as it rolled down the road. Diablo held the reins with Sylvie sitting at his side.

“Isn’t Rombert a great craftswoman?”

“If you ignore how chatty she is.”

“She’s actually pretty tight-lipped, so long as booze isn’t involved.”

Can’t shut her up when it is, huh.

“I have no complaints about the craftsmanship.” Rombert had indeed made him a pair of gorgeous wedding rings.

“I sure was surprised when you decided to go to the capital as soon as the rings were done♪”

“Hmph... It has little to do with the rings having been completed. Besides, I’m the surprised one here. I didn’t think I’d be getting a guildmaster along with the fodder.”

He’d gone to the coach where he left his carriage to get the horses prepped for the trip, only to find Sylvie waiting for him there the next day.

“I said I’d come with you, didn’t I?”

“What about your other duties?”

“Hmm... Well, I figured it’d be a good time to get the new guy used to the job. Having him act as my proxy will be a good lesson for him.”

“Proxy?”

“Yeah, Emile.”

“That idiot?”

“He’s actually pretty shrewd when it counts, you know?” Sylvie smiled wryly.

“That doesn’t make him a good fit as a guildmaster.”

“Ahaha... Well, you see, popularity is what’s important.”

Diablo shrugged; popularity wasn’t a fond topic. Emile was often surrounded by his party members, and had the social skills to gather people together.

“I’m the type to give instructions from behind the scenes,” Sylvie said, gazing at the scenery. “But Emile’s the type to tackle crises head on, and he always has his friends with him.”

“Hm...”

“He’s kinda like you, actually.”

“Hmph... I don’t recall ever leading any ‘friends.’”

“Really?”

“I need only myself when the time comes for battle.”

When the Demon Overlord Modinaram attacked, he felt at ease with Sasara and Rose handling the vanguard. But they weren’t here now. In the end, it was all dependent on the situation, or so Diablo thought. Same as the weather and the terrain, there was a fighting style one could adopt with vanguards to help, and a fighting style for when one didn’t have them.

Yet Diablo could never understand those who were dependant on others despite their own strengths, who said things like, “We can’t challenge this boss because the healer isn’t around” or, “We’re scouting out a dungeon so I want to have a seeker around.”

“Even if this world is built on cooperation, I work alone.”

“But I’m here with you right now.”

“I can’t trust you.”

“Wow, rude?!” Sylvie’s face was practically ruined with tears.

...Crocodile tears.

That’s why I can’t trust you.

Diablo scratched his ear with one of his fingers, as a way of cutting the conversation off.

“You can’t do that, Diablo!”

“Do what?”

“Ears are very delicate!” Sylvie’s own rabbit ears twitched excitedly.

Grasswalkers had an excellent sense of hearing. Their ancestors lived out on the plains and developed the scouting abilities and agility necessary to escape larger predators. They were also rather zealous when it came to tending to their ears.

Beyond that, Diablo pondered about how this was the first time anyone had scolded him since he came to this world. Many people opposed him, and many more were angry at him. He’d faced individuals who were out for his life more than once...but he couldn’t recall ever being scolded.

“Let’s stop for lunch, Diablo♪”

“Lunch? It’s far too soon...”

“There’s a river over there, and the weather’s so nice. I feel like eating something really good.”

“Hm.”

It wasn’t like he had any plans to see the king. Rather, the store he’d heard about interested him and he decided to go check it out. Thus, he went out of his way to visit the royal capital. He wasn’t in a hurry to get there, so he stopped the carriage as Sylvie had asked. She took the cooking tools from the wagon as she got off.

“I’ll stoke the fire, so you go get water for the pot!”

I have to help too...?

When he was with Rem and Shera, they usually had jerky and fruit. They sometimes even made soup, since Rem knew enough elemental magic to start a fire, so he always ended up just staring at them as they worked. The only time he was ever involved in cooking was in his personal dungeon.

At Sylvie's instruction, he washed the battered iron pot in the river, then scooped it upward from the water. When he came back, Sylvie had already made a simple kiln with a few bricks.

"Thanks, Diablo!" She smiled. "Next, I need you to wash the dishes."

"...Hmm."

By the time he'd returned, there was already fire under the pot. Sylvie was skillfully cutting vegetables on a cutting board before dropping them in it. This was what an experienced adventurer looked like.

"Mm hmm mm♪"

Sylvie took some yellow powder out from under her "clothes." A faint scent tickled Diablo's nostrils.

"Is that curry?!"

"Oh, I'm surprised you know. You really live up to your name, Diablo. From what I've heard, it's a dish from the southern countries."

She sprinkled the powder on top, and, after simmering the contents for a while, her soup curry was ready. Sylvie poured some into a plate and handed it to Diablo.

"Just be careful, it's hot."

"Hmm."

He tore off a piece of hard bread, dipped it into the curry, and bit into it. A great taste filled his mouth. Sylvie did the same and her ears twitched with delight.

"Mmm~ It's so spicy and good!"

"Hm."

Diablo's tongue tingled. The flavor was a bit thin, but the spice was certainly there. It hadn't been simmered for that long, but the potatoes and carrots were soft and easy to eat. Upon closer inspection, they weren't simply cut into mouth-sized bits, but sliced so meticulously that they'd be easier to eat. It was a process called scoring.

To think one's skill with cooking would make such a huge difference even when cooking outdoors...

"Haah, it's been so long... Eating this really gives me that 'I'm out on an adventure!' feel."

"Do you always make this?"

"When I have the time and proper ingredients."

"Though it's not much of an adventure this time."

"That's not true. There's no telling what might happen by the time we get to the capital."

"...Something more dangerous than the Demon Overlord?"

"Maybe. Who knows."

Her response was more serious than he expected, making him shrug.

"You're a cowardly one."

"Sure am. That's why I've lived for so long. All my brave friends went ahead and died already."

When Diablo was summoned to this world, he'd already had most of his strength; he was never weak enough to die that easily. There were times when he was backed against a wall by a powerful enemy, but he never had to look at things with cowardly caution. He'd exercised efficiency in this world, just as he did in the game. Even if he took damage or exhausted himself, he prioritized the results first and foremost. But if he were to die, there wouldn't be any restarts. This aspect wasn't like the game.

Diablo slowly chewed the well-simmered, soft carrots of his curry soup, and swallowed.

“...I suppose there are still many things to learn.”

“Hm? What?” Sylvie grinned at him.

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After packing up their cooking utensils, the two set off once more. Unlike stage coaches, which would switch out horses every time they’d make a stop, the two could only rely on the one horse they had right now. They couldn’t overwork it, and decided to set up camp soon after. While there was the option of going to an inn-town, it was fairly peaceful out on the highway, and the weather was nice. They bought water and fodder for the horse and decided to camp out on the outskirts of town. They still sat in the carriage’s wagon, however, which was more comfortable than a cheap inn.

After leaving the carriage for a moment, Sylvie went back in.

“I set up some traps around camp. If a wild animal comes near, the traps should make some noise to alert us.”

“So you didn’t go out to use the restroom.”

“N-No...” she replied, her face turning red.

“It’s nice not having to stay so on guard with just the two of us.”

“When you guys go out, do you alternate shifts?”

“That’s what we usually decide, but Shera keeps sleeping in. We usually avoid quests that require us to camp out for days.”

Diablo laid down on the bench. It was a bit cramped for a bed, but it was much better than the moist ground or scraggy gravel.

“Your MP doesn’t recover if you don’t sleep, after all!”

Sylvie quickly scooted over to where Diablo rested his head.

“...What?”

“You were picking at your ears today, right? I figured I’d show you some *proper* ear caring techniques.”

Thinking back, she’d scolded him when he scratched at his ear with his finger.

“That’s not necessary. I’m not a child.”

“Now, now, my ear cleaning procedure is something special. I’ve even thought about starting an ear cleaning parlor once I retire.”

“It’s already night.”

Sylvie snapped her fingers, and a light appeared above them—a light spell. Sorcerers in this world possessed weak magical energies and couldn’t get much firepower out of elemental magic, so they looked down on it. However, they still learned some basic elemental magic as part of their foundation, the kinds that would serve as necessary functions in everyday life.

“What should I do then?” Diablo followed along, albeit with some suspicion.

Sylvie sat at the edge of the bench and tapped on her slender thighs. “Just rest your head right here.”

“...Are you serious?”

“I wouldn’t joke about something like this, Diablo. Hmmhmmhmm...”

She didn’t seem to be teasing him, so Diablo laid down and rested his head on her lap.

“Ah, your horns are getting in the way... Any way you could take them off or something?”

“Th-They don’t come off, I’ll have you know!”

Saying they were decorative this late into the game would be lame (and it obviously went against his Demon Lord role play).

“Oh well. Then look away.”

His cheek pressed against one of her thighs. Judging from her speech and conduct, she was much older than Diablo, but her skin was as soft and smooth as a child’s. He knew grasswalkers retained childlike appearances no matter how old they got, but apparently their skin remained the same too. It was a bit odd, if only because they had the same lifespans as humans.

Her body heat was as hot as a human’s, too, and he could feel it against his skin. Looking closer, he could spot superfine hairs, like a cat’s whiskers, on her

kneecap. They were white, so he couldn't tell they were there without looking so closely.

Then, something touched the tip of Diablo's ear.

"Ugh..."

"Oh, did it hurt?"

"It does tickle..."

"Ahaha... Bear with it for a bit."

"Well...it's not *that* bad..."

"First, I'll use this wooden earpick to get the earwax out..."

She began gently cleaning his ear out.

"Hmm, hmm, hmm♪ Next, I'll use this cotton swab to get all the dirt out..."

"A cotton swab?!"

"This." She presented a small tool consisting of a thin, wooden stick that had cotton wrapped around its tip.

"O-Oh..." In his old world, cotton swabs were a bit different. They were made of plastic with absorbent cotton adhered to their tips.

Diablo experienced a soft, pleasant sensation as Sylvie continued cleaning his ears.

She rubbed the interior of his outer ear and asked, "Does it hurt?" She then propped her hand up against the other side, and used her slender fingers and the swab to gently trace the ups and downs of his ear. She was only touching his ear, but when coupled with the heat of her thighs, it gave him the sensation of floating in hot water. He felt like he was melting in both mind and body.

"All right, I'll finish by putting in some Jojoba oil!"

She produced a small bottle filled with a transparent yellow fluid, which she dripped onto her finger and smeared all over his ear. Diablo felt his own body heat rise for some reason.

"Good! Now, turn the other way."

“...What?”

“I need to clean your other ear, too.”

“R-Right...”

“Look that way for me.”

She’s just cleaning my ear. There’s nothing suspicious about it...

Repeating those words like a mantra, Diablo turned sideways, facing Sylvie’s stomach. The cheek that had touched Sylvie’s thigh until now rapidly cooled down, while the other cheek began heating up. This time, though, Diablo’s nose just barely touched Sylvie’s belly button.

The way she’s dressed, she’s pretty much walking around naked...

Owing to her small body frame, it ended up being an ear cleaning session with tons of skin contact. It almost felt like his face might get buried in her smooth stomach.

It was overall a warm sensation. His ears felt open, and her humming sounded like a lullaby. With the day’s exhaustion weighing in on the matter as well, Diablo felt his consciousness rapidly sinking into slumber.

Aaah. This feels so good... I guess that’s a guildmaster for you...

†

Lyferian calendar, year 165, first month, ninth day— After a few days’ journey, Diablo’s carriage arrived at the gate of Sevenwall’s ninth district gate. The guards called him over.

They mistook me for a Fallen last time...

It had brought up some unpleasant memories. However, before things could get bothersome, Sylvie presented a gold staff decorated with a crystal.

“I’m Sylvie, guildmaster of Faltra’s Adventurer’s Guild. Will you be inspecting our cargo?”

“No need! You may pass!” All the guards gave an orderly salute. Diablo heaved a sigh of relief inside.

“Just what I’d expect from a guildmaster.”

“They didn’t have these citizen identity crystals before, so it could get really annoying. People wouldn’t believe me when I said who I was.”

“That sounds hard.”

They quickly passed through the gate and rolled onto the street full of shops. The wheels rattled and rumbled against the tiled ground which was larger than Faltra’s main street, but was still overflowing with people. Seeing so many of them made Diablo feel queasy.

“Tch...” Diablo hated being around large crowds. “Is there some sort of festival going on?”

“The new year’s festival. For the first ten days of the year, people drink, sing, and dance. There’s a ton of stalls that are unique to this festival too.”

“Is the new year really such a reason to celebrate? It comes around every year...”

“Ahaha... I suppose. But at the end of last year, there was news of the Demon Lord’s revival. There were also rumors that this was a doomed war for us, so they’re probably celebrating more than usual.”

“Hmm...”

The victory celebrations in Faltra had lasted for a few days as well, but Diablo was surprised that the news traveled this far.

“It’s all thanks to you, Diablo,” Sylvie said with a light smile.

“I didn’t fight to save these people. I only reduced Modinaram to dust for attacking my base of operations.”

“*And* you saved everyone in the process,” she interjected with a serious expression.

Diablo could feel himself getting embarrassed, so he changed the topic.

“Where would Rem and Shera be?”

“I’m not in touch with them, but...they’re probably at Castle Grandiose. They did head to the capital for an audience with the king.”

“I see.”

“Usually, you have to wait a long time in the castle for an audience. The king is pretty busy at the start of the year, so they’ll probably have to stay there for another ten days or so. Want to go see them?”

“No, I have no intention of doing so.”

He’d come to the capital, but still had no wish to meet with the king. Sylvie was aware of that, and didn’t bother him further.

“We’ll need to find somewhere to stay, then. I could stay at the capital’s Adventurer’s Guild, but you don’t like places full of strangers, right?”

He nodded silently. They hadn’t traveled for very long, but she realized that much already. Maybe she’d seen through his Demon Lord role play too.

Still, I have to stick with it. I can’t hold a conversation otherwise...

“...Rem said they’d meet Alicia and Lumchina in the capital,” Diablo said after a moment’s pondering. “Perhaps we should get in touch with them.”

“Then I’ll try to contact Lumachina. Let’s find an inn and I’ll write her a letter.”

“I leave it in your hands.”

Sylvie didn’t trust Alicia, which was perhaps natural, seeing as she’d plotted Klem’s awakening as the Demon Lord Krebskulm. She was an Imperial Knight, but was at the same time a Demon Lord worshiper who desired the destruction of the races. She’d since reformed and swore her allegiance to Diablo, but her hatred for the races still ran deep.

She’s a pretty dangerous person...

Even Diablo would still treat her as an enemy if Rem hadn’t forgiven her. The same held true for Shera, but those two were far too kind and naive for their own good... They were humanitarians to the core, despite being adventurers. While Diablo didn’t dislike that about them...

In the end, Diablo and Sylvie decided to stay at an inn in the ninth district, since many of the inns had stables attached to them.

“I think this place looks good!”

Sylvie pointed at an inn called The Princess Lafina. Its name was impressive,

but the storefront looked quite old and unfashionable.

“Have you stayed here before?” Diablo asked, tilting his head.

“It’s a great place! It’s old, but a neighboring country’s princess, Lafina, once stayed here. They’ve renovated the place three times since.”

“That’s too old.”

“They’ll house the carriage, they’re really cheap, and their food is tasty.”

“Hmm.”

Cheap was good. After defeating the Demon Overlord, Diablo had received a good amount of coin from the nobles to “prepare for the celebratory feast,” but not so much that he could freely throw his money around.

So, for lack of a better option, they decided to rent a room at The Princess Lafina. The interior was just as old and frugal as the exterior.

Did royalty really stay in this place? Must’ve been a pretty poor princess. Or maybe it’s just made up...?

The room was fairly wide, and was equipped with two small beds.

“We’re sharing a room?”

“Don’t worry about it~ The Faltra Adventurer’s Guild will pay for our stay.”

“... So you’re monitoring me.”

Diablo’s defeat of Modinaram increased his worth...for better and worse. He could easily imagine the Adventurer’s Guild becoming more wary of him.

“Well, I won’t deny that.” Sylvie waved her hand in a casual fashion. “Your achievements were just that grand. But you won’t experience any bad treatment from me, all right?”

“Do whatever you want.”

Being monitored was an unpleasant thing, but running around behind her back was even more bothersome. Either way, it seemed she meant him no harm for the moment.

Sylvie picked up a pen and paper. “I just need to contact Lumachina, right? I’ll

also inform Rem and Shera we'll be staying at this inn."

"Yes. And tell them I don't intend to meet the king."

"I'll write it down."

Apparently accustomed to office work, Sylvie ran the pen over the paper in fluid movements. Diablo laid down on the bed as she did so. He'd come all the way to the capital, but...when push came to shove, he was too timid to visit that store. He had no experience playing those sorts of..."games." That said, he was never the type to actively go out and look at the sights. He was interested in this relatively unfamiliar city, but the crowds outside were so large he only wished to stay holed up at the inn.

"I'm going to sleep."

"It's still only noon."

"I'm tired."

"...I suppose it was a long journey here. Well, good night, Diablo."

He closed his eyes...and instantly dozed off.

When he came to, it was already dark out the window. The western sky was still faintly red, with the sun apparently having just set. He thought he'd wake up before dinner, but he was surprisingly tired from the trip and overslept. He was also alone in the room.

I guess Sylvie went out.

His stomach grumbled.

"I came all the way to the capital, so I suppose I'll try their food."

The capital had many places that offered unique food one couldn't find in Faltra. Though the last time he was here, he was in hiding, and while that hotel's cooking was wonderful, he still wanted to eat out.

†

One of the inn's workers had told Diablo, "You looking for something to eat? The tenth district is open until late at night. It's a lively town, but it's not the safest place around, so be careful while you're out there!"

It was the next district over, so it'd take thirty minutes to walk there. Diablo pondered if going that far just for dinner was worth it, but...there were apparently carriages making rounds for free.

The capital's pretty amazing. How convenient.

Diablo was the king of Greenwood, only a small kingdom in the remote countryside, there was probably something to be learned about administration here. However, Diablo's firm stance was to never get involved in politics.

As he waited at a carriage station, which functioned like a bus station, a large box-shaped carriage arrived and picked him up. They didn't operate on a set schedule, so his trip was fairly easy-going. You didn't need a ticket to get on, and when you wanted to get off, you either did so at a stop or jumped off on your own accord when you reached your destination. It was a somewhat wild sort of infrastructure, to put it mildly.

At the tenth district— The central area was a large entertainment district. Multiple roads extended in all directions, with bars and restaurants lined up side by side, making for a very lively place. Voices echoed all around, inviting people in to visit certain businesses. Drunks loitered on the roadsides, singing or chattering with each other. There were men and women, young and old folk...

Diablo was shocked at the sight of a child downing a bottle of alcohol! But upon further inspection, realizing it was a grasswalker, he suspected they were likely older than he was.

I don't know if I'd call this lively or just disorderly and chaotic...

Diablo surveyed his new surroundings. The city's infrastructure was larger than he remembered it being in *Cross Reverie*. The game's version of this city was far more simplified, which was to be expected. If the starting town was thirty times bigger than it was, it wouldn't be a fantasy world adventure RPG but a city adventure where you solved cases around town. If it took you an hour just to get from the castle to the city gates, it'd be one hell of a shit game.

This fantasy world in particular was based off of Europe's Middle Ages, but the capital, Sevenwall, was larger than any town in that time period. Perhaps the existence of the Fallen and magical beasts made people gather more easily. But at the cultural level of the Middle Ages, having people gather in one place

required agricultural land and pastures, which limited the population a city could adequately support. Now, the royal capital didn't seem to have any food problems, so perhaps they grew something that yielded bountiful crops? Maybe they'd established some larger scale means of transportation? While Diablo had no interest in politics, he liked the concept of fantastical worlds and had some interest in urban organization.

"That aside, I should find some place to eat... Hm?"

As he walked down the main street, a sign entered his line of sight. He couldn't read the letters, but he recognized the mark it displayed.

A mermaid!

Diablo hastily took out his medal. There was no mistaking it...

It's the monster girl soapland!

Diablo started sweating bullets.

What do I do?!

The place looked sort of suspicious... However, the door was closed. Maybe they were closed for business...? No, the letters that formed the word "open" were on the door; he could read that much. In this world, businesses often had their doors closed even during normal working hours, and had the word "closed" displayed when they were...well, closed. This meant the place was still open.

"Nnng..."

But what if it's one of those really weird shops? I'm scared...

As he stood frozen in place, the door swung open from the inside, and a woman dressed in an outfit that greatly exposed her chest exited. She had long ears, like an elf's, and her long, golden hair covered half her face. Elves had slender bodies and flat chests, and her skirt had a very provocative slit that reached up to her hipbone. It seemed to naturally draw one's gaze to it—and so his eyes met hers.

"My, are you a customer? Welcome. We're available, so you can come in now."

“No, I, erm...”

“Oh! That medal!” She pointed at the object in his hand.

“Ah, no, this is...”

“That’s proof you’re a *special* guest! Now come in, come in!”

“N-No... Wait...”

“Don’t mind the fee; you can check out the girls to your heart’s content. Come, come hither!”

The lady wrapped her arms around Diablo’s arm. He thought she was flat-chested, but hers had a distinct softness to it. When she drew her face close to him like it was some CG graphic from a game, Diablo’s thoughts screeched to a halt. Elves were said to be a beautiful race, so much so that they were “close in likeness to God.” She was irresistible. Or rather, he wanted to give in to the temptation.

Before he even realized what was going on, Diablo had entered the store. He passed through a red curtain which led him into the dim interior.

“Ah?!” he let out inadvertently.

Reclining on many circular sofas were girls unlike anything he’d ever imagined. He figured they’d be young ladies in monster costumes, but he was merely being naive. One girl looked like an oni, with what looked to be a very real horn protruding from her skin. Another green-haired girl was apparently a...dryad? It was a type of female monster that appeared in *Cross Reverie*. Another had the lower half of a snake, likely a lamia. The sounds she made were all too realistic to that of a snake.

“What...is this...?!”

Monsters, in the middle of the peaceful capital?!

“Heheh...” The elven lady who’d invited him in stood behind the reception counter. “Which monster girl suits your fancy?”

Diablo swallowed audibly, the sound of his heartbeat thundering in his ears. He was sweating profusely, not able to focus his eyes for whatever reason.

“...My...fancy?” was the most he could squeeze out of his throat.

The lady nodded and brought her lips to Diablo’s ears, whispering those honeyed words with a glossy voice and a sweet tone once more.

“That’s right. What. Girl. Do you. Want. To do~”

“Wha?!”

Upon closer inspection, Diablo concluded that if he had the sort of personality that would actively attend this type of establishment, he wouldn’t have bailed from his first night with Shera or kept Rem waiting for three whole days. He didn’t have an ounce of confidence, which was why he was so terrified of doing anything that would expose him for who he truly was.

What if I screw up because I’m inexperienced?! Won’t they laugh at me? Won’t I embarrass myself? No, I’ll definitely *embarrass myself!*

His body was shivering like a leaf, and the lady seemed to catch on.

“My, my, I thought with the medal you’d be more... Well, how about we just make do with a massage instead?”

A...massage?

Diablo regained his cool. Calming his breath, he asked the receptionist lady, “Are those real monsters?”

“Oh dear... This really is your first time, isn’t it, sir? Those are therianthropes. They’re not much different from the races, they just aren’t acknowledged as such. Their numbers are few, and they ended up opposing the races.”

“Since they’re identified as beast-type monsters...”

“But all the ones here are very good girls who love the races very much~”

“Hmm...”

There were some among the races who desired the races’ annihilation. Was it not strange that some who were treated as monsters were friendly to the races?

“They’re all good girls who love the races’ ●●●●● very, very much♪”

“Pffft?!”

“My, my, my... I didn’t think you’d be so naive from how you look. Are you a virgin, by chance?”

“N-N-Nonsense!”

It seemed there was no fooling a pro. He gave it all away far too easily.

“Well, fine then. Let’s see this as a first-timer’s course and just make do with a massage, all right?” The lady pushed him from behind.

“A massage...”

“It does wonders for stiff shoulders, eyestrain, and lower back, joint, and muscle pains. They’re also great for one’s skin and help prevent aging.”

It felt like she was just spewing marketing buzzwords. Diablo was led to a bed that was partitioned off with a curtain, and the lady was replaced by the monster girls he saw reclining earlier.

“Welcome, welcome♪”

“De...mon... Unusual...”

“Is that something we should be saying thoooough~”

Respectively, the oni girl had a high-pitched voice, the dryad was speaking in broken sentences, and the lamia girl seemed to slur the end of her lines.

“Let’s just take off your armor for now.”

“Steel... No like...”

“Mister, you’re a hottie! Your skin’s so smoooth!”

They’d removed his armor with skilled swiftness as Diablo stiffened in place, overwhelmed by the situation.

So this is the power...of monster girls... Impressive...

“Hey, now, it’s just a massage.”

“Won’t...hurt...”

“You might feel like you’re going to heaven thoooough~”

Is this really, truly just a massage...?

Such a thought crossed Diablo's mind, but he didn't put it into words. The oni girl was finger-massaging his shoulders earnestly, and the sensation was something between pain and pleasure.

"Uuu..."

The dryad's hands touched Diablo's cheeks. The scent of the forest wafted into his nostrils, and his body felt like it was covered in moisture. His muscles relaxed. It was the first time he'd felt such a sensation that clung adhesively to his skin.

The lamia girl was touching Diablo as well—with her tongue.

"Schluuuuuurp..."

"Uuu, kuh..." The soft, warm stimulus finally elicited a moan from the rigid Demon Lord.

"Ah, this is a massage, too, you knooow?" the lamia girl said bashfully. "My haaands~ They're kinda weeeak~ And my scales would just feel painful, so I make people feel better with my tooongue~"

"It just looks like you're tasting him to me," the oni girl spoke up as she continued pressing on Diablo's shoulders.

"Booo~ If anything, try not to break his bones this tiiime~"

"I've been practicing a bunch, so it'll be fine."

"And I've practiced a bunch toooooo~"

"Yeah, except you did it so you don't end up peaking just from giving someone a massage."

"Ehehe, heheheee~ Mmm, nnn, schlurp..."

"Uuu..." Diablo moaned some more, overcome by three distinct sensations mixing together into a blend of pleasant, sensual pain.

Diablo felt his body heating up. This had happened before where, when he was extremely worked up, his magical energy seeped out on its own. Right now, his magical energy was flowing toward the monster girls touching him.

"Haaah?!" The lamia girl who lapped at him with her tongue stiffened and

shivered.

“W-Wait, what are you... Nnn?!” Next, the oni girl massaging his shoulders arched her back, her eyes darting about in surprise. “Wh-What is this?! Magical energy?! Th-There’s so much...”

But even as she shivered, she didn’t let go of Diablo. Her face was flushed, her voice noticeably coquettish.

“Kaaaha?!” The dryad recoiled. “Magical energy... So much...”

“Haah, haah, haah...” Diablo’s breathing came out in rough, shallow bursts. His consciousness was hazy from the inexplicable stimulation. It was said that a good massage could make one sleepy, so he may have been experiencing something similar.

He unintentionally reached out and grabbed the Dryad girl’s arm.

“Eek?! Nnnnnn!” Her body twitched as if she’d been struck by electricity and sank limply to the floor.

When Diablo came to shortly after, the monster girls all looked utterly exhausted.

What the heck happened here...?

“What?! What happened to you, girls?!”

“Ugh... Sir... So good...”

“I...finished...”

“Haaaha, mooore~”

The oni, dryad, and lamia lay limply with intoxicated, climactic expressions on their faces.

“Impossible...” The elf turned pale. “You did this...so quickly?! But it should’ve just been a massage!”

Diablo was, frankly, just as clueless as she was, but he’d apparently done *something*. He hurriedly fixed his outfit in the meantime.

“Hmph... That was a fairly pleasant experience, but it appears it was far too soon for them to challenge the likes of me!” he proclaimed grandly.

“J-Just who are you...?!” The lady stepped back in awe.

“Listen well and carve it into your heart, for I am Diablo! A Demon Lord from another world!”

Even he had to stop and wonder if introducing himself so pompously even meant anything in this kind of establishment... If he was capable of handling this tactfully, his life would’ve been that much easier...

The lady took another step back. Her expression flushed and she looked at Diablo with glittering eyes.

“The Demon Lord...of the bedroom!”

Uhh, no?!

It didn’t feel like correcting her at this point would do any good, though.

“Ahahahahahaha!” Instead, he simply gave a hearty laugh, so as to hide his embarrassment.

The aftereffects of the monster girls’ massage still lingered. While his vision still wavered a bit, his level 100 warrior body wouldn’t lose its balance that easily.

“Demon Lord, sir!” The receptionist lady ran after him as he left the store. “Please, come again! We’ll have more cute monster girls waiting for you♪”

She was a pro. However, Diablo grew maddeningly embarrassed as the gazes of those around the district gathered toward him.

“Hmph...” Diablo suppressed the blush trying to overtake his cheeks and smiled indominately. “Tonight was quite the feast.”

Even though all he did was get overwhelmed and receive a massage with his mouth hanging wide open...

He then recalled his own inexperienced conduct and burned with shame. Yet another epic case of failed communication. Diablo distanced himself from the shop as quickly as he could.

†

“Haah... Haah... Haah...”

Despite not having run or fatigued himself in any particular way, Diablo felt more exhausted than he did after fighting the Demon Overlord. He was sweating profusely and his heart was beating fast. The memory was far more embarrassing than the act itself, and his body was reacting oddly to it.

“...Idiot,” he cursed at no one in particular.

It was directed at nothing but his own timidness. If only he had a bit more backbone, he’d be able to spend his time better with those monster girls... But he couldn’t imagine himself handling a girl properly.

“Kuh...”

I wish I could speak to them more...properly...

There were so many things he wanted to ask about those monster girls. But instead of curiosity, he was now full of regret.

Then, he felt someone approach him. As he hung his head, a pair of loafers entered his sight.

A girl...?

Diablo raised his head. A Pantherian girl stood there, a cherubic expression on her face.

“Hello, mister. Um... Would you like to buy a flower?”

Diablo felt his heart skip a beat.

“Ah...?!” His eyes widened.

She had small, triangular cat ears, orange hair tied into twintails, and long, entrancing eyelashes. She was dressed in a green, modest robe, with her tail sticking out from its hem. The basket in her hands was full of violet flowers.

“Hmm...” Perhaps he’d been staring at her too intensely, because her cheeks flushed pink.

“Y-You’re...?!” Diablo reflexively grabbed her by the shoulders.

“Ah?!”

A large bulky man (by the standards of the races) had just grabbed a relatively petite Pantherian girl. It was as suspicious as it seemed. The girl didn’t shriek,

but the passersby were certainly turning to look at them.

“A-Ah...” Diablo hurriedly let go of her. “I apologize. Pardon me.”

“Do I...know you?”

“No... Um...”

They didn’t so much know each other as she’d asked. The Pantherian girl Diablo knew was a “Flower Seller” NPC who appeared in *Cross Reverie*. Diablo gazed at the girl, all while minding not to frighten her.

She really does look like her...

The Pantherian girl tilted her head in even more confusion.

†

“The God of Destruction Europa Raid Event! A time-limited quest for the summer holidays!”

Such was the announcement for this unique raid event the admins had set up for high level players.

“An extremely powerful monster has been summoned inside the mage academy within the capital! Form a party with other high level adventurers and defeat this overwhelmingly powerful beast! (Event duration is between August 1st and August 31st. Participation in the quest opens after completing the newly added story section.)”

Of course, Diablo didn’t form a party and tackled it solo...

That part was just fine.

What *wasn’t* fine was how absorbed he was in that event’s story. Ever since the start of *Cross Reverie*’s service, the Flower Seller NPC was always in the main square of the capital. She was just one of the city’s civilians, unremarkable in every way. If the girl before Diablo’s eyes were to be made into a 3D model, she’d likely look exactly like that NPC. The game’s rendering potential was never that realistic, and often focused on bringing out certain visual quirks in the characters. All she’d ever done was repeat the line, “Would you like a red flower?” with her naive appearance. However, flowers were never really sold in the game, not that Diablo wanted them to be, but...

Said NPC gained somewhat of a cult following among the players. Just a pure, innocent flower seller. However, some foul-mouthed players made stupid claims that selling flowers was Middle Ages jargon for prostitution, which triggered more than a few flame wars. And Diablo's stance?

I thought she was just an innocent little girl. You have to have a dirty mind for that NPC to look suspicious! What nonsense.

However!

After the God of Destruction Europa raid event began, the flower seller actually did begin selling an item called "The Violet Flower." The flower you actually obtained wasn't the right color, though, which gave players a feeling something was off. At the same time, players would receive a quest from the mage academy's headmaster stating, "Thirteen of our pupils have gone missing. Please find them."

Well, why didn't you ask for help before so many of them went missing?!

Cross Reverie wasn't a mystery game or anything, so just a bit of investigation made it clear some suspicious mage was doing the dirty work. Tailing him led the player to an older, suspicious campus building where, in a magic circle drawn on the floor inside it, the missing students were kept. Among them, clad in a school uniform, was the flower seller NPC! She was apparently a student of the academy. As the adventurers tried to rescue her, the culprit appeared and activated his ritual. In a classic example of a cinematic where the players couldn't do anything, the girls were sacrificed to summon the God of Destruction Europa from the underworld.

What followed was a battle, and just as the admins had advertised, it was a very challenging boss. Some even claimed it was harder than fighting the Demon Lords. Diablo failed his first time against it and was forced to retreat. But the rewards were very much worth it, making the event rather popular. Diablo challenged it over and over, but no matter how many times Europa was beaten, the sacrificed girls never came back. The reward for beating it would drop, but that was it.

Some players complained about the story not allowing them to rescue the girls despite their best efforts. But in the end, they were all just nameless NPCs.

A victim in the story was used to hype up the battle; your stereotypical "Passerby A."

The oddly sympathetic players hated it, and Diablo did understand how they felt... Being greeted by this NPC's smile every time they spoke to her likely brightened up their days. And so Diablo kept wondering...

Wasn't there some way to save that girl...?

†

Diablo gazed at the girl in front of him as a frightening thought crossed his mind.

Does this mean the God of Destruction Europa raid quest is in progress right now?!

But how could he confirm it? Diablo was bad at talking to girls. Really, though, the answer was quite obvious: his Demon Lord role play was his only choice.

"I am Diablo," he declared, crossing his arms grandly. "A Demon Lord from another world!"

"Huh?!" The girl's eyes darted with surprise at his sudden proclamation.

"Speak your name, lass. I'll allow it!"

Diablo was used to welcoming challengers, so his tone wasn't that suitable for speaking to dainty flower sellers.

"I-I'm Mercie..." she said nervously.

"Hmph. So, Mercie...you sell flowers?"

"Y-Yes."

"Very well. Then I shall buy one."

"...Huh?"

He only intended to investigate and see if the event was ongoing, but the question slipped off his lips... It was something he wanted to know back when he was still a player since it was the subject of much ardent debate.

But Mercie seemed hesitant.

“What is it?” Diablo glared at her. “Will you not sell me one?”

“...U-Um... How much do you have on you...?”

“Hmph, do not belittle me.”

He took a sack out from his pouch and produced several coins from its interior. There were a mixture of bronze, silver, and gold coins in there.

Incidentally, a gold coin was worth 80,000 friths. One could live off a single gold coin for a month if they were frugal. There were ten such coins resting in his hand. Diablo didn’t know the market price for flowers in the capital, but he doubted it cost more than this. They were the kind of flowers one could find blooming on the roadside outside of the city.

“Gold coins?!” Mercie’s eyes widened. “A-And so many! You’re really rich, mister...”

“Diablo.”

“Haven’t I heard that name somewhere...? Oh, never mind. Come over here then!”

“Hm.”

...This is *about selling flowers, right? Besides, aren’t the flowers in her basket all ones you can find in the flower shops around here? I’m pretty sure they are...*

Diablo followed her to a narrow alleyway between buildings. The moonlight just barely illuminated the place.

“Heave-ho...” Mercie took off her green robe.

Diablo was taken aback. Beneath her robe was an outfit as detached as it could be from her purity before. It was a sensual outfit greatly exposing her cleavage. She looked up at him with moist eyes, her pink tongue licking her pale lips. She pulled up her skirt with her hands, revealing a pair of violet panties.

“It’s 10,000 friths to use your mouth. If you want to go all the way, it’s 30,000. If you just want my panties, they’ll be 5,000 friths★”

“...Oh.”

Diablo looked up at the starry sky silently.

The moonlight kinda stings for some reason...

Beads of sweat rolled down his cheeks.

“You better decide quickly.” Mercie leaned her body forward. “If the imperial knights find us, you’ll be in trouble, too, you know?”

“Ah, no...”



If Diablo were bold enough to have his way with a girl in a dark alley like this, he wouldn't have been walking around the district holding a mental post mortem meeting in his head. Of course, he didn't even have the nerves to meet this girl's expectations, either. All he could do was falter.

"Then I'll start servicing you★"

Mercie squeezed her body against his assertively. She grabbed Diablo's hand and brought it to her chest, a round, soft sensation filling the palm of his hand. He could tell even over her blouse. She had a petite build, but quite the volume. While she wasn't large enough for his fingers to sink in, her youth granted her a certain suppleness.

The sensation filled his hand. Despite it being winter, her clothes were thin, and Diablo felt her warmth. She wasn't even wearing a bra under her shirt! The tips of his finger touched on a small protrusion.

"Aaah... You perv..." She showed him a lascivious smile.

How do I get out of this now...? What do I say to stop this?

Diablo writhed as Mercie's hand traveled downward, touching on something at the center of his trousers.

"My, I see you're all ready..."

"Uoh?! N-No..."

"Then...it's about time we settle this."

Her other hand approached Diablo's ear, then...*snap!* The sound of snapping fingers filled his ears. Mercie's eyes glowed with a mysterious light.

"Hypno," she whispered.

It felt as if cold water had spilled over Diablo's thoughts, which were enveloped with a pink-colored fog.

"M-Magic?!"

That same moment, the Demon Lord's Ring on his left hand lit up.

†

Mercie stood completely still and silent. Her eyes were open, but her expression was blank.

“H-Hey!” Diablo called out with surprise.

“...Yes?” she replied with a completely flat voice.

“Did you just use some sort of magic?” Diablo had no idea what was going on.

“...Yes.”

“Explain yourself.”

“...Hypno. It hypnotizes people... In my case, for three minutes.”

“Hypnosis...?”

“...It lets me plant commands in people’s heads, or make them think they did it with me when they really didn’t.”

Diablo sank deep into thought. To think the spell could let you give orders and falsify people’s memories! Sure it had the disadvantage of making the victim act weird, but it was still fairly powerful.

“What’s its activation requirement?”

“...Thirty seconds or more of direct physical contact.”

“Huh? But I didn’t touch you directly...”

He’d only fondled her breasts over her clothes—or so he was about to say, but then he remembered she’d been holding his hand the entire time. This also reminded him he’d touched a girl’s breasts, which, as inappropriate as it was in this situation, made him blush.

“Hmph...” Diablo shook his head, banishing the dirty thoughts from his mind. “That’s some pretty powerful magic, but its activation condition is difficult to perform. And status ailment spells can be resisted with one’s resistance stat.”

“...Men who are turned on...have low resistance.”

...Makes sense.

He’d never tested it, but it sounded plausible. It was a good thing he was able to reflect that spell. He’d come all this way to the capital, so having a girl like

her manipulate him with hypnosis would've been too pathetic.

After three minutes passed, Mercie came to with a start.

"H-Huh? What did I...?"

Diablo crossed his arms and sighed. "I never imagined that a flower-selling girl was using Hypno to pass off as a prostitute and swindle people out of their money..."

"Wh-What?!" Mercie reacted with flustered shock. "H-How did you... How did you find out...?!"

"Didn't I say I was a Demon Lord? A party trick would never work on me."

The Demon Lord's Ring had simply reflected it, but he didn't bother explaining that to her.

"N-No... S-Sorry... No... F-Forgive me..." She was in complete panic and dismay. She was shaking like a leaf. Diablo hadn't intended on frightening her that much...

"Aren't you a student of the mage academy?"

"Eek?! No... Don't tell the academy! I'll get expelled!"

So she was, same as the flower seller NPC from the game.

"If you don't want to get expelled, why are you doing something so foolish?"

"Ugh... My family... We're poor, and my mom... She doesn't earn enough to cover the teaching fees...and I didn't know I'd need so much money for the matriculation fees, and the tuition, too..."

Diablo clicked his tongue internally. So was this why the flower seller NPC was standing in the square during *Cross Reverie*'s event? Then sacrificed. There was no saving her. And if the story of the God of Destruction, Europa, raid boss event were being reenacted in this world...

I'll crush that rotten story to dust!

"Girl, if you do not wish to die, answer my question."

"Kya?! I'm gonna die?!"

“Answer me!”

“Y-Yesh...” she replied through shivering lips, tears in her eyes.

Honestly, he really didn’t intend to scare her like this...

“Have any students gone missing from the mage academy?”

“Huh...? Hm... Ah, yeah, there are. The teachers said so... And that we shouldn’t be going off alone.”

...Said the girl loitering outside alone, and late at night at that. The little fool.

I have to charge into the mage academy and stop the ritual! I’ll stop the culprit before he has enough sacrifices!

He turned his gaze toward Mercie, who was still shaking violently. He couldn’t have her repeating something this dangerous. Diablo took out the sack from his pouch again, offering it to her.

“Never repeat this foolishness again.”

“Huh? Huh?! Huuuh?!”

“You can have money if that’s what you need. But, if you need more, work for it *properly*.”

I’m telling her to work even though I was just a NEET in my old world...

That made him a touch embarrassed. Regardless, Mercie accepted the sack. Upon inspecting the coins inside, her face flushed red.

“U-Um... I... I don’t really know how to do any of this stuff, you know?!”

“That’s not why I’m giving you this money!”

“Th-Then why...?”

He didn’t want anything in return, but a thought did cross his mind.

“You will do as I tell you, if you wish to remain alive!”

Interlude

At Castle Grandiose—

A fragrant aroma wafted from somewhere within. The ivory wall curtains were quilted with golden threads and the large room was full of art and other assorted decorations. The old butler showing some guests around extended his hands, clad in white gloves, and continued his commentary.

“This portrait by Duke Reedlance was drawn in the thirty-fifth year of the Lyferian calendar, and stands as a masterpiece of realism. The sculpture over there was made before the country’s founding, and was discovered in a northern sorcerer’s tower. The works presented in this corridor were all carefully picked by Duke Bricken, who is known as an astute critic.”

“...Is that right?”

“Hm.”

Rem threw in a few agreeable responses every now and then, trying to maintain some façade of courtesy. Shera simply gave disinterested, absentminded reponses.

The two girls had arrived at Castle Grandiose and were now receiving the grand tour from the old butler.

“With the new year and his duties of visiting the royalty and other nobles for the festivities, His Majesty Delouche Xandros is extremely busy.”

“...They would want to celebrate His Majesty’s good health and the new year, I’m sure.” Rem gave the sort of praising response expected of her.

“Who’s Delouche?” Shera tilted her head. As expected, this earned her a severe glare from the butler.

Rem sighed. “Shera, the current king of Lyferia is His Majesty, Delouche Xandros.”

“Oh, right. I thought I’d heard that name somewhere...”

“...Didn’t they teach you how to behave in front of royalty when you were a

child?”

“Well, I wouldn’t normally leave the kingdom after becoming queen. Greenwood’s a small country and we don’t get too many visitors from the outside.”

“...How peaceful.”

“Isn’t it?!”

It seemed sarcasm had a way of going over Shera’s head. Instead, the elven queen asked, “Weren’t you always an adventurer, Rem? How do you know all this courtesy stuff?”

“...I left home after my parents passed away, but my family usually had dealings with royalty and other nobles.”

The butler then stopped in his place, directing a careful gaze at Rem.

“Miss Rem Galleu...could you be of the Gadou clan...?”

“...I’ve left my hometown behind, but...my uncle serves as this generation’s instructor of the arts.”

“Unbelievable...” The butler then corrected his stance.

“Huh?!” Shera exclaimed with her eyes round.

Rem remained silent.

“What’s the Gadou clan?!”

“...So that’s the issue. I see... Well, I will tell you one day.”

“You better tell me before I forget I asked, you hear?!”

“...If you only care that much, I may as well not tell you.”

“But I wanna know more about you!” Shera enthusiastically persisted with her absurd demands.

Rem sighed again. The butler then opened the door at the end of the hall.

“This is a visitors’ section of the castle. It is meant to house royalty, nobles, and other important guests. I do believe you will not find yourself inconvenienced here in any way.”

“Whoooaaa!” Shera exclaimed at the sight of the luxurious interior as she walked into the room.

A soothing aroma filled the air. The curtains were embroidered and the furniture all had delicate, attractive designs. The canopied beds were spacious, there was a large table and sofa, and the sideboard was stacked with glasses and bottles of wine.

“If you are ever in need of anything else, please ring this bell...” The butler motioned toward a bell sitting on the table.

“You mean this?” Shera rang the bell, which chimed loudly.

Rem moaned and cradled her face. Before long, a maid entered the room and bowed politely.

“May I be of service?”

Shera gave a small “oh wow...” and scratched the back of her ear. The butler coughed dryly.

“As you can see, a maid will quickly come to tend to you.”

Feeling it’d be rude to call her over for no reason, Rem asked the maid for a cup of water. The maid bowed and walked away. The butler went on to explain how to use the toilet and bath...but seemed to not touch on the most pressing question.

“...I’m sure he’s busy, but how long do you think it would take before we receive an audience with His Majesty?”

“I believe you will have to wait for some ten days.”

“...Is that so?”

“Huh?! Ten days, as in, *ten* days?! That many?!”

Shera’s shock came as no surprise. They’d only visited because King Delouche personally requested them. But that was simply how matters were when it came to royalty. Rem didn’t raise any complaints, as understanding as ever.

“If you ever need anything, we can bring anyone right over to your room, be it a tailor, beautician, musician, troubadour...” The old butler said apologetically.

“Your food will be prepared from the finest ingredients in all the land in the hands of the most skilled chefs in the kingdom, and will be available to you at all times throughout the day. And, of course, you may help yourselves to our world-class wine. In addition, our Castle Grandiose houses more works of art than you could hope to see in a mere ten days, and I would be glad to show you around.”

“...Are we forbidden from leaving?”

“You may leave the castle, but if you do, your audience with the king will be delayed.”

So they’d essentially lose their spot in line.

“...Can we write letters?”

“Why of course, you are free to send letters out. We will provide you with pens and papers should you request them. However, you must leave the sealing to us.”

“...I see.”

So they could write letters, but their contents would be inspected. This meant that if they were to contact anyone, it’d be best if it were High Priest Lumachina. Rem thought it’d be wise to not establish a connection between Alicia, the imperial knight, or Horn, the student, with the self-proclaimed Demon Lord Diablo.

The butler bowed and closed the door to the room. Shera dove onto her bed.

“So soooft~”

“...Phew... It seems you still need to learn some manners, don’t you?”

“...Zzz...”

“...You’re asleep already?!”

It seemed they’d have to stay inside the castle for the time being...

Chapter 4: Detective Horn?

Shortly before Diablo met the flower seller girl, year 165 of the Lyferian calendar, first month, sixth day— The clock tower's bell tolled, informing one and all that it was noon. The grounds of the capital's mage academy were vast. The campus popularly known as the Blue Brick Building was a new building made of pearly white pillars and blue bricks. One of its many classrooms was the middle school wing's first year, class F classroom. The desk at the back of the class and next to the window was Horn's seat.

The students were divided by their grades, with the honor students being in class A, while class F was said to be where all the bad students were sent to. Horn had entered during the middle of the school year and had hardly studied any magic before enrolling, so her skills as a sorcerer were nonexistent. She was actually a level 80 thief...but she promised her guardian, Lumachina, that she'd keep that fact hidden.

With the day's lessons having been concluded, Horn's bespectacled female teacher delivered a message.

"It's become clear today that we've lost contact with several of our students. We currently do not know of their whereabouts."

The students stirred as the classroom filled with whispers and murmurs. Picking up useful information out of the noise and tumult was one of a thief's basic skills, and Horn picked up on what they were saying without even focusing: a student from the high school wing's second year class A and two other students from the third year class A had gone missing.

Three more...

A tiny girl, small enough to sit in the palms of Horn's hands, sat on Horn's desk, crossing her legs on Horn's pencil case which served as her impromptu chair.

"It's ten peeps missing now, right? Isn't it, like, really bad for the school? Like, totes bad."

Her name was Babalon, a self-proclaimed level-up goddess from another

world. If Diablo could see her, he'd recognize at a glance that she was wearing what looked like a high school uniform from his world. But only the owner of the Holy Grail could see and hear Babalon, and that owner was Horn.

Horn nodded at Babalon's words. There was probably some incident going on. Ten students were missing already, all of them girls. It started at the end of last year, and while it was interrupted during the long break at the start of the year, it resumed on the first day of school this year with three more disappearances. Did they go missing during the holiday?

"Quiet!" The teacher clapped her hands in a loud, menacing fashion. "Everyone, remember to never act alone, even on academy grounds. Understood?"

Everyone gave a collective "yes, ma'am," but only a handful of them would actually be that obedient. Horn was certainly part of the group that wouldn't. The teacher left the classroom, and after everyone dispersed, Horn headed for the exit without anyone to accompany her.

At the corridor connecting the school buildings, Horn made way for another ward. Strictly speaking, though, the bag in her hands contained the Holy Grail, and Babalon sat on her shoulder, so she wasn't completely alone.

"Hey, hey, Horn, my girl, what do you think the culprit's like?"

"...You think they were kidnapped?"

No one else could see Babalon, so whenever Horn spoke to her it looked like she was talking to herself. Not wishing to be seen as a gloomy weirdo, Horn spoke in a soft voice, while trying to move her lips as little as possible. Thanks to Babalon being a blabbermouth, Horn had more than enough practice to master that particular skill.

"It's totes gotta be kidnapping! Like, legit! I dunno about the three chicks today, but, like, the seven other girls didn't leave notes and never consulted with their girlfriends."

"...That's what the rumors say, yeah."

There were many students at the academy, but it was still a private school. With the whole matter looking like such an incident, rumors spread like wildfire

that this wasn't a disappearance, but a kidnapping case.

"Incident♪ It's an incident♪*"*

Why did Babalon look so happy about that?

"...I kinda want to focus on my magic studies instead."

"You've got, like, zero compatibility for it though?"

"Stop it! We don't know that yet!" Horn raised her voice despite herself, prompting another student passing by in the corridor to look at her with a jump.

Giggling apologetically, Horn sped up her steps as if she were running away.

"Did you see their face?!" Babalon cackled obnoxiously. *"My sides!"*



“...When am I gonna get uncursed again?”

“I’m not a cuuurse, I’m the goddess *of the Holy Grail.”*

“So it’s gonna last forever, huh...” Horn sighed.

“If you let go of the grail, I’ll just go somewhere else, y’know?”

“But you haven’t leveled me up yet.”

“Right, riiight. Well, I’m bored stiff waiting for my next owner. It’s a win-win situation, y’know?”

Babalon had the ability to give the Holy Grail’s owner a one-time increase in their level, in exchange for two liters of a virgin’s blood. While Horn certainly fulfilled the virgin requirement...losing two liters of blood was fatal. That said, she couldn’t just sacrifice someone for it. On the other hand, though, letting go of the grail felt like a waste. And so, Horn remained haunted by Babalon with nothing to show for it.

Horn visited the staff ward. The capital’s mage academy didn’t have a singular faculty office where all the teachers were gathered as the teachers were all skilled sorcerers who conducted active magic research, and had rooms that served as their retreats. First, she decided to visit her homeroom teacher’s laboratory, but...

“Huh. She’s out.”

“What did you need that annoying four-eyes for, anyway?”

“...I wanted to ask her about the missing students. I can’t focus on my lessons in peace with them on my mind.”

“Whoa, so annoying. Just leave it to the cops.”

Leave it to what now?

Babalon had a habit of using unfamiliar words, on top of her manner of speaking already being as erratic as it was.

“...There are no adventurers around, and even though the imperial knights showed up to investigate a few times, they didn’t solve anything.”

“Bummer.”

“But rumors say the old campus... Ah...”

Horn shuffled over to the edge of the hallway. She’d met the old lady walking down the hallway once before, in her interview before she was enrolled in the academy. This was the academy’s headmistress, who stopped in front of Horn.

“You’re...”

“G-Good day.”

“Yo, yo, yo!” Taking advantage of the fact that the headmistress couldn’t see or hear her, Babalon gave a nonsensical greeting.

“I believe you were Horn, correct?” The headmistress fixed her monocle. “Do you need to ask your teacher something?”

Her voice was hoarse, but her pronunciation was impeccable. Horn thought to make an excuse, but then decided that this was actually a great chance to consult the headmistress.

“I... Um, I was worried about the students that went missing...so I wanted to check the register. But I need a teacher’s approval for that.”

“*You’re* looking into the matter?”

“Ah...”

She thought the headmistress would scold her for doing this despite being a mere student. There was a case afoot, so she wanted to investigate it—it was just an adventurer’s habit. Horn had only just turned thirteen and was currently a student of the mage academy, but before this, she was indeed an adventurer. No matter what, an adventurer defended the races from all manner of threats.

“Come with me.” The headmistress nodded.

“...Huh?”

The headmistress motioned for Horn to follow, and the two entered the headmistress’s office.

†

The room was more modest than Horn had expected. There was no luxurious furniture, and despite being larger, it wasn’t much different from a room in the

student dorms. Her desk was large, and the walls were covered with bookshelves stuffed with complicated-looking books.

The headmistress sat on an oak chair, placed her hands on the desk, and crossed her fingers together.

“How much have you researched this incident so far?”

“Seven went missing last year, and three more today. It’s likely kidnapping, and the reason people think that is because they didn’t leave any notes or tell their friends anything about wanting to run away... At least, that’s the rumor. And people say they saw them heading toward the old campus building.”

The old campus building wasn’t currently in use. It was locked and secured at all times, and no one was allowed to enter without a teacher’s permission.

“The imperial knights are inspecting the old campus building as well.”

“I figured.”

Not only that, they’d combed through the entire grounds and still didn’t find anything.

“But *I* haven’t looked around yet,” Horn said.

The headmistress seemed surprised. “Right... I’ve heard a bit about you from your guardian.”

“Ah...”

“I don’t intend on telling anyone else, but...you’re actually a renowned adventurer, correct?”

Renowned?!

She wanted to deny it, but thought that it’d be best to avoid a misunderstanding for now.

“Th-That’s right.”

“From what I hear, you made contributions in saving a town in the west from the Demon Lord’s army, as well as exposing corruption from within the church.”

“Well, all I really did was fight some paladins...”

“Pffft,” Babalon cackled. *“All you did was run around and get cut down within an inch of your life.”*

Horn went silent and turned red.

“Frankly speaking, it’s my and the other teachers’ jobs to solve this problem for the academy...” The headmistress closed her eyes. “But...could you please lend us your help?”

“Leave it to me!”

Feeling exactly like she’d accepted a quest as an adventurer, Horn was filled with a sense of elation. Having the headmistress’s approval made inspecting the academy much easier, too.

“This is the academy’s master key.” The headmistress handed it to her. “If there’s any place you can’t enter with that, come speak to me again.”

The headmistress had also arranged for someone to cooperate with Horn’s investigation. She excitedly accepted the request to help resolve the incident.

“Wait, isn’t that...?!” Babalon exclaimed enthusiastically. *“Isn’t it that, like, ‘One truth prevails,’ ‘In the name of my grandfather’ kinda thing?! I’m so hyped, let’s gooo!”*

I don’t know what you’re talking about, but stop saying things that’ll get me in trouble!

A sudden chill ran down Horn’s spine...

“Ah?!” Horn wheeled around with a bad feeling. The door to the headmistress’s room opened and someone waltzed in, without having knocked first. Horn braced herself.

The one who entered was a blond man clad in a crimson longcoat. He was tall and slim; an elf, perhaps?

“You’re in charge of this academy, correct?” He glared at the headmistress with clear, blue eyes.

The headmistress narrowed her own, her golden eye gleaming under her monocle.

“Who might you be? I don’t recall expecting any guests.”

“I am Thanatos the Undying, of the Order of Palace Knights.”

Horn stiffened. When she first arrived in the capital, she’d met them once. She didn’t really notice because she’d been watching the parade back then...but Alicia had told her they were dangerous folk after the fact. Rem also told her that they’d killed the members of the church’s Cardinal Authority.

“This entire area is filled with foul magic...” Thanatos’s gaze scoured the room. “I am looking for its source.”

“On whose order? The academy has a right to autonomy...”

“I couldn’t care less for your ‘rights’ or your ‘autonomy.’ Take up your complaints with His Majesty. The Order of Palace Knights have full authority to eliminate any who pose a menace to this country. That means our word is as good as the king’s orders. If you stand in my way, I will show no mercy, no matter who you may be.”

“I see. Very well... I will allow you to inspect the academy. But in return, I will report any outrageous acts you commit here to His Majesty.”

“Do not get in my way, and instruct your subordinates as such.”

His attitude was utterly oppressive. The man hung up the blackened longsword sheathed at his thigh, then swept his coat as if to make a show of it, and turned around. Having said his piece, Thanatos left the headmistress’s office, the door shutting loudly behind him.

“Step on a LEGO, you annoying a-hole! Go stand in the middle of an intersection! Creep!” Babalon pumped her fists in annoyance: left, left, right.

“I don’t really care who solves the case so long as it’s resolved.” Horn shrugged. “But with him around, it just looks like we’ll have more trouble on our hands...”

“That is true...” the headmistress agreed. “However, he is true in saying that suspicious magical energy has been suffusing the campus. It is being skillfully obfuscated, so we cannot discern where it has been coming from.”

“Even for you, headmistress?”

“It would take some time even for me to find the source.”

“If the magical energy has to do with this incident...it means the culprit knows he’ll be recognized eventually...”

So they probably didn’t need much more time. Hurrying along with the investigation would be for the best.

†

Horn visited the staff ward’s special reference room, where the information on the missing students was supposedly stored. The headmistress said that, in place of herself, being too busy to help out directly, she would have someone help Horn out with the investigation. That person was one female student with long, lustrous black hair. The girl was thin, slender, and tall—a human despite looking like an elf.

“My name is Angeline, from the high school wing’s third year class A. I serve as the student council president. The headmistress specifically asked me to help out with an investigation... Who might you be?”

She spoke like a boy, but her voice sounded angelic.

“I’m Horn, from the middle school wing’s first year class F. There are some, err, circumstances...”

“So I guess you’re not just some washout.”

“The class F students are just a bit bad with magic, that’s all.”

“And people like that get called washouts in a mage academy, but... Nevermind. I want to find the missing students, too, no matter what. Let me know if there’s anything you want to know.”

“Then I’ll start with the missing students’ profiles.”

“I have them all summed up here.”

Angeline extended her hand toward the bookshelf and chanted a spell and what sounded like a sequence of numbers. A flurry of pages suddenly flew off the shelf and landed in her hand.

“Whoa! That’s awesome!” Horn exclaimed with round eyes.

“Huh? No, it’s really not that unusual... Everyone can do this by their third year of high school... L-Look, just forget that and look at these documents. I tried to summarize what we know about the missing students.”

“Great work!”

Spreading out the pages over the long table, Horn and Angeline took a seat and read through the documents. Half of the missing students were third years from the high school wing and had a few similarities between them, but the biggest one was that they were all high achievers: students from class A, all with vast magical energy. Their races were diverse, with demons and grasswalkers seemingly making up the most of them, but there were elves and humans mixed in too. Most importantly, though, was that they’d all received lectures from the same teacher.



Incidentally, the mage academy allowed it's students to choose whatever lectures they wished to take. Their division of classes only mattered during compulsory subjects and school events, but they were essentially free to pursue whatever knowledge they wanted to learn, assuming their schedule accommodated for such lectures, and were permitted to pursue independent research. So long as they cleared the graduation exam, they would receive their diploma from the academy.

"Professor Bihyak from the ritual magic branch..." Horn pointed at a name appearing on the page. "He's a demon, right?"

"He looks totes suspicious! He's got a pervy look in his eyes!" Babalon, who was sitting on Horn's shoulder, began spouting nonsense again upon seeing Professor Bihyak's picture.

"...So you're curious about him," Angeline said uncomfortably.

"It's not that, he's just super suspicious! All of the missing students attended his lectures."

"Professor Bihyak is one of the academy's top teachers. His theory on ritual magic is on the cutting edge of magical research worldwide, so it makes sense many of class A's students study under him."

In cases where there were more applicants for a lecture than open spots, students from class A were preferentially picked. Those who had higher grades received such privileges.

Horn read Angeline's expression. "You really look up to him, don't you?"

"...Yes... I won't deny it."

"But we can't ignore him in regards to all the missing students," Horn proclaimed.

Angeline hung her head. After pondering for a moment, she parted her lips to speak.

"Actually..."

"Yes?"

“Around the end of last year, Professor Bihyak asked me to help him with an experiment after school.”

“Did something happen when you did?”

“Well, I couldn’t attend because I was busy with a student council meeting.”

“Ah...”

“So I had another student help him in my place... A childhood friend of mine, and another brilliant student.”

“Don’t tell me she...”

“Went missing, yes.” Angeline pointed at one of the students’ pages.

“...I see.”

Horn rose from her seat. “I’ll go look into Professor Bihyak!”

“Hold on...”

“I’m not gonna barge into his lab or anything, I just want to check things out first.”

“I understand that, but I want to come with you, so please wait.”

“Why do we have to wait?!”

Angeline gathered up the documents and put them back on the bookshelf with a slightly bothered face.

“I can cast a spell to remove books from the shelf, but there are no spells for putting them back.”

“O-Oh... Sorry.”

They set their chairs back in place, and after making sure the windows were all locked and the drapes closed, they left the reference room behind them.

†

Three days after the two girls began their observations, in the afternoon—Horn had climbed up a tree, looking over the courtyard leading to the staff ward. She could see the entrance to Bihyak’s room from the window, which was closed with a drape during the day and at night. Sunlight could make a book’s

pages become discolored while magical ingredients spoiled when exposed to sunlight, so that wasn't entirely unusual in and of itself.

I promised Lumachina I wouldn't use my thief skills, but...

It was after school and she'd officially accepted the headmistress's request as an adventurer. She'd likely be forgiven for this.

Horn used her Hiding skill to mask her presence. If a level 80 thief actively tried hiding themselves, a sorcerer would stand little chance of detecting them, though things may be different if they summoned a beast with detection abilities.

"Horn!" Babalon tapped Horn's cheek.

Horn, who'd carelessly dozed off, woke up with a jolt. A female student entered the door at the furthest end of the hall, entering Bihyak's room. It was six at night, and everything had already gone dark. Even if it were a teacher's laboratory, it being just the two of them so late after school felt problematic enough to Horn...and that was after the teachers instructed the students to not walk outside alone.

But if Horn were to just barge in here, she wouldn't be able to prove it had any connection to the abductions. They'd just be warned for their carelessness and that would be it. There was no point if they couldn't find the missing students.

Horn waited silently. If she were to go in front of the room, she could probably listen in on the conversation, but if they became too wary she could end up missing out on precious clues. She had to be as cautious as could be.

"Someone's coming out!"

"Looks like it."

Bihyak illuminated the dim corridor with a candlestick, clad in a crimson, hooded robe. It was a color sorcerers often used: the color of magical energy, of rusted metal, of dried blood. Bihyak had dark red hair with a few streaks of white. Deep wrinkles carved themselves into his face. He was a man with a piercing gaze. A striking tattoo extended from his right cheek to his forehead, proof of him being a demon. Demons were said to be born as a result of

humans mixing their blood with the Fallen. While it was only conjecture, it had once led to their race receiving a great deal of prejudice.

The man Horn respected the most, Diablo, was a demon, too, so Horn held no preconceived notions about the race in particular. Or rather, she had no intention of holding any, but here and now...

Looking at Bihyak from the side, he looked less like someone of the races and more like a Fallen.

Horn rubbed her eyes. Following in his footsteps was a female student, the same one who entered his laboratory a short while ago.

"...She's being controlled," Horn said, focusing her gaze at the girl's movements.

"Huh?" Babalon tilted her neck.

They were on the other side of the courtyard, so Horn's voice wouldn't reach them, but she whispered nonetheless.

"She's not walking the same as when she entered his lab. She's not dragging her feet as much."

"But that's good, isn't it?"

"Normal people usually have their minds get in the way of their walking. They keep looking around, so their stride is always a bit off-balance. The only ones who don't walk like that are soldiers and adventurers who were trained to walk effectively."

"Off-balance? But you can't, like, see that from this far away."

"Maybe if there was rain or fog, but at this distance it's the same as them being right in front of me."

"Whoa... Gross."

"Hey?!"

Thieves and seekers functioned as a party's eyes and ears, so having transcendent senses was a given for them.

Horn no longer had any reason to say on top of the tree, so she briskly got

down. As she landed, Angeline came out from a nearby thicket.

"How was it, Horn?"

"He moved. He should be coming out of the building soon, so I'll tail him."

"I'll... I'll come with you."

"Huh?"

"I won't cause you any trouble, but I need to save my best friend. And...I need to see with my own two eyes if Professor Bihyak really is the culprit."

Angeline said she respected the professor, and didn't want to believe he was the kidnapper.

"You're already causing us so much trouble, y'know?" Babalon said sharply. *"Can't you tell you're kinda interrupting right now? Gawd."*

This was probably because her actions and sense of responsibility as the student council president ended up getting her childhood friend involved. But Horn knew the feeling of wanting to do something and being too powerless to act all too well. She was the same as Horn was before.

Horn scratched her head. "All right. But stay behind me. You can't make any sounds, not even talk."

"I promise." Angeline nodded with a serious expression.

"Wait, hold up, Horn! Isn't this, like, a super bad idea?!"

"...I've got my Hide All skill. A level 80 thief can hide an entire party's presence."

"Oh, yeah, that lowkey cheating skill."

"...Is it really cheating?"

A level 80 sorcerer could summon creatures capable of fighting toe-to-toe with dragons, and warriors attained martial arts capable of slaying such summons. Reaching level 80 granted one skills capable of influencing group battles. In that regard, masking a party's presence didn't feel all that impressive. If anything, it felt insufficient. In Horn's case, she didn't reach such a high level as a result of her efforts, but from her subjugation contract with Diablo. The

black, leather collar bound around her neck gave her half of her master's level. However, if Diablo died, so would Horn.

I didn't gain that kinda experience...

Using an item to gain all those levels at once may have left her skills underdeveloped. If only she had some veteran thief to teach her how to properly utilize them...

Horn shook her head and those thoughts away.

I'm gonna become a sorcerer, just like Diablo!

That was her goal in life. But for now, she'd do what she could as an adventurer.

Bihyak and the female student had already left the staff ward. It was dark out, but that didn't matter much to Horn's eyes. She silently tailed after them...

†

The old campus— Professor Bihyak had led the female student to this two story stone structure behind academy grounds. It technically had a third floor if one were to consider the attic. Its light-blue-dyed shingles were dotted with holes. A window connected the passage between the attic and the roof.

Bihyak unlocked the front entrance, entering with the female student in tow. Horn stopped in her tracks, looking in from a tree's brush, watching the light of the candlestick retreat through the window. The light and shadows were just barely visible through the wooden, latticed window. She couldn't pick up on the details, but she could tell it was Bihyak from the pace of the steps, with the female student remaining faithfully in his footsteps, before they both entered a classroom.

"What do we do?" Horn was conflicted.

"You go in, that's what!" Babalon stuck out her fist.

"Hmm..."

Horn had heard that the imperial knights inspected the old campus building and didn't find anything. Still, Bihyak just led a female student to a classroom here for seemingly no reason.

Angeline leaned forward, her eyes filled with resolve, as if she were steeling herself and saying, “Let’s go!” Horn nodded and approached the old building cautiously, so as to not make any noise, and reached out to the old wooden door. Its hinges looked prone to creaking, so Horn opened it lightly, as if wind were enticing it open.

Compared to the dilapidated exterior, the interior wasn’t as damaged. Horn advanced down the corridor’s wooden floor, arriving at the classroom in the center of the first floor. A faint light emanated from the gap between the floor and the door.

Horn held her breath. Closing her eyes, she focused on her hearing; her dictation skill. Surprisingly enough, she couldn’t hear anything from inside the room except for one person breathing.

Just one...?

She could only hear Babalon on her shoulder and Angeline behind her. She couldn’t sense the female student’s presence... But she definitely saw the female student go into the building.

Horn reached for the door and pulled it open...

“Ah!”

†

The candlestick was the only thing illuminating the room, which was full of books piled up in every corner. The old professor was seated in one of the student’s seats with a book in his hand as he lifted up his eyes to look at Horn.

“Well, this is a surprise. What are you doing here?”

“Professor Bihyak...”

“Indeed. Do you need me for something? And just who are you?”

“Ah... I’m Horn. From first year class F.”

“I see.”

“And I’m Babalon! A level-up goddess from another world, teehee♪” Babalon introduced herself, knowing full well he could neither see nor hear her.

Angeline followed Horn into the room and lowered her head respectfully.

“You as well...?” Bihyak’s expression filled with surprise.

“I-I’m sorry...”

“I don’t know what business you have with me, but I cannot say I look too fondly on you chasing me out here. This building is off limits for students.”

“But!” Horn stepped forward reflexively. “Didn’t you just bring a student here with you?!”

“I came here by myself, young miss.”

“Wha...?!”

Horn looked around the classroom again. It was dark and only illuminated by the candlestick, but not to the extent where Horn couldn’t see another person. Heaps of piled up books littered the floor, but there didn’t seem to be anything else that could be related to magic.

“I use this classroom as a storeroom of sorts. With the headmistress’s approval, of course. Perhaps you mistook *that* for whoever you’re looking for?”

He pointed at a life-sized doll standing against the wall, which was clearly not the student. It had a cross section showing the internal organs of the races; an anatomical model, as it were. Inspecting it, Horn found it was indeed just a wooden model.

“My word...” Bihyak shrugged. “Pretending to be imperial knights when you’re so young? And you, too, Miss Student Council President?”

“I-I’m sorry!” Angeline went red with embarrassment.

Horn broke into a nervous sweat. She’d trailed him and walked in with confidence, but while the suspect was there, the female student had disappeared.

“C-Can I inspect the room...?”

“Do as you please. But if you come up with nothing, I will report you to your homeroom teacher.”

Horn nodded.

Less than an hour later, and despite a level 80 thief's careful inspection, she found nothing wrong with the room. No rotating walls, no trap doors in the floor or openings in the ceiling. She couldn't find any magical tricks in the room, either. Most of the magic tomes in the room were simply covered in dust, and Horn had Angeline inspect any that didn't. While their contents were fairly high-level, they weren't anything one couldn't buy at the market.

However, Horn did find what looked to be a girl's strand of hair, but with this having previously been used as an actual classroom, it wasn't unreasonable to find something like it lying around.

Horn hung her head in disappointment. Bihyak, still seated on the chair, waved his hand as if dismissing a misbehaving dog.

"Go back to your rooms... I haven't the time to waste on you."

"I-I'm so sorry!" Horn said through gritted teeth as she left the classroom.

Babalon looked like she wanted to tell her something, but her mouth remained shut for once.

Interlude

Horn left the classroom, but Angeline didn't follow after her immediately. Instead, she lowered her head respectfully to Professor Bihyak.

"I'm so terribly sorry for interrupting you while you're busy."

"This kind of behavior isn't very becoming of you."

"We were searching for the missing students at the headmistress's behest."

"Oh...? So that girl wasn't a run-of-the-mill student, was she?"

"Horn is apparently an adventurer."

"...It's hard to tell a grasswalker's age at a glance, but if she's in the middle school branch, she'd be younger than fifteen," Professor Bihyak murmured, almost to himself.

"But...I'm glad." Angeline heaved a sigh of relief.

"Oh?"

"You really are innocent after all, Professor Bihyak!"

"You suspected me...?"

"My apologies... But I did think that it was impossible from the start."

"Is that so?"

Angeline's cheeks flushed over a bit. "I don't know a single person who tries harder to do what is right, professor. I don't just think your lectures are wonderful, but I highly respect you as a person in general."

"Even though my lectures are overcomplicated and unfair?" Professor Bihyak shrugged.

"The students simply aren't trying hard enough."

"Heh..." He rose to his feet and walked over to her. He extended both his arms and wrapped them around the girl.

"Ah?!"

“Thank you. I’ve become too used to being suspected by others.”

The tips of Professor Bihyak’s fingers touched the nape of Angeline’s neck. Feeling his body heat filled her with emotion, and forced her breath to clog in her throat.

“P-Professor...?”

“When someone does believe in me, I’m moved all the more.”

“I...believe in you, Professor...”

Old as he may be, Professor Bihyak was still a man. And even as she thought that he was embracing a student like her, she couldn’t just reject him, not after she’d told him she believed in him... Even though things were completely different, the atmosphere didn’t allow that. The professor didn’t seem to be doing anything other than embracing her, so Angeline surrendered herself to him. With both of their bodies mingling, she’d grown a bit sweaty despite the winter cold.

“Professor...”

“Yes, it’s about time.”

She thought he’d let go of her, but his embrace grew even tighter.

“Ah?!”

Bihyak brought his mouth to Angeline’s ear, his lips brushing against her cheek.

“The touch of a human’s skin is a sensation I can grow used to...”

“Professor...?!”

“Hypno.”

Angeline’s consciousness sank into darkness. As the female student stood frozen in place, Bihyak revealed his true colors.

“Heheheh... A student council member not being able to resist a hypnosis spell is laughable. But, well, after such prolonged contact, that much is obvious...”

Angeline stood silent.

“And to think they brought an adventurer into the mix...” He clicked his tongue. “Damn headmistress, you’re better off staying focused on your petty research.”

Bihyak then reached his hand out to Angeline, who was standing as if she were asleep with her eyes open. He caressed her cheek and ran his fingers through her raven-colored hair.

“You said you believed in me, yes?”

“...I believe in you.”

“You are brilliant, yet stupid all the same. But that is good... I have need to hasten my plans. I’ll have you help me.”

“...Understood.”

Chapter 5: Stopping a Ritual

On the morning of the fifth day of the first month— An air of unrest like no other settled over the mage academy: the student council president had gone missing.

This rumor began in the high school branch, and spread so quickly that, by noon, not a single soul remained that hadn't heard of it. All the lectures became self-study classes, and the instructors were all called into an emergency meeting in the faculty ward.

The students of the middle school branch's class F were as restless as everyone else. Everyone was overcome with anxiety. Some spoke openly of it while others tried to joke around, and there were those who were angry at the whole situation. Overall, the classroom was in a state of chaos. Only Horn, sitting in the corner, was quiet.

"Kuh..."

She felt all too keenly that it was her failure that led to this situation.

When it was time for lunch break, Horn's homeroom teacher arrived. Not bothering to shout at the noisy students for silence, she walked over to Horn.

"The headmistress is calling for you."

"...All right."

"Did you do something?"

"...I... I *couldn't* do anything."

"Horn..." Babalon looked up at Horn anxiously.

"Still... I'll make this right. Somehow..."

She told her homeroom teacher she may have to leave class early today and grabbed her leather bag, heading toward the faculty ward. She walked down the connecting corridor when a man in a crimson robe approached from the opposite direction.

Bihyak!

He closed the distance, step by step. At this point, Horn wasn't suspicious—she was convinced. But she didn't have even a strand of evidence.

She glared at him. "I'll never forgive you."

"Like you can do anything about it, anyway," Bihyak said without even sparing a glance, disappearing into the middle school building.

†

Horn was frustrated, but had no idea what to do. How was she going to explain this to the headmistress?

Walking with her head occupied in her own worries, Horn found herself in front of the headmistress's door before she knew it. She knocked, and upon hearing the headmistress say, "Come in," she opened the door.

The room was as plain as it was before, but the headmistress wasn't alone this time. Seated on the sofa...

A demon clad in a black cloak who had unsettling horns growing from his head, turned a sharp, cold glare in her direction. His lips softened a bit; Horn thought she was dreaming.

"B-Boss!" she said through shivering lips.

Waving at her from Diablo's side was a grasswalker, the guildmaster of Faltra's Adventurers' Guild, if Horn recalled correctly.

"It's good to see you again! I'm Sylvie. Do you remember me?"

"O-Oh, yes. It's good to see you, too." Horn bowed her head.

"I see you're already acquainted." The headmistress nodded.

"That's right."

"Imagine my surprise. This man, Diablo, is apparently the hero who repelled the Demon Lord that attacked the city of Faltra."

Horn had heard of it in rumor only. The Demon Lord awakened in the west, calling itself the Demon Overlord. Leading a Fallen army of unprecedented proportions, it destroyed city after city in the former Demon Lord's domain. The races seemed unlikely to win, with it eventually arriving in the capital.

But an adventurer had defeated this fearsome Demon Overlord! A demon sorcerer to be exact. The stories didn't specify his name, but Horn was convinced it was Diablo.

"I brought him here!" a female student Horn had just noticed exclaimed with a smug smile. "You better be thankful!"

"Who're you?" Horn turned her attention to the girl.

"Talking so casually to your senior... Remember my name. I'm Mercie, from the high school ward's year 2 class A. Though who knows if a class F like you will even still be here come next year..."

"Ugh..." Horn raised her head in defiance, but decided to drop it for the moment.

"A renowned adventurer like Miss Horn, a hero like Sir Diablo, and Miss Sylvie, an Adventurers' Guild's guildmaster." The headmistress smiled broadly. "Having the three of you here is so encouraging. I do hope you can locate the missing students."

"Huh?!" Mercie stared at Horn with shock. "*Renowned* adventurer?!"

Diablo tilted his head in confusion while Sylvie covered her mouth and snickered.

Aaah, so awkwaaard!

The only reason the headmistress thought Horn was renowned was because Lumachina had said as much, and she probably truly believed that. But being called a "renowned adventurer" in front of Diablo and Sylvie, who knew her real abilities full well...

Frankly, she wished the earth would open up and swallow her.

"Hmph... I'll handle everything," Diablo said.

The headmistress nodded, and Horn found herself trembling. There wasn't a hint of kindness to his words, and there was even a frightening tinge to them, but she honestly found that dependable in its own way.

†

Leaving the headmistress's office, Horn led the way to the special reference room. Very few students were allowed to enter there.

Angeline wasn't there anymore, and none of the teachers were present either. Only Diablo and Sylvie accompanied her; Mercie was gone.

Did she even have anything to do with this to begin with?

If she were from second year class A, she must've been an honors student. So how did someone like Mercie come to know Diablo? The details behind that tugged at Horn's curiosity, but she needed to focus on the main topic for now.

"Um... So, to sum it up, students have been going missing in the academy."

"How many?"

"Ten students. Ah, well, it's twelve, as of this morning."

"Hmph... Not thirteen then?"

"Huh? Yeah... There's definitely only twelve students missing."

"...I suppose it's not all exactly the same," Diablo said pensively. "Or maybe I just beat them to the punch...?"

"I looked into it, and I think a teacher named Bihyak is the suspect here," Horn resumed her explanation. "I tailed him and saw him go into the old campus building with a female student."

"Oh? The old campus building?"

"I thought there was something fishy going on, so I went in after them..."

"Don't tell me you didn't find anything..." Diablo said dubiously.

"Ayup..." Horn clenched her teeth, recalling last night's events.

"And?" Diablo looked pensive again. "There was *nothing* in the building? What about the other classrooms?"

"Nothing, not as far as I could see..."

"If a level 80 thief couldn't find anything after combing the place, there's probably nothing there." Sylvie nodded. "It's a different story if there were an illusion set in place."

“That didn’t happen, for sure.” Horn could say as much with confidence because Babalon was with her. While she may have just been a self-proclaimed goddess from another world, apparently no manner of magic influenced her. If anyone tried using magic to fool Horn, Babalon would be able to see through it.

“Heheheh... There’s no fooling Babalon’s watchful eye, or, like, something!” Babalon, who’d been sitting in Horn’s bag, stuck out her head and commented.

“The student council president, Angeline, was with me at the time...” Horn continued. “But she’s been missing since this morning.”

“Were you with her until you went back to the dorms?” Sylvie asked to confirm.

“No... I went back alone and Angeline stayed behind...”

“Aww, yikes. That was a big blunder. Both bringing an amateur on your quest, *and* not ensuring her safety.”

“...Yeah. You’re totally right.” Horn hung her head.

Her disappointment made her lose sight of the most important thing. She’d become aware of how, even with her high-level being, she was still an inexperienced, novice adventurer.

Diablo seemed to be contemplating something as he muttered to himself. Horn could pick up on what he was saying with her incredible sense of hearing, but he was speaking in a tongue that didn’t sound like it was from Lyferia, so she couldn’t make sense of anything he was saying.

At times, Diablo’s expression even became that of not a terrifying Demon Lord or a practiced sorcerer, but of a child engrossed in a game.

Diablo eventually lifted his face with determination.

“Since he’s making his identity known so openly, I suppose we should assume we don’t have much time left. Originally, the final boss would appear once we storm the old campus building.”

“Huh?”

Ignoring Horn’s confusion, Diablo started giving instructions. “We might be too late, Sylvie.”

“I gotcha. So, what you told me this morning...”

“Yes. Urgently.”

“Leave it to me! I’m off!”

Apparently they’d already decided on what to do next ahead of time, because Sylvie left the room in a hurry.

†

Horn showed Diablo around the mage academy. He needed to have a grasp of the place’s structure in his head. He wanted to know the exact layout of the buildings and what places people gathered in.

They went out into the courtyard, and Diablo eyed the old campus building.

“What’s behind there?”

“A small mountain. There’s a thicket, too... And a shed with some cleaning tools, a well, a dump for firewood...”

“A well?”

“It’s old, so no one uses it anymore.”

“Hmm...”

Horn couldn’t get a handle on what did and didn’t catch Diablo’s interest.

“What’s wrong?”

“Europa is an earth and water element monster.”

“...You-rope-a?” Horn cocked her head quizzically.

“Forget it.” Diablo cut off his explanation and walked off. But just as he tried to head for the old campus building...

A single man walked up to them from the direction of the high school wing. He was a blond elf, dressed in a red long coat.

“The palace knight!” Horn stood on guard.

“Oh?” Diablo’s lips contorted.

The man in the red coat stopped before them, as if to stand in their way. A

sharp glare glazed over his eyes.

“I am Thanatos the Undying, of the Order of Palace Knights,” he said menacingly. He fluttered the hem of his red coat dramatically as if to show off his blackened longsword.

Diablo’s breath caught in his throat for a moment.

“Hm... You’ve quite the unique tastes, don’t you? But surely you introduced yourself knowing you’ve just come face to face with the Demon Lord Diablo?”

He really just called himself a Demon Lord!

Horn was concerned if this would end well...

“A Demon Lord?!” His eyes widened. “Ah... So *you* are Diablo. I see... The rumors of the Black Hero were true, then.”

“Black Hero? Heh... People do append the most tasteless aliases possible to me.”

Thanatos pointed squarely at Diablo. “I do not acknowledge you. Your eyes are those of one who brings ruin to the races. When the time comes and you reveal yourself for who you truly are, know that I, Thanatos the Undying, will be there to claim your head.”

Having made his proclamation, he bent his extended finger back in an odd manner, pointing at his own face. Diablo responded by covering half his own face with his hand, his bloodshot yet sharp glare peeking through the gap between his fingers.

“Ha! The likes of you are no match for me. The day you pull that black sword against me is the day you will garner a taste of bottomless despair.”

“Damnable Demon Lord... So you’ve noticed my demonic blade. As worthy of your name, I see!”

““Heh heh heh, ahahaha!””

They both began exchanging stifled cackles. Horn looked at the two of them with a complicated expression.

These two... Are they...?!

Babalon chimed in, with a similar expression on her face.

“Are they, like, actually getting along?”

No, it couldn’t be. Two palpable, murderous intents were clashing, sparks dancing through the air as this volatile situation was unfolding...but somehow, it felt oddly calm and friendly.

Thanatos the Undying left, leaving behind what was probably his idea of a cool parting line. Where he was headed was a mystery. He’d been searching for some “malevolent magical energy” since the other day, but he likely hadn’t pinpointed its source yet. Even the headmistress said it would take time to identify where it was coming from, so it probably wasn’t a simple matter.

I guess it’s fine, since he hasn’t actually caused any problems...

Her current appraisal of Thanatos was that he was some weirdo prowling about the academy, and Horn chose to leave it at that for now.

The clock tower’s bell rang. Diablo glared at the old campus building.

“I should check it out before it gets dark. Now would be a good time.”

“You sure? Sylvie isn’t back yet.”

“Not a problem. Knowing Sylvie, she’ll make it by the time we’ll need her.”

She could tell he trusted the other grasswalker from his tone.

I hope Diablo can trust me that much someday, Horn thought.

But to accomplish that, she’d have to focus on the task ahead.

†

“So you’re checking the old campus building?”

Diablo nodded. “Just to be safe.”

They used the master key they’d borrowed from the headmistress to unlock the old campus building, opening it with a loud creak. Last time Horn entered here, she tried her hardest not to make any noise, but that wasn’t something they were mindful of now. Even when they checked during the day, there didn’t seem to be any hidden passages or secret doors.

“Over here, Boss.”

Horn’s hands clenched into fists automatically. It was the classroom Bihyak used as a storeroom. It looked no different, with the books piled up, tools related to magic all in a row, and the anatomical model leaning against the wall.

Diablo inspected the floor. “There’s no magic circle here.”

“I checked, too, just in case.”

Even after moving the books around, there were no traces of a magic circle. Diablo nodded and moved to the opposite side of the classroom, inspecting the windows.

“Hmm...”

“What is it?”

“You said there was nothing set up in here.”

“Ayup.”

“Then the only way the female student could have come out...” He opened the window. “That’d be through here, don’t you think?”

“W-Well, yeah... You would think that, but...”

“Speak your mind. I’ll allow it.”

“Um... There’s just that mountain and shed behind the building. And I checked there, too, of course.”

“Then let’s check it again.”

Diablo flung his body out the window and into the area behind the old campus building. Horn followed after him in a hurry. The building’s other side was shady and dim, with the undergrowth gradually growing thicker until it led into a thicket of trees. Most of the trees were wilted, though, due to the winter weather.

They carefully checked the mountain, but there was nowhere anyone could hide.

Diablo inspected the ground. “There aren’t any tracks, either... But it looks like many people have passed by here...”

There were no footprints left because of the undergrowth, so how did he know...?

“How can you tell?”

“See how green the grass is over here? It’s brown over there.” Diablo pointed at the ground near the window.

“Oh, you’re right... So the grass in that spot got stepped on more?”

“No. With short grass, being stepped on promotes growth. Its vitality increases.”

“Really?! That’s amazing... You really do know everything, Boss.”

Horn was positively impressed with Diablo’s vast knowledge, but he simply shrugged it off.

“...Well...I just picked it up from some small talk during a distribution...”

“Distri-boo-shun?”

Sometimes he’d say words she didn’t fully recognize. *He’s similar to Babalon in that regard,* Horn noted to herself.

“If you head straight for the mountain, I imagine there’s a trail back there. But seeing as they headed out through the window...” Diablo inspected the undergrowth.

“You’re saying the missing students went out this window to get to the mountain? But, why would they do that...?”

“Maybe he was scared of being followed?” Diablo glanced in Horn’s direction. “A demon sorcerer’s detection skill is incredibly low. If a grasswalker thief was following him, he wouldn’t be able to tell.”

“Ugh...” Horn lamented her underestimation of the culprit’s planning.

What other reason would he have to go into the old campus building when it was already known it was being investigated? The regret weighed on Horn’s heart. But a certain doubt also surfaced in her mind.

“But there’s nowhere to hide that many people behind the old campus building.”

Diablo's gaze fell on the shed, then he peeked into the well. Horn did the same, even if her short stature made it harder for her to look.

Wait, could they be in the well?!

But the old well was entirely dry. All they could see was the earth at its bottom. It was about as high as three adult human males, making the building's roof closer to them than the bottom of the well. Moss grew all over the stony interior surface.

There didn't seem to be any tunnels or other hidden passages inside. If there were a single missing student in there—to say nothing of several of them—they'd definitely be spotted.

"Phew..." Horn sighed with relief. It was a shame they weren't there, but she didn't want to see twelve students stuffed in such a claustrophobic space.

"Horn..." Diablo raised a hand. "Get back."

"Huh?"

"The moss... It's supposed to grow at the bottom of the well."

"Ah..."

Come to think of it, there was moss all over the stone surfaces, but...

Why is the ground at the bottom of the well so clean?

Diablo began chanting a spell.

†

Diablo charged up his spell.

I don't have any proof, but this spot feels off... I have to make sure.

"Gather forth, o light—Shining Lance! More! *More!*"

A spear of light formed from his extended hand. It was a somewhat unique spell, so it was slow to appear. The spear itself was the length of a javelin, but this spell enabled one to make it larger by pouring copious amounts of magical energy into it, increasing its damage output and duration. As a result, the spear in Diablo's hand had doubled in size.

“Come on!”

It had become long enough to reach the old campus building’s roof, making it less of a spear and more like a battering ram.

“Wh-Whoooaaa...” Horn shuddered.

“Pierce through—crush! Shining Lance!” Diablo swung down his arm. If his assumption was wrong, the old well would merely be destroyed...

A deafening screech echoed across the academy and the entire eleventh district.

The ground split. Diablo jumped back, Horn following after him in a panic.

“Ahaaa!”

“I told you to get back!”

“Well, it’s not like I could predict something like this!”

The spell blew away the well, and what crept out from beneath looked like an earthen serpent. It was incredibly enormous, large enough to swallow an adult whole. It rose up, the Shining Lance still pierced into its stomach.

But then the tear in the ground expanded, showing that it wasn’t a snake, but a tongue. What rose to the surface was what looked like a person’s face, and that brown elongated...“thing” was its tongue. Just the surface of the tongue looked like the earth at the bottom of the well. It didn’t have any skin, and much like the anatomical model in the classroom, its muscles, tendons, bones, and internal organs were exposed. Its skeleton was vastly different from the races, having four arms and six legs, and its spine elongated like a serpent’s, with the tip of its tail still tucked into the ground.

“Monsterrr!” Horn screamed as she pointed at it.

“That’s the God of Destruction, Europa... But it looks incomplete...”

“Incomplete?!”

In *Cross Reverie*, Europa was more elaborately decorated, being covered in golden scales.

“B-Boss!” Horn looked around in a panic, her voice unsteady. “The missing

students...?!”

Diablo clicked his tongue. It was a bit different from the game’s story after all. There, it was far more concise, easier to understand, and even more dramatic. But the ritual magic that took place in this world was obtuse and far more sinister.

“The sorcerer who summoned this thing...” Diablo clenched his fist. “He wasn’t gathering the women so he could sacrifice them all at once... He sacrificed them one by one, to summon the God of Destruction in an incomplete form!”

“S-So...what about the students who went missing?!”

“Kuh...”

Just forget about them.

Diablo swallowed those words. There was more at stake right now: he’d have to get rid of this despicable thing as soon as possible.

Diablo took his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur, out of his pouch.

“Let’s see what you’re worth in this world... Take this, God of Destruction Europa—Grand Tornado!”

Just like the game, the enemy was an earth and water element monster, so the effective element against it, of course, was air. Once Diablo cast the spell, a small, localized tornado raged through the atmosphere.

Europa unleashed a screech along with a snapping sound, like metal breaking. The magical storm disappeared, and one of Europa’s four arms fell into the ground, shattering like glass.

“Hmph...” Diablo’s lips contorted into a smirk. “Without that shield, you’re as fragile as you look.”

I can push it back at this pace!

†

“You’ve done it now, adventurer...” an irritated voice spoke from behind them. There was only one person who would say that in this situation...

Diablo turned around. “Europa’s sorcerer.”

This person was an old demon male clad in crimson robes. From what Diablo recalled, they were called...

“Bihyak!” Horn called out.

He smiled indomitably. “That’s *Professor* Bihyak to you, girl.”

“Did you really sacrifice the missing students to summon this...this *thing*?!”

“You turned the school upside down yet still couldn’t find those students, correct? What a pointless question, you bungling fool...”

“You little...”

Horn reacted with fury, but Bihyak ignored her only to glare at Diablo.

“I heard you’d be coming, but...I didn’t think you’d find it this easily... You’re no ordinary adventurer. And that overwhelmingly powerful elemental magic earlier... Just who are you?”

Diablo wasn’t even in the mood to introduce himself. He was shocked at how enraged he felt.

“Why would you summon this thing?”

“This world is distorted and erroneous... Like a nasty torture device meant to torment the races. It must be destroyed.”

“So that’s why you fed female students to this creature?”

“Even if they have magical energy, without any smarts, they’d merely be used by others. All I did was put them to better use.”

“How delusional.” Diablo aimed his staff toward Bihyak. “You’re nothing but a murderer.”

Diablo suddenly remembered: in one of *Cross Reverie*’s cutscenes, Europa had been completed by absorbing its summoner, but the Europa behind them wasn’t taking any such action.

So the only one with any sort of destructive impulse is this guy?

“Then I need only defeat you and prevent the ceremony! Will you not beg for

your life, Bihyak?!”

“How... How do you know so much... This is a ritual magic I developed on my own!”

Saying he knew about it from the game would be meaningless... Or would someone capable of summoning this thing actually understand somehow...? Maybe Bihyak knew the reason Diablo had been called to this world...

But it was exactly because he was so powerful that Diablo had to stop him here and now. An adventurer’s role was to defend the races.

“Burn to dust, Flare—”

“Are you sure you should be doing that?” Bihyak’s gaze turned toward the old campus building.

Diablo cut off his spell’s incantation and looked up to the roof. At first he thought the female student on the roof might be Mercie, the flower-selling girl, but it was someone else. A black-haired, intellectual-looking human girl wearing the mage academy’s uniform.

“Angeline?!” Horn cried out.

She was the student council president Horn had mentioned. She’d gone missing this morning, so Diablo was sure Bihyak had sacrificed her by now.

“I’ve ordered her to count to five and jump off after she hears her name called. Will you leave her to die just so you can kill me, I wonder?”

“Argh...”

Diablo rushed away. He may have been able to fire a spell and run to catch her, but would he really make it in time? Wouldn’t letting her die make him the same as Bihyak, who sacrificed these girls to destroy the world? He had no delusions about being some paragon of justice, but if there were a life he actually had a chance to save, he wanted to save it.

Horn also ran toward Angeline, but she was too slow. Diablo used the martial art Sword Smite III to cover the distance to the old building with explosive speed, only to cancel the horizontal slash and use his boots, the Empty Sky’s Gambol, to fly into the air. At that same time, Angeline threw herself off the

roof...only to be caught by Diablo.

“Oof!”

“...Haah...”

The girl in his arms opened her eyes with a start. She looked shocked; the effects of the Hypno spell seemed to have worn off. Maybe its effective time period had ended, or perhaps the hard impact into Diablo’s arms made her snap out of it.

“Are you all right?” Diablo asked as they landed on the ground.

“Y-Yes... I’m... Where...am I...? Professor Bihyak hugged me, then... Huh? Wait, who are you...?”

“That slimy bastard...”

You talk about the state of the world like some know-it-all, but you’re nothing more than a teacher who molests his students!

“B-Boss! Angeline!” Horn finally arrived at their side.

Too slow... Thieves were supposed to have speed-type martial arts, but Horn wasn’t adept at using them in the slightest. Despite this, she’d leveled up rapidly and was currently studying magic. Diablo was always failing left and right, though, so he wasn’t one to blame others for their faults.

“Keep her safe.” He left Angeline with Horn.

“Ah... G-Got it, Boss! I definitely will!”

“Huh?!” Angeline was completely confused. “Horn, what’s going on here?! What’s... Eek?! Wh-What *is* that thing?!”

She’d finally noticed Europa. She’d been displaced from the last place she remembered being in and was surrounded by strangers. On top of that, some gigantic monster she’d never seen the likes of had suddenly appeared. The mere fact she still kept a grip on her sanity was admirable.

Diablo stood ahead of the two, as if to guard them. The crimson-robed sorcerer stood in front of Europa.

So it’s the same formation as the game...

This all felt familiar to Diablo.

“Farewell.” Bihyak smirked. “The one thing I sorely regret is not getting to see this malicious world be destroyed!”

Europa was probably struggling to use its tongue with the Shining Lance still stabbed through it. Europa grabbed Bihyak with one of its hands and casually tossed him into its mouth. Angeline screamed while Horn’s face distorted unpleasantly. Diablo braced himself for battle.

“It’s coming... The God of Destruction Europa raid begins!”

†

Powerful magical energy filled the area. Europa’s skinless body was being covered in golden, metallic-looking scales. Two horns then burst out of its back and chest. It hissed, the tips of its horns shining. A transparent sphere formed around Europa, enveloping it.

Its official name in the game was the Curtain of the End, but its popular name was just “the barrier.” So long as that barrier was up, it was completely immune to physical, magic, and attribute-aligned attacks. According to the walkthrough sites, it wasn’t a means of defense, but rather an indicator that it was in a state where it took no damage. Like a final boss, it was immune to negative status effects like sleep and petrification, and it inflicted damage and speed debuffs.

But Diablo didn’t rely on those to begin with, and the God of Destruction Europa had more than just the Curtain of the End to rely on. Its attack was increased, its speed augmented, it was immune to flinching, dealt extra attacks with each blow (which also had a piercing effect)...

In short, it had countless buffs applied to itself. Its base stats weren’t that impressive, but with so many buffs on it, Europa temporarily exceeded the strength of even the strongest Demon Lord in existence.

It gave a menacing roar just as Diablo finished exchanging his gear. He was now holding a small wand in his hand, its rod colored silver and its tip decorated with a crown. At its end was a gemstone that shone with a faint glow.

“What’s that, Boss?!” Horn asked.

“An SSR-rarity item, the Asterisk Dispel Wand.”

“...Huh?”

“Currently, the God of Destruction is immune to all types of attacks and has multiple support spells applied to it.”

“That’s nuts!”

“But this will strip them all away!”

Diablo swung the Asterisk Dispel Wand, and a light flashed before them. A snapping sound shook the air, and the Curtain of the End enveloping Europa immediately dissipated.

Diablo pumped a fist internally.

All right! The strategy from the game worked!

“Even I can take it out with one hit now!” Horn braced herself.

“Don’t! If you attack Europa, it’ll put up the Curtain of the End again!”

“Oh no!”

“Now I’ll blow it away with one powerful blast of grand magic...”

A man clad in a red long coat stood in front of Europa.

“Thanatos the Undying...?!”

†

He started monologuing in front of Europa.

“I’ve finally found it...the source of the malevolent magical energy! Such a massive form... But you’re out of luck! Thanatos the Undying will defeat you!”

“H-Hey, stop!”

Diablo’s voice failed to reach Thanatos. He could have tried to attack it first, but Europa was massive. A spell that would destroy it in one hit would take considerable time to charge.

“Take this!” Thanatos already had his black sword in hand. “Secret Blade... Black Tyrant Dragon Slash—Overkill!”

Huh, that's kinda badass... Diablo thought to himself.

"Why is he calling out his martial art like that?" Horn asked, her eyes narrowed. "Is it magic? An incantation? Is it necessary to do that?"

Black flames lit up over the blade of Thanatos's ebony sword, turning into the shape of a dragon that whirled and coiled about.

"Haaargh!" His slash connected along with his cry of zeal. The slash cut into Europa's exposed chest, which was purged of all its buffs and defenses.

"I did it!" Thanatos called out.

...Why did you have to say that? Now you've just jinxed us!

Thanatos was a Palace Knight and had the strength to back it, so the blow was indeed powerful, but it still lacked the firepower to take Europa out in one blow.

Europa unleashed a mighty roar, and its four horns lit up again. The Curtain of the End's sphere enveloped it once more.

"In that case..." Thanatos, who knew nothing about this creature, unleashed another martial art. "Secret Blade... Wicked Destruction Inferno Slash—Rushing Force Variant!"

It was an earth-shaking blow. His level wasn't low at all, without a doubt being well over 100. His martial art's name seemed to be a string of nonsense, but it was as strong as a normal martial art unleashed by a superhuman warrior's vanguard charge.

Still, the Curtain of the End completely cut off the attack.

"Impossible!" Thanatos raised his voice in surprise.

Most players who faced Europa reacted exactly like this. A perfect example of a first-time killer boss; getting caught up in its attacks would be no joke.

"Run, Horn!" Diablo shouted.

"Y-Yes!" Horn picked Angeline up in her arms as she did as she was told. In terms of their sizes, it was like a primary schooler picking up a middle schooler, but a level 80 thief had the physical strength to pick up even a large man.

“Eeya?!” Angeline gave a small shriek, but maintained enough presence of mind to not thrash about.

Europa swung up two of its three remaining arms, producing swords of earth and water in both, bringing them down on Thanatos.

“Ah?!”

Along with the Curtain of the End, its multitude of buffs had been reapplied as well. An attack greater than a Demon Lord’s, capable of crushing the ground to bits rained down on him, over and over. Thanatos was reduced to a puddle of blood and gore, with his red long coat torn into bits and fluttering away in the wind.

Just the remaining shockwaves made the old campus building begin crumbling. Europa’s buffed attacks were as powerful as grand magic, and were unleashed in fast succession. Facing it without any countermeasures was, as demonstrated, suicide.

It seemed to be attacking with swords, but the damage it inflicted was in fact an area of effect skill. The only hope was to keep your distance from it.

“Can’t you use that wand from earlier, Boss?!” Horn asked as she ran.

“It takes an hour to recharge before it can work again!”

It had no use limit, but as a result took time to recharge.

“Oh no! If we leave that thing alone for an hour, then the academy... No, the *whole capital*’s gonna get messed up!”

“I *know*!”

Students and teachers who’d noticed the commotion rushed out of the blue brick building, only to find a terrifying monster on the grounds, capable of half-destroying the old campus building with a single blow. As one would expect, no one stuck around to watch leisurely. They all began running away, screaming in a panic.

Europa then began moving.

How fast is it?!

“Too fast!”

Diablo expected it to be sluggish because of its size, but it was getting further and further away. It likely saw Diablo as its target, perhaps influenced by Bihyak’s consciousness or possibly because he’d attacked it with the Shining Lance.

Diablo ran for a service entrance located on the other side of the courtyard, right as a single carriage rushed over in their direction.

†

“Wowzers!” Sylvie hopped out of the white carriage. “You don’t see something this crazy every day!”

“How ominous...” a woman clad in a white clergy garb said with a shiver in her voice as she stepped out of the carriage. Her hair was a platinum blonde close to white, her skin smooth, and her eyes a shade of hazel. In her hands was a silvery bishop’s staff only the High Priest was allowed to bear.



“Lumachina!”

“Ah, Lord Diablo!” she said, preparing to kneel before him.

“We can talk later! Sylvie told you what you need to know, yes?!”

“She did.”

“Then do it!”

With a short delay, Horn arrived with Angeline in her arms. As Horn was about to collapse from exhaustion, Sylvie caught the girl.

“Good work out there! Leave the rest to us♪”

“Haah... Haah... Haah... Yeah...”

Europa was charging at them with great speed. Its six legs kicked against the ground, kicking up clouds of dust. It now had swords in all three hands, which it swung in their direction. Even Diablo wouldn’t survive a direct hit from one of those, not to mention the others who’d most likely be obliterated with a single touch.

Lumachina concentrated. Holding up her bishop’s staff, she gazed at the target.

“If that is your order, Lord Diablo, I will follow it even if it costs me my life... *Our Father in Heaven, bring down Your power on this malevolent being bringing ruin to this earth and Your many children. Purify, sublimate them. Do away with this calamity, and grant upon us Your blessing...*”

Will it work in time...?

All Diablo could do now was believe, but a thought had crossed his mind.

I fight alone. I have no need for comrades. I’ve always done that... But now, I’m relying on her. Is this my weakness? Maybe, but...for some reason, this doesn’t feel bad...

Diablo focused on his own magic. He took out a ring from his pouch; not the marriage ring he had made in Faltra, but another Demon Lord’s ring.

When he defeated the Demon Overlord Modinaram, he’d found this item at the site of its destruction. In the game, it would’ve been a drop to reward the

player who'd beat it faster than anyone else. Diablo never obtained it in *Cross Reverie*, but if it were based on Modinaram...then this was the Ring of Madness.

He placed it on his left hand's index finger. At once, he felt magical energy rush throughout his body. His attack stats skyrocketed, but his defensive stats were reduced to essentially nothing in the process.



But if a single blow from Europa were to defeat him anyway, then defense was meaningless in this situation. Regardless, Diablo's style was to always defeat his enemies before they attacked. He was a Sorcerer of Annihilation who always made the first move.

He held up his right hand and chanted, "Spear of darkness—Darkness Lance!"

The spear of dark flames that erupted from his hand was so powerful even he was surprised by it. It was like someone had torn through space, and it was this darkness that seeped from within. The darkness spread out, as if to paint the world over.

Diablo's hand shivered.

"Lord Diablo, I am ready!"

"Do it!"

"Holy Flash!"

Blinding light leaked out from the heavens, powerful enough to consume the academy. Its effect was similar to the Asterisk Dispel Wand, except Lumachina's miracle targeted everyone in sight. In this case it didn't matter since Europa was alone, but there was another difference: the Asterisk Dispel Wand's effect could be resisted, but the Holy Flash was guaranteed to succeed. Its charge time wasn't so ridiculously long for no reason.

The Curtain of the End enveloping Europa disappeared again, as did its many buffs. Its movements became noticeably more sluggish as it slowly swung down its three swords. The enemy was right before his eyes; Diablo surely wouldn't miss.

"Go forth, Darkness Lance!"

Diablo unleashed his lance of black flames. It connected with the Shining Lance still lodged into Europa's tongue.

A spear of light and a spear of darkness—

The moment the two intermingled, an explosion of magical energy exceeding both of their original respective strengths blew out.

Once before, Diablo's Darkness Cannon had clashed with the Paladin Captain Battuta's Shining Blow, resulting in an unexpectedly powerful shockwave. When he went dungeon crawling with Sylvie, he also experimented with the idea.

"Composite Magic! Get blown to bits!"

A torrent of pure energy reduced Europa to ashes. Its golden, metallic scales were crushed, its human-shaped head blown to bits, and its three arms dispersed. Its lower half avoided the direct blow, but the shockwaves crushed it into nothing.

Everything shook. Fissures ran across the courtyard, and the blue brick building wavered unsteadily as the old outer walls of the academy crumbled. Only the area around the carriage somehow remained whole.

Diablo quickly chanted an Air Wall spell, forming a fault of air that blew back all manner of shockwaves. Still, Horn and Angeline couldn't help but scream in fright, while Lumachina fixed a trusting gaze at Diablo.

Epilogue

The mage academy was reduced to a state that could only be described as the epicenter of an explosion. The God of Destruction Europa was gone without a trace. Not only that, but the mountain behind the old campus building and the courtyard were so utterly obliterated that it was hard to imagine the buildings that once stood there ever existed in the first place.

I didn't expect it to be this powerful...

Even as they ran away, if any of the students had been harmed by the blast... Diablo looked around anxiously, but thankfully the blue brick building was hardly perturbed in all the commotion. The students who ran to hide behind it were gradually coming out, raising voices of surprise at how much the courtyard had changed.

Looking at the ground, it seemed the shockwaves had somehow bounced back in front of the buildings. Was that the headmistress's or the teachers' doing? This was a mage academy, after all; there should've been some sorcerers capable of such.

Diablo heaved a sigh of relief.

"The evil has been extinguished." Lumachina nodded. "And the children are safe. As magnificent as ever, Lord Diablo."

"Hmph... Such a monster cannot hope to match me..."

"Yes."

"...But your contribution was significant as well."

"Thank you very much!" Lumachina beamed happily, her gratitude sincere.

Diablo turned to look at Horn. She and Angeline were just fine. The two were in a state of shock over the complete chaos the academy was in, but they didn't seem to be physically hurt.

He then turned his eyes to Sylvie. "I told you to get a Dispel ready..."

"Going through the capital's Adventurers' Guild would've been too time

consuming. Besides, it's hard to hire someone for help on such short notice. So I just thought I'd ask Lumachina if I could borrow a priest."

"...You didn't expect her to come herself, did you?"

Sylvie shrugged. "I bet the Grand Cathedral's in a panic right now, though..."

"It's fine." Lumachina smiled. "The believers will all understand that this was at the will of God."

"Uh..." Sylvie waved her hand lightly. "I think it's a pretty big deal when the High Priest just up and disappears."

Diablo had to agree. But her rushing to the scene was to be expected given the circumstances. Besides, everything turned out okay in the end, so it was fine.

Diablo finally turned toward the panicking students.

Mercie...

The flower-selling girl was standing alongside her friends. As one might expect, she was surprised by the situation as her eyes darted about.

She looked fine. He couldn't claim everything went the way he wished it would, but he'd at least saved her. He could feel a smile naturally play over his lips.

"So what are you going to do now?" Sylvie folded her hands behind her head. "Report this to the academy? Think they'll give you a reward?"

"...Right after they hand me the invoice for the damages."

"The old campus building and the mountain behind it are one thing, but the courtyard's definitely a problem... If they want it properly serviced, it'd cost a fortune."

"And the blue brick building was damaged a little, too, looking at it."

"Your magic is just too strong, Diablo."

"I had to defeat that monster in one blow. It only made sense to use that much power."

"Riiight~ So then, do we head back to Faltra?"

“...Hmm.”

“You’re leaving so soon, Lord Diablo?!” Lumachina looked surprised. Horn also raised her voice, her eyes on the verge of tears, as she cried out, “Boss!”

“I... I still...needed you to save me...b-but...um!”

“Stand firm and learn. The powerless haven’t the leisure to lament their weakness.”

“Yessir, Boss! I’ll study real hard!”

After rising to her feet unsteadily, Angeline bowed her head too.

“I honestly still don’t have a handle on what happened here, but...I think you saved me, and the academy. Thank you so very much.”

“Hmm.” Diablo nodded. But just as he was about to turn on his heels to leave, Sylvie screeched out.

“Huuuh?!”

Then— Clap, clap, clap...

Someone greeted them with half-hearted applause. A large, bulky man stood on the roof of the carriage that had brought Lumachina here. His body was so muscular and robust one could hardly believe he was human. His black hair was parted to one side and he wore black-rimmed glasses. He was like a beefed-up bank teller.

“Astounding. You defeated a monster that powerful with just *one* hit. Simply remarkable.”

“Ugh... The Order of Palace Knights...” Sylvie winced.

“I am Marquis Maximum Abrams,” the man said with a smile. “I believe this is our second meeting, no?”

“Hmph...” Diablo glared back at him. “As if I’d remember... Huh...?!”

Another figure stepped out from behind the carriage, a man clad in a red long coat. He was a blond elf with a black sword at his waist. He was completely unharmed...

“This man is quite dangerous, Captain. I, Thanatos the Undying, will be the

one to put him in his place.”

“Yes... Perhaps someday. But now.”

“D-Didn’t you die...?” Diablo couldn’t help but ask.

“Do not make me repeat myself. *I am an undying immortal.*”

Seems that wasn’t just a bluff...

Diablo didn’t understand the logic of it, but it seemed the Order of Palace Knights were a troublesome lot. There was no telling how strong their captain was.

Maximum narrowed his eyes. “Looking at you fight...it seemed to me you were well-versed in how to combat that monster, Sir Diablo.”

“Hmph... I can tell that much just by looking at it. Maybe your underling is just useless for rushing in without a plan?”

“What?!”

Thanatos’s anger flared up, but Maximum silenced him with a raised hand.

“No, I guarantee you my ‘underling’ is quite skilled. It is you who is suspiciously skilled.”

“Think whatever you will.”

Diablo wanted them to keep thinking as much, that he was “too dangerous to oppose.” For that reason alone he stuck to his Demon Lord role play. But Maximum wouldn’t back down—not yet.

“Well, any power that exceeds human understanding will raise a red flag by the normal population. But there is a very important gentleman who wishes to meet with you, Sir Diablo. Surely you know who I speak of?”

“Nn...”

Maximum reached out his hand. “His Majesty awaits. Please come with me.”

“...And if I refuse?”

“Oh, you won’t, Sir Diablo.”

Saying so, his glance turned to Horn, then Angeline.

“You bastard...” Diablo held up his staff.

“I think you’re well aware of which one of us would prefer the peaceful solution here... So, what will you do?”

“Tch.”

This man thought to extort Diablo. He seemed quite powerful, but it seemed his trust laid in his words. Sylvie was more suitable for that sort of exchange, but...Diablo couldn’t expect much out of her now. Diablo had nearly forgotten, but she was one of those who said Diablo was better off listening to the king’s order. She wouldn’t interfere if Diablo going to the audience would end things peacefully here.

Diablo turned a sidelong gaze toward Sylvie, only to see her bringing her hands together apologetically and mouthing a “Sorry!” He almost had to wonder if the captain of the Palace Knights being here was her handiwork...

“...Traitor.”

“What, I didn’t go that far!”

Lumachina stood in front of Diablo.

“You must not show disrespect to this man. Even the Palace Knights are not allowed to do so.”

Maximum looked at Diablo.

What will you do?

Depending on what Diablo said here, Maximum would even be willing to cut down the High Priest. Diablo could see this man doing so.

And so, Diablo sighed and placed a hand on Lumachina’s shoulder.

“I see your devotion clearly. For now, return to where you belong, and do what you must.”

“Lord Diablo?!”

“Believe in me.”

“Y-Yes.” Lumachina kneeled.

“I thought the High Priest offered prayer to God and God only.” Maximum tilted his head curiously.

“Hear me and listen well, captain. If you dare lay a hand on my belongings, both you and your king will regret it.”

“Hmm. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Maximum snapped his fingers. A chariot covered in black approached from down the road, and he gestured for Diablo to get on it.

“I will have you accompany me to Castle Grandiose, Sir Diablo. Will your companions be joining us?”

“I will be going alone.”

“Mhm.” Maximum nodded.

“...I don’t trust him,” Diablo whispered in Sylvie’s ear. “Make sure Horn and Lumachina aren’t taken hostage. I leave it to you.”

“Right. I’m sorry it ended up this way.”

“It’s fine.”

I figured I’d end up meeting the king, anyway...

The door to the black carriage opened, and Maximum took a seat first. Thanatos, who stood outside, propped up the sword at his waist.

“If you do anything suspicious, I *will* cut you down.”

Diablo ascended the carriage’s gangway ladder and sat on the seat opposite Maximum.

“Hmph... Going to such lengths to call for me, I expect quite the banquet.”

To be continued...

Afterword

How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord's anime adaptation will begin airing in July 2018, right before this volume is released [in Japan]. I'm actually writing this down as we're taking a break from the voice recordings. I believe it will be a wonderful anime, and hope all of you will enjoy it with me. Thank you for all your support!

Now then, volume 10.

This ended up being a volume focused on Sylvie and Horn, where they go on adventures and investigations with Diablo. Writing mystery elements into this type of fantasy story was rather challenging, but an interesting experience to be sure. I hope you enjoyed it.

As the number of characters in this series grows, having all of them participate in one volume becomes difficult, so I've tried narrowing down their appearances per volume. What this means is that you can expect Rem and Shera to appear more prominently in the next one.

Finally, Diablo will meet the king of Lyferia. I'll do my finest to finish the next volume quickly.

Some thanks—

To Takahiro Tsurusaki. The monster girl scene ended up being really something. Thank you for all the lovely illustrations this time as well.

To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow. Thank you for yet another volume.

To the editor in charge of me, Shouji, my catching a cold threw the schedule out of whack. I apologize for all the grief I've caused you.

To Kodansha's light novel editorial department and all those involved, and the family and friends who supported me. And to you, the readers who picked up this book, I offer a thank you of the greatest level. Thank you very much!

Yukiya Murasaki

Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

The Story So Far

Prologue

Chapter 1: Being Summoned to the Capital

Chapter 2: Conquering the Viridian Cathedral

Chapter 3: Going to the Capital (Again)

Interlude

Chapter 4: Detective Horn?

Interlude

Chapter 5: Stopping a Ritual

Epilogue

Afterword

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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 10

by Yukiya Murasaki

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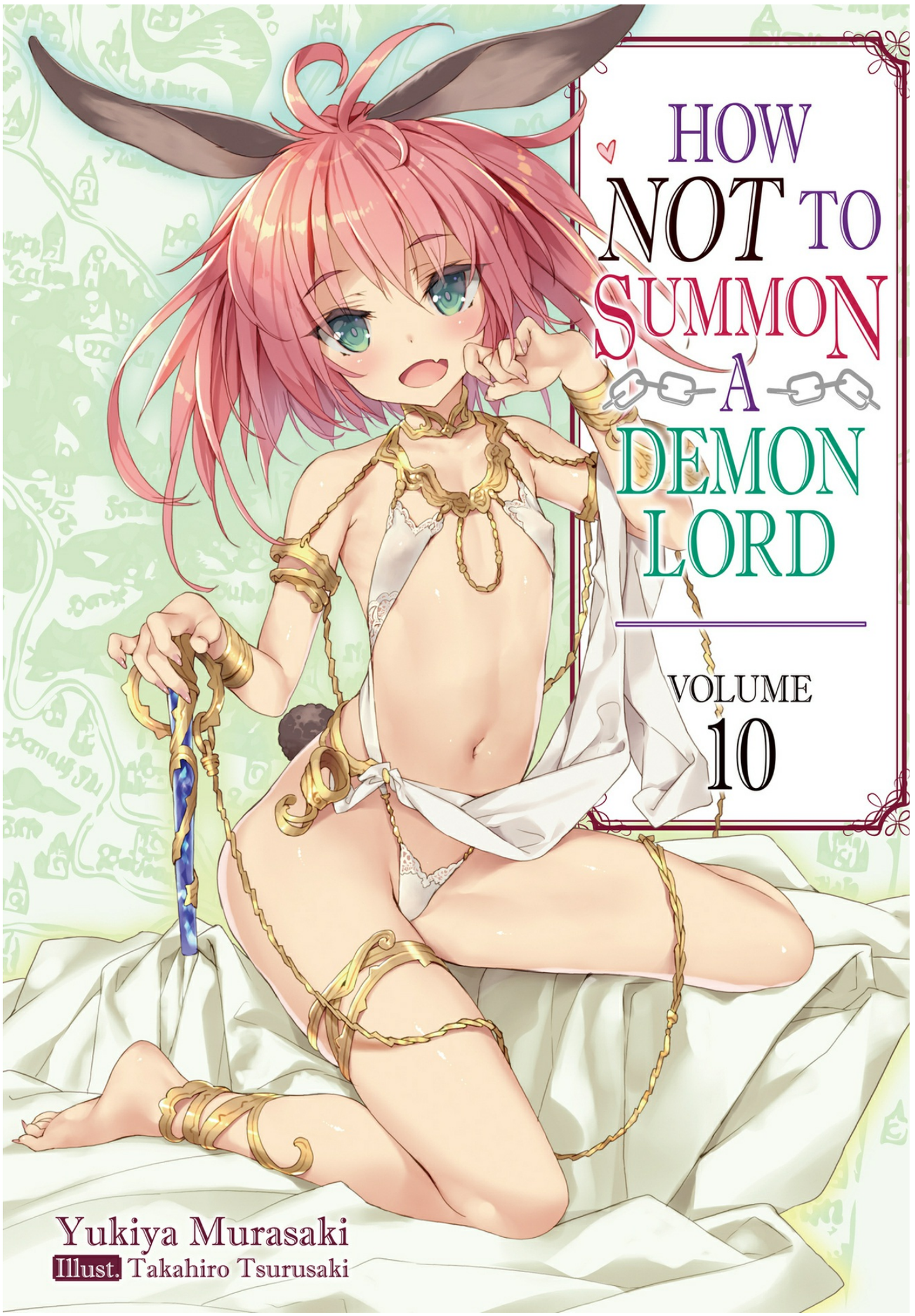
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Yukiya Murasaki
Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki