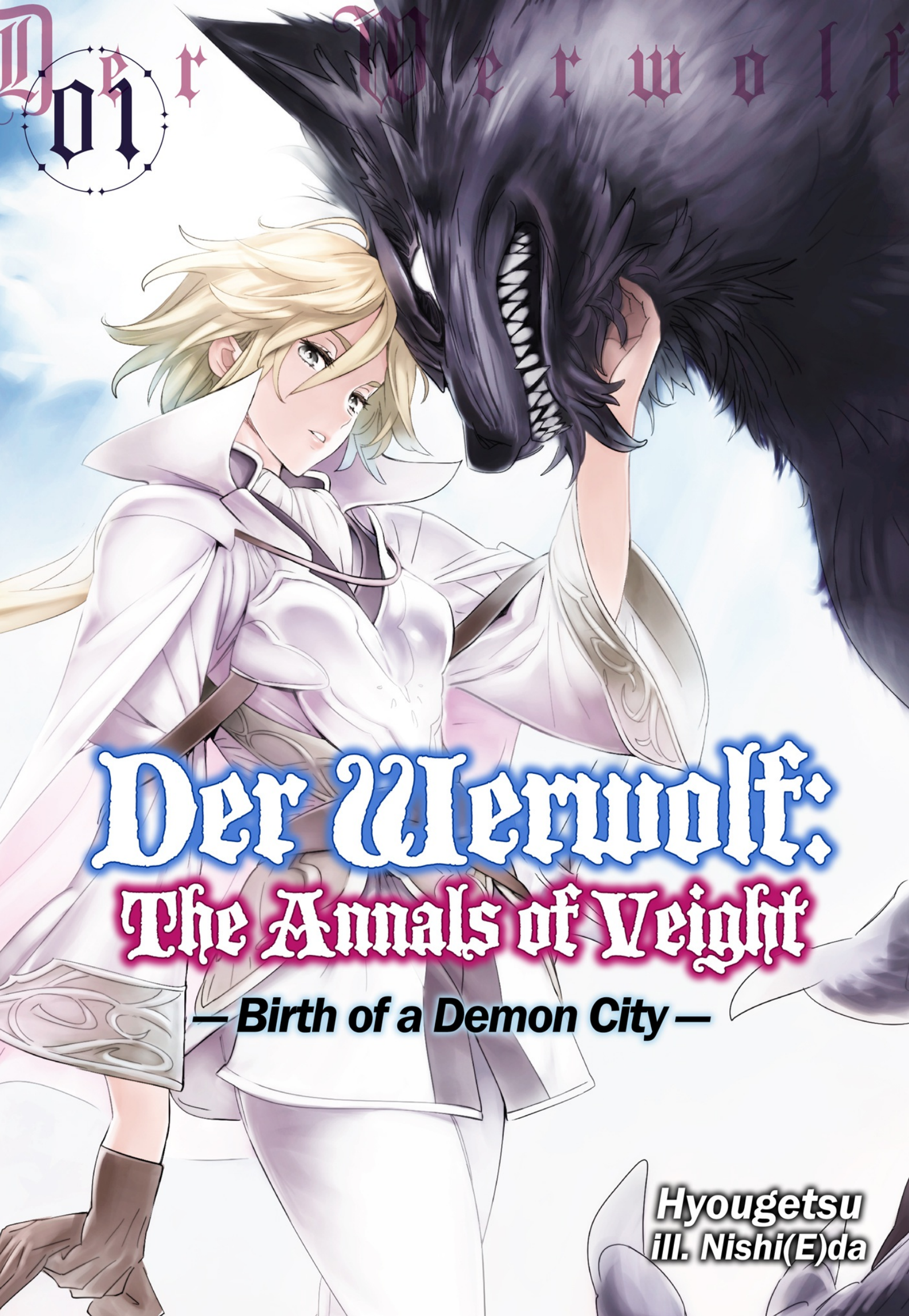
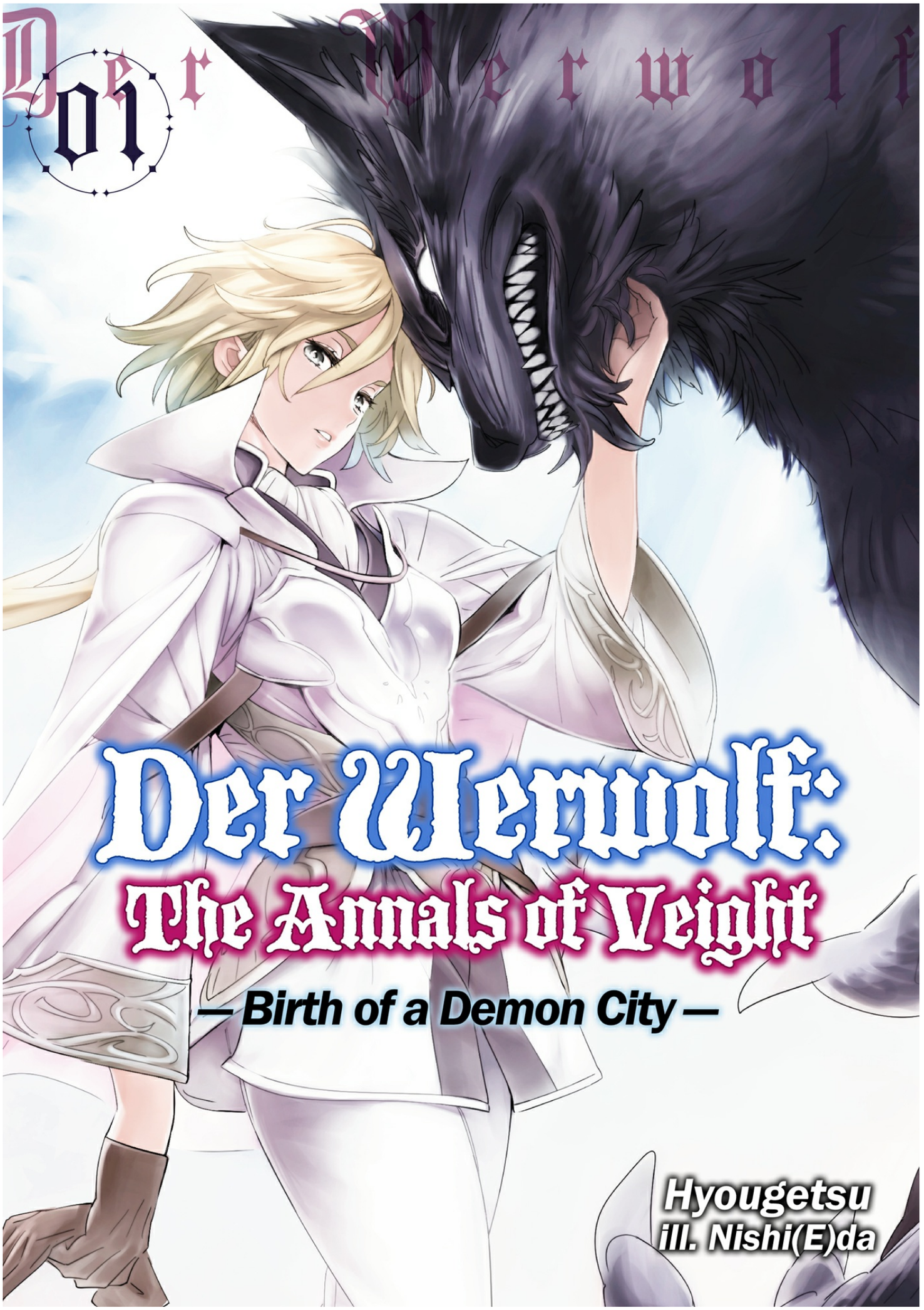

Der Werwolf
01
Der Werwolf:
The Annals of Veight
—Birth of a Demon City—
Hyougetsu
ill. Nishi(E)da


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Der Werwolf
illustration:Nishi(E)da


Northern Peaks
Fortress City Schverm
City of Peaks Draulight
Mining City Krauhen
Agricultural City Bahen
Theopolis Lange
Agricultural City Welheim
Farming City Aryoug
Former Capital Vest
Fortress City Vongang
Nation of Wa
Demon Forest
Fetid Wastes
Windswept Dunes
Grenschtat Castle
Ancient City Bernheinen
Industrial City Thuvan
Labyrinth City Zaria
City of Craftsmen Veira
Trading City Ryunhelt
Trading City Shardier
Pirate City Beluza
Maritime City Lotz
Sea of Solitude

Chapter 1

I don’t remember much about my past life, but I’m also not that interested in learning about it. My name is Veight. I know it’s hard to pronounce, but I still wish people would at least try to say it right. And right now, I serve the Demon Lord.

“Commander Veight, our troops have successfully infiltrated the city.”

“Understood. There’s no need to wait for my orders. Once the advance party gives the signal, charge.”

“Yes, sir.”

Werewolf. A word that refers to a half-human, half-wolf demon. In my human form, I look pretty much like I used to in my old life; an unassuming, plain guy. But transformed, I truly do look like a monster. I imagine most people find my jet-black wolf form to be terrifying, but personally, I think it looks cool. If anything, I’d say I hit the reincarnation jackpot.

At present, I serve as a commander of the Demon Lord’s forces. Vice-Commander of the Demon Lord’s third regiment. That’s my current title. It sounds impressive, but regiments aren’t very big, and there’s other vice-commanders aside from me.

Right now, my command consists of 56 werewolves, and 200 canine combat engineers my commander loaned to me for this operation. Our target is a remote trading city. Its name was Ryunheit, and it had a modest population of 3000, along with a walled perimeter.

From within my position inside the forest, I looked down at the city we would soon attack. As I waited, a messenger ran up to me to deliver a report.

“The enemy possesses roughly 200 men. They’re currently spread out throughout the city on patrol.”

“You’re certain of this?”

The young boy with a face of a beagle gave me a confused look.

“That’s the report I was given from the werewolf team that infiltrated the city, sir. I wouldn’t know how accurate it is...”

“Yeah, I suppose not.”

Our mission this time was not to annihilate the city, but to occupy it. I strode forward and gave orders to my messenger squad.

“Tell all canine squads to advance. Stick to the plan.”

“Yes, sir.”

They ran off to their respective squads, while I turned toward the city and began walking forward.

Ryunheit was a city that specialized in trade, so its front gates were larger than most to accommodate caravans. That being said, it wasn’t a very impressive gate. The walls, too, were not very high. In fact, they were made mostly of hardened mud, with the occasional stone or wooden bulwark. It was a wall meant to deter beasts and bandits, not withstand a siege.

Do they really feel safe with just that? A few guards watched over the main gate as a steady stream of traders and pilgrims trickled through. Most were let inside the city without question. *Guess they’ll let me in without a fuss, too.* At the moment, I looked like an ordinary young man with black hair. Contrary to my expectations, however, the guard lowered his spear as I approached the gate. He wore a simple helmet and breastplate, and didn’t seem particularly strong.

“You there, halt. I don’t recognize you.”

I came to a stop and pulled a bird-shaped whistle out of the sack on my back.

“I came here to deliver an order of toy whistles to one of my clients, the Betun Traders.”

“I see.”

The guard took the whistle and blew lightly into it. Out came a shrill tone, like whistles anywhere would.

“Fun to play with, right?”

“I...guess?” The guard awkwardly returned my smile and passed the whistle back to me.

“Alright, you can pass.”

“My thanks.”

Just then, a disturbance occurred further down the road.

“Monsters are coming!”

“Heeeeelp!”

A group of merchants were running for the gates, all of their wares held in their hands.

The guards sprang into motion, running forward to surround the merchants.

“What kind of monsters!?”

“C-Canines! Monsters with dog faces! They’re armed to the teeth!” one of the traders stammered, pale-faced.

“There’s hundreds of them!”

“Hurry up and get rid of them for us!”

The guards exchanged glances and got to work.

“Ring the bell! Three times!”

“Someone inform HQ! Send messengers to the other gates as well!”

“Close the gates! Everyone, inside!”

Panic engulfed the people. Travelers dithered back and forth while citizens scooped up their children and ran for safety. On the other hand, the soldiers worked as a cohesive unit. It was obvious they were well-trained. Not only that, they had excellent morale.

Meanwhile, I squeezed my way into the city along with the fleeing crowd. Once I was inside I found a relatively secluded corner, pulled out one of my

whistles, and blew it with all my might. This one made no sound—no sound that could be picked up by human ears, at any rate. Us werewolves heard the dog whistle loud and clear.

It was time to begin the next step of our plan. In order to not appear suspicious, I headed to the city's center along with the rest of the citizens. That was also where the viceroy's mansion happened to be.

Before long, the inside of the city was engulfed in chaos as well. "The monsters are here!"

"There's werewolves, too!"

It seemed my werewolf unit that had infiltrated the city earlier had gotten to work. The streets were in turmoil, but the city garrison was busy with the enemies outside and could do nothing to help. Even if they could, they didn't have enough information to act. Conflicting reports of canines outside the gates and werewolves inside had left the army confused and disoriented.

"There's canines inside, too!"

"Don't worry, the army's pushing them back!"

"O-Oh, alright then."

Their forces truly were in complete disarray. *Still, I wish they'd be able to tell the difference between cute-looking canines and fearsome werewolves. We're nothing like dogs!*

Everything appeared to be going according to plan, and none of the complications I'd been worried about cropped up. Which meant it was time for me to join the fray. I took a deep breath, and unleashed my inner beast, beginning my transformation.

"UWOOOOOH!"

I don't think I'll ever get tired of how awesome that feels. I felt power surge through me. It brought along a rush of euphoria that left me feeling like a giddy little kid.

Of course, the people around me weren't nearly as excited about my transformation.

“Eeeek!”

“Kyaaaaaaa!”

“It’s a monster!”

Excuse me? I’m no monster. I’m a demon. People often mistake us for monsters, but werewolves possess intelligence and culture, we’re a proper race. I mean, come on. Humans are mammals just like horses and wolves, but no one goes around screaming “Oh my god, it’s a mammal!” when they see a person. So yeah, we technically fall under the ‘monster’ category, but I’d prefer it if people called us demons. As I’m sure you can tell, this is a pet peeve of mine.

“S-Sir! There’s a wolf monster here!”

I said I was a demon, not a monster!

I smiled tiredly as I watched people flee before me. Since I had a wolf’s head at the moment, I don’t doubt everyone saw it as a feral grin, not an exhausted smile.

“Don’t worry, I don’t plan on eating any of you.” *It’s no good, no one’s listening.* It seemed I’d caused a bigger panic than I’d intended. People bowled over entire market stalls in their haste to escape.

In the span of a few seconds, the street had become empty. Everyone had fled into nearby buildings, or narrow back alleys. Thanks to my superior sense of hearing and smell, I was easily able to tell where they were hiding. *I know I look scary, but the fact that people are this terrified of me still kind of hurts. I used to be human too, you know. Besides, I thought my transformation was kinda cool, like the ones superheroes have in movies... Ah well.*

I heaved a weary sigh and kicked off the cobblestoned ground. My leap propelled me a good three stories into the air. From this height, I was able to get a good view of the whole city. As planned, my werewolf squad had the viceroy’s manor surrounded. The few guards protecting the manor had already been mauled beyond recognition.

“I told them to avoid killing as much as possible... Oh well.” Once a werewolf got going, it was hard for them to hold back. I ran across a series of rooftops and jumped down in front of the manor. Unfortunately, that was the same time

a squad of reinforcements happened to show up as well.

“Protect the viceroy!”

“Chaaarge!”

The five soldiers drew their weapons and charged. I sent the first of them flying with a back kick, then turned around and started attacking in earnest. I shattered one soldier’s sword with my bare arms, then jabbed his breastplate with my knuckles. I couldn’t use my claws, or I’d kill him.

“Gaah!”

Crap, did I overdo it again? Holding back’s harder than I thought. I dispatched the other three with low kicks, too afraid to use my arms against them. As it was, even my weak kicks shattered the soldiers’ legs, but at least that was something I could fix with magic later. In the blink of an eye, all five of the soldiers were lying defeated on the ground.

“I’ll heal you later, so just sleep there for now,” I said as I jumped up to the manor’s second-story window.

Compared to the glass in my old world, the glass here was far more crude. Not only was the window’s thickness uneven, it was filled with translucent bubbles that made it difficult to see through. Still, a pane of glass like this would have cost about a month’s income for a rich noble here. I smashed it without hesitation and strode into the viceroy’s manor.

The room I’d broken into was the viceroy’s own office. I’d examined the building’s blueprints before, and as I’d expected, the viceroy was here.

“Who are you!?”

I found myself being glared at by a woman in her early twenties. She was wearing a male official’s uniform, however, and a saber hung from her waist. She cut a rather gallant and dashing figure in the uniform; it was clear she was used to wearing men’s clothes. My guess was she normally wore them to work.*Though I guess now’s not the time to be thinking about that.*

A quick glance around the room told me there were no guards. Neither my nose nor my ears picked up traces of anyone else in the room. And my

werewolves had the outside of the manor surrounded. I bowed politely to the viceroy, doing my best not to antagonize her.

“I am Veight, Vice-Commander of the Demon Lord’s third regiment. You would be Viceroy Airia, correct?”

“None other.”

Pale-faced, Airia nevertheless put up a brave front as she nodded. Unfortunately, she couldn’t hide the trembling in her voice. She may not have had the fortitude of an emperor, but she would still make a fine general. A better one than me, that’s for sure. Out of respect for her courage, I tried to be as non-threatening as possible.

“My forces have captured your city. Further resistance would be meaningless. I advise you to surrender.”

“I will not!” Airia clenched her fists as she shouted. Why was it that people in power inevitably all had problems listening to other people?

“Ryunheit is an important lynchpin of our alliance! I will not allow it to fall into demon hands!”

Looks like I’m going to have to get a little violent, or we won’t get anywhere.

“Then die,” I snarled, baring my fangs.

As expected, the viceroy shrunk back in fear. Her trembling was understandable. She was up against a werewolf after all. Our claws could rend plate armor, and our legs could carry us faster than a galloping horse. A tiny girl such as herself had no chance against me. I took a step forward and put even more pressure on her.

“I will at least give you the honor of a noble death, befitting of your station. Draw your sword.”

Airia brought a trembling hand to her waist, but because of her fear she couldn’t even get a good grip on the weapon. She clearly wasn’t used to fighting.

“I-I am the V-Viceroy of Ryunheit... Marquis...”

In her confusion, she’d started declaring her name. Normally, in duels in this

world, you did that *after* drawing your weapon, not before.

I grinned and roared at her. Though it wasn't a very loud roar, the remaining windows vibrated from the force. Airia let out a yelp and fell backwards, her saber dropping from her limp fingers.

"Hiii—"

It was a pretty comedic reaction from my perspective, but I could see why she was so terrified. Had I still been human, I'd have pissed my pants facing a werewolf.

I snapped my jaws shut and sat down on the lavish rug in front of her. There was no need to intimidate her any further.

"That puny saber won't even be able to put a scratch on me. And even if you could somehow beat me, it's too late to save your city. Surrender."



Airia once more picked up her blade, but this time pointed it at herself. Pale, lips trembling, she said, “Th-Then I’ll...”

“Wait, hold up!”

I hurriedly snatch the saber out of her hands. *What is she, crazy!?* In my haste, I’d grabbed the sword by the blade. It wasn’t sharp enough to cut through my tough hide, but it still hurt. About as much as gripping a plastic ruler really tightly by the edges would.

“What point is there in killing yourself!? Think about this rationally!”

“Rationally?” Airia looked up at me with a dumbfounded expression on her face. It seemed she was too shocked to think straight. I sighed and looked her in the eyes.

“Look, our army’s already taken the city. We’ve tried our best not to kill any of the citizens, but I understand why you’re scared. With me so far?”

“Y-Yes... I understand.” Airia nodded over and over, like a terrified child. I nodded back and continued my explanation.

“We do plan on ruling this city from now on, but we have no intentions of killing you, or turning you into our slaves.”

“What?”

Is that really so surprising? Unable to comprehend what she’d just heard, Airia followed up with a question.

“Th-Then, what on earth did you come here for?”

I guess the humans have some misconceptions as to what we actually do. Ah well, I suppose I should explain.

“We don’t want a slaughter. To be honest, we’d prefer you all to keep going on about your lives normally. And for that, we’ll need a human leader. See where I’m going with this?”

“Umm... You want me to continue being the viceroy?”

“That’s right.”

Thank god she’s an understanding person.

“We need your help to keep friction in the city to a minimum, so please just surrender and cooperate with the demon army. If there’s any demands the humans have as well, we’re willing to listen, so long as they’re not unreasonable.”

I waited patiently for Airia’s response. Though she still appeared to have a few misgivings, the light had returned to her eyes. She sure did come to her decision quickly.

“If I found you’ve lied to me in any way, I’ll rally the citizens to fight back with everything we have. Are you still sure you want to make that offer?”

“That’s fine by me. The Demon Lord personally gave me full authority over administration of this city.”

I nodded my consent, and Airia got to her feet. She held out her hand, and I obediently returned her saber back to her. She held it reverently for a few seconds before respectfully offering it back to me.

“I, Airia Lutt Aindorf, Viceroy of Ryunheit, formally surrender to the Demon Lord’s army. I humbly request that you have mercy on my men.”

“I hereby accept your surrender.”

With that, the battle was officially over.

Events progressed rapidly after that. Airia collected her terrified servants and began giving out orders.

“Get me the messengers. Tell all units they are to cease hostilities immediately. We have surrendered to the demon army.”

Crap, that reminds me. I need to let my men know it’s over too.

“I’m gonna start howling, but don’t be scared. I’m just contacting my men.”

Airia’s servants had looked like they were about to faint just from seeing me, so I was trying to be as considerate as possible. I turned to the window and howled as loudly as I could.

“AWOOOOOOO!”

Anything made of glass in the room shivered, and the servants all screamed and fell on their backs. A few of them wet themselves. *Oops. I guess that was my fault.* Still, with that, my orders reached every corner of the city. Coded within my roar was the message.

"Commander has been defeated. Gather."

Seconds later, a series of howled replies reached my ears.

"On our way."

"Roger."

"No injured in our squad."

The howls faded away after everyone finished their reports. The fighting, which had been going overwhelmingly in our favor, came to an end. *I just hope those guys didn't kill too many people.*

Soon enough, all of the werewolves gathered at the plaza in front of the viceroy's manor. Each and every one of the men and women under my command looked quite intimidating. And though they were under my command, they technically weren't my subordinates.

"It's been a while since I last went on a rampage. Were battles always this tiring? My poor hips ache." A gray-haired werewolf walked up to me and grinned. It was Vod, the old geezer who lived in my neighborhood. In his human form, he looked like a kindly old man with white hair.

"It was probably good for you to get some exercise, old man. When you get to our age, you gotta keep fighting or you'll go senile." Mary, the old lady who ran the nearby grocery store grinned at Vod. She was a kind woman who always threw in a few freebies when I shopped at her place.

"Oh? We're done already?"

"Holding back tired me out more than if we'd just been allowed to cut loose..."

The werewolves I'd led for this operation were all my friends and neighbors. Which was why they acted so friendly with me. Werewolves always hunted in packs. Those who lived in the same town were all part of one pack. Whenever

they had to fight, they'd fight together like this.

That being said, werewolves were also demons. And there was only one thing demons respected: strength. Werewolves were no exception. Those who doubted my power and ability to lead started voicing their complaints.

"Hey Veight, how come we're being so soft on these humans?" A large werewolf with a striking crimson mane looked up at me. He was Nibert Garney, the younger of the Garney brothers. His elder brother, Garbert, strode forward and voiced his discontent as well. "Did you forget how many of our ancestors were hunted down by human scum like these? We should slaughter the lot of them."

I had been friends with both of them since childhood, and I knew they were stronger than me. In general, werewolves with red manes were stronger than others. So much so that they were given exaggerated nicknames like 'hunters of the blood moon' and so on. That being said, they were definitely tough. And because they had such confidence in their skills, they were unhappy with the fact that they were taking orders from me.

Ah well. As someone who used to be human, having to solve everything with violence is just a pain. But that's the only thing that'll get through to these two.

I leapt out of the second-story window and landed in front of the Garney brothers.

"Got a problem with my orders?"

The two of them exchanged glances. They probably thought they could take me if they attacked together. As expected, they puffed out their chests and attempted to intimidate me.

"That's right, I don't like your half-assed attitude. I should be the leader of this pack!"

Both brothers were a head taller than me, and they certainly looked imposing. It was obvious they wanted a fight. The other werewolves could tell as well, and they backed away to make space. No one else wanted to challenge me, it seemed.

I glared at the two brothers and said firmly, "I'm the one in charge here. If you

don’t like my orders, beat me down and take my position by force.”

“You sure you wanna say that?”

The Garney brothers grinned. Among the werewolves here, they were the strongest. Not only did they have burly bodies, they had trained constantly. One of the two always took the championship at the annual wrestling contest we held every harvest festival.

In a fair fight, I wouldn’t even be able to beat one of them, let alone both. Even when we were kids, I’d never been able to beat either of them no matter what I did. But right now, I was a vice-commander of the Demon Lord’s army. For one, very good reason. I smiled.

“Let’s see if you’re still saying that after you hear this.”

I unleashed a howl completely different from the ones before. Shockwaves of sound blew through the streets, shaking trees and buildings. This time, all of the windows in the viceroy’s manor shattered.

“Ugh!”

“Uwaah!?”

The Garney brothers staggered backwards. The other werewolves crouched on the spot, rooted there by fear. A werewolf’s roar had the power to instill fear into the hearts of men and beasts. Its effect was weakened on those who had a strong will to fight, and it was entirely ineffective against demons of the same class or higher. Naturally, this meant it was useless against other werewolves.

However, my roar was laced with mana—enhanced by the power of magic. For I wasn’t a warrior, but a mage. Vice-Commander of the Demon Lord’s third regiment, Veight the Werewolf Mage. That was who I was.

The spell I’d used in this particular instance was called ‘Soul Shaker.’ By manipulating the mana around me, I was able to turn my roar into something that could affect other demons as well. The spell’s primary effect was actually to seal away the magic of any humans in the vicinity for a short period of time, while simultaneously improving the power of my allies’ spells. It just also happened to possess the secondary effect of striking terror into the hearts of anyone who opposed me, regardless of how brave or determined they might

be. Trying to break free from my spell with willpower was akin to resisting anesthetics with resolve.

Naturally, the Garney brothers were unable to do a thing.

“Uwaah...”

“B-Bro—”

In their current state, I could kill the two of them with ease. I slowly walked up to the pair of them, and lightly tapped their stomachs with my fists. Seeing the two of them tremble, I grinned.

“Trust me now?”

I disabled my magic, and the brothers both sucked in deep breaths. Though they’d regained the ability to move, they no longer possessed the will to fight. Their ears drooped, just like beaten dogs. Finally, the older of the Garney brothers opened his mouth. His fur, which was usually bristling with vitality, seemed oddly colorless. It was proof he’d submitted.

“Y-Yeah... I won’t disobey you anymore... You’re...the boss.”

“That’s right.” I turned to the other werewolves with a smile. “Our third regiment has captured the trading city of Ryunheit! From now on, violence in the city is expressly forbidden, except in cases of self-defense!”

The werewolves lowered their heads in assent. I then began explaining our plan from here on out.

“Our objective is to transform this city into a forward base for the demon army’s future operations in the area. In other words, harming the citizens or the city’s infrastructure runs counter to our goals, understand?”

“No, I don’t get it, actually,” the younger of the Garney brothers replied. He wasn’t looking for a fight anymore; he genuinely just didn’t understand. While the Garney brothers were tough, they were also dumb as bricks. They always had been. I decided to simplify my explanation enough so even idiots like them could understand.

“Okay, look. This city is like a tasty deer meant for the Demon Lord’s army. So you fools better not make a mess of it and rip it to shreds before they get here.

Anyone steps out of line, and I kill them.”

“Ahh, I get it now.”

This time the Garney brothers nodded their understanding. I wasn’t sure if they’d really understood or not, but I’d have to settle with this for now.

The older brother folded his arms and muttered, “You think we’ll be able to live together with the humans, though? Seems to me they’re all ready to kill us in our sleep.”

He did have a point. The animosity coming from the inhabitants was palpable.

“Figuring out how to make things work is my job. In fact, I’m the only one capable of doing it, so you guys better listen to my orders.”

“Y-You got it, boss.”

At my glare, the two brothers nodded hurriedly. After confirming their obedience, I turned back to the other werewolves and continued my speech.

“Anyway, as far as meals go, you will be well-fed as long as you are here. If you want to hunt, you’re welcome to hunt as much as you like in the nearby forest. The only thing you’re forbidden from doing is attacking humans. Are we clear?”

To be honest, it was kind of tough giving orders to my friends and neighbors. Which was probably why my speech had gotten a little awkward at the end. Still, it seemed everyone was willing to cooperate.

“Hohoho, no problem, kid. I’m fine with following your orders.”

“Besides, it’ll be good to get a rest before the next battle.”

Since the elders had shown their support, the younger werewolves followed suit.

“Man, I’m starving! Hey Veight, when do we get to eat?”

“And where are we staying, anyway? You’re not gonna tell us to camp out, are you?”

“Oh shut up, you brats! I’ll get all that sorted out too, so stop bugging me!”

The werewolf squad had been understaffed, so we’d padded our numbers out

with everyone from the elderly to kids barely old enough to fight. The only people still in our village were the very elderly, a few sick people, and kids too young to be useful on the battlefield. Oh, and their parents.

We may have looked like a fearsome crew, and we definitely were pretty ferocious in a fight, but it's not like our unit was made up of veteran fighters or anything. The two kids who'd badgered me earlier were barely in their teens. This was a city of 3000, while my werewolves numbered a mere 56. Even if I included the 200 canine corps waiting outside the city, I didn't have the manpower to fight back in the event of a revolt.

Are we really going to be alright? Even I wasn't sure I'd be able to maintain control.

I may have captured Ryunheit in under an hour, but keeping it was going to take a lot more work. The biggest issue was the number of casualties. I hadn't expected it to be so high. There hadn't been any werewolf casualties, but the number of slain Ryunheit soldiers was staggering. Everyone had done their best to hold back, but even so, 70 men had died in the attack, with over a hundred more gravely injured. If we'd fought at full strength, it's possible we would have wiped out Ryunheit's entire garrison.

I used my shoddy healing magic skills to heal as many of the soldiers as I could. My magic could only do as much as a hospital in my old world would have been able to, but considering the medical development of this world, that in itself was really fortunate. At a hospital here, there was a high chance you'd die from infection or poor quality medicine, so the soldiers had it well off by comparison.

I went to the last injured soldier and put my hand over his broken bones. I'd only dabbled in healing magic in order to properly learn strengthening magic, but I knew enough to deal with simple wounds like these. Shocked, the soldier looked from my hand to my face as he felt the pain recede. *That should do it.*

"Any other injured?"

I transformed back into my human form and swept my robe back. I'd maintained my wolf form while healing in case any of the soldiers tried to attack

me, but it appeared that had been a needless worry.

Mages were the elites of this world. They were far more important than even doctors or lawyers were back in my old world. Even in a decently large city such as this one, there probably wasn't anyone able to match my magical skills. In general, demons tended to make better magicians than humans. Which meant that, to these soldiers, even my crappy healing magic must have seemed remarkable. Though their wounds had been healed, the soldiers still appeared tense, so I decided to reassure them a little.

"Few have the courage to stand and fight when face-to-face with a werewolf. Even fewer have come out of a tussle with one alive. We may have been holding back, but that doesn't change the fact that you are hardened warriors, worthy of respect."

I doubted they were happy to be praised after hearing we'd held back, but I needed to emphasize the difference in strength between us. This was just the best way I could think of doing it without also hurting their pride. *Dealing with people sure is difficult.*

"Your Viceroy, Airia, has promised to hold a service for the seventy men who fell in battle. They may have been my enemy, but they were truly brave soldiers."

If anything, I'd say they were more unlucky than brave, seeing as they died even though we held back. 'Course, no one would be happy to hear that. Better to make them into heroes. I bowed to the remaining soldiers and left the barracks.

Man, that was awkward...

There was a mountain of things I still needed to do. First, after agonizing over whether or not to let the canine corps in, I ended up compromising by letting them camp right outside the castle gate.

Canines were weak. In a fair fight, they'd lose even to the average farmer. If I let them into the city and the people decided to revolt, it'd be impossible to protect them. I didn't have enough werewolves to guard them all. It was smarter just to leave them outside for now. And since I was leaving them near

the walls anyway, I ordered them to a thoroughly investigate said walls. Canines were primarily silversmiths, and they were far more skilled craftsmen than werewolves. If there was anything strange about this city's walls, they'd discover it straight away.

Canines were light eaters, and they had brought their own supplies with them, so I didn't need to worry about feeding them for now. Feeding the werewolves, on the other hand, was going to be quite an ordeal. Most werewolves ate more than an Olympic athlete, including myself. Fortunately there weren't too many of us, so I was able to convince the viceroy to pay for our meals. As long as you kept them fed, you could keep werewolves docile.

For safety reasons, I split my squad into two groups and had them lodge in separate places. My squad was to stay in the viceroy's manor, while another would stay with the canines to protect them. The problem was, I didn't know who to appoint as leader of the other squad.

Both of the Garney brothers were out of the question. I needed to keep them under constant supervision, or who knew what kind of trouble they'd cause. They were idiots, after all. Ideally I'd ask one of the elders to do it, but once a werewolf returned to their human forms, they had the stamina of a normal human their age. The fighting this afternoon had been fierce, and I wanted to let them rest.

As I was deliberating, a woman slightly older than me walked over. She was another of my neighbors, Fahn. She also happened to be my first love. Back when we were five, I'd asked her to marry me. To which she'd said yes, with a smile.

"Veight, would it be alright if I take charge of the second squad?"

"That's fine by me, Fahn-onee... I mean Fahn."

Whoops, I almost used the nickname I'd called her by when we were kids. Fahn snickered in response and nodded.

"We just have to guard the canine unit and keep watch over the gates, right? I've become pretty good friends with those guys, so just leave it to me."

Come to think of it, she *was* a big fan of dogs. When we'd been marching

she'd spent most of her time cuddling with the canines. Plus, she was dependable, and someone I could trust. Not only that, in terms of pure strength, she was stronger than me. I'd need magic to beat her.

She always won the girls' wrestling tournament back in our village, and she'd be able to give even the Garney brothers a run for their money. In fact, she was the only person who intimidated them. Seeing as she wasn't lacking in qualifications, I wasted no time in appointing her the commander of the second squad.

"Alright, you've been promoted to Vice-Captain. Here's a list of the members I was thinking of assigning to your squad. If you want to swap any of them out I don't mind."

"Let's see here... Yep, this'll be just fine. Just leave the rest to me."

Fahn winked, causing my heart to skip a beat. I kept my excitement off my face, and said in a commander-like tone, "I'll be counting on you, Fahn."

"You got it, Sir Vice-Commander."

She bowed to me with a smile, took the list from my hands, and walked off. *I wonder what she'd say if I asked her to marry me now?*

"This is more exhausting than I thought..." I sighed as I looked out at the city, dyed orange by the dying light of the setting sun. I was sitting in one of the viceroy's guest rooms, which I'd appropriated for myself. Should citizens decide to revolt, I didn't have the manpower to settle things peacefully. The only way to maintain my hold on the town would be to kill anyone who resisted. *I really hope nothing happens.*

Just then, I heard a knock at my door.

"Enter."

Ryunheit's Viceroy, Airia, walked into the room. As promised, I hadn't stripped her of her title. Not only was she a competent leader, she had the trust of her people. It would have been a waste to replace her. Now the only problem was whether or not she'd cooperate with us as promised. At this point, I still couldn't be sure. One word from her would be all it took to incite the citizens to

revolt. It was possible she'd try and gather her elite guards to try and assassinate me too.

Of course, nothing she might try would actually pose a threat, but it would still mean I'd failed to occupy Ryunheit peacefully. Airia watched me curiously and said, "Is something wrong, Sir Veight?"

"Ah, no, it's nothing. Anyway, what did you need, Lady Airia?"

Since we were both leaders of our respective camps, it was imperative that we treated each other with courtesy. Airia looked down apologetically and said, "I have managed to suppress any discontent in the city. At present, I don't think the citizens will attempt to revolt, or escape."

"I see, that's good to know. I'll probably have to restrict the freedom of the residents for a little bit while things settle down, but I aim to have this city running normally as fast as possible."

For some reason, my words made Airia look even more apologetic.

"That shouldn't be a problem. However..." Airia trailed off. She seemed to be picking her words very carefully. Whatever it was she wanted to say, she was having a hard time saying it.

"Is there something you need from me? If it's within my power to grant, I don't mind hearing out your request."

"Oh no, that's not it... The thing is, Sir Veight..."

Her expression grew even more troubled. This was a good opportunity to show off how tolerant I could I be to my conquered subjects.

"Don't worry, I promise not to resort to violence, no matter what it is you have to report."

After seeing my serious expression, Airia finally decided to talk.

"The truth is, there is one complication with regards to the soldiers stationed here."

"There is?"

I thought they'd surrendered quietly, but I guess that wasn't the case.

According to Airia, the problem was that the city's garrison didn't actually belong to her. The soldiers stationed in Ryunheit were actually under the direct command of the Meraldia Commonwealth, which Ryunheit was a part of. In other words, only the Meraldian senate could give orders to the men.

Before the city-states in the region had coalesced into a single nation, they had often fought with each other. For this reason, when Meraldia had been formed, it had been decided that only the senate had authority over the troops stationed in each city. Without the senate's permission, no large-scale orders could be given. The Meraldia Commonwealth was comprised of seventeen city-states of varying sizes. It lay due east of the Great Forest that the demons had made their home, so conflicts between them and the demons were common. In fact, at the start of the current war, the Demon Lord's army had had its hands full dealing with the subjugation army Meraldia had dispatched.

Regardless, I could understand that Airia was dealing with a rather complicated situation. Just to make sure, I confirmed I had the facts straight.

"So what you're saying is, even if they have agreed to surrender, you don't have the authority to force them to cooperate with us?"

"Precisely. All I can do is implore that they acquiesce."

As far as I could tell, Airia wasn't lying. It turned out, humans gave off a peculiar odor when they lied. One that a werewolf's sensitive nose could easily pick out.

"That's definitely a problem."

I folded my arms and lapsed into thought. *There's only 200 soldiers left, but I need them to maintain public order. If the city's garrison refuses to cooperate with us, then I'll have to ask my werewolves to patrol the streets instead. But there's not nearly enough of them, and they're not suited to this kind of work. Plus, if my men are busy keeping the peace, I'll only have my canine unit to fight the army Meraldia's undoubtedly gonna send to recapture the city. There's no way I'll be able to win with just them.*

"Hmm..."

A normal demon would have attempted to threaten the soldiers, or kill half of

them to make an example out of anyone who resisted, but that wasn't my style. Rule through fear inevitably invited revolt. And maintaining just the right amount of fear so that people obeyed you, but not enough that they felt compelled to fight back, was far too much effort. The risk of pushing your populace over the edge was always present, too. Besides, as a former human, I wanted to avoid killing humans outside of the battlefield.

Seeing my troubled expression, Airia timidly asked, "You're not going to make an example out of the soldiers?"

"Do you want me to?" I said with a wry smile, and Airia firmly shook her head.

"No, not at all. I simply thought you would turn to force to resolve this issue."

"Forcibly imposing your will on others works for demons, but not for humans."

I could understand the soldiers' concerns. If they chose to side with us, they would be tried as traitors if Meraldia successfully retook the city. After thinking about it for a while, I decided it would be better to give up on obtaining the soldiers' cooperation.

"I can see why it would be a difficult choice for them. In that case, as long as they're willing to disarm, I won't ask for anything more. Please let them know that."

"Understood...and thank you for being merciful."

Airia breathed a sigh of relief upon learning that I wouldn't do anything horrific to the soldiers. Her business concluded, she turned to leave. When she reached the door, she hesitated for a few seconds, before ultimately turning back to face me.

"Umm..."

"What seems to be the matter?"

At my urging, Airia gathered her resolve and opened her mouth. "If all you want is to maintain order, you could ask the merchants guild to patrol the streets instead."

"The guild?"

“The various branch offices of the guild have always helped patrol the city and maintain the fire brigades. Too much crime would negatively impact business, so they have an incentive to keep the city safe.”

I see, so they’re basically like a neighborhood watch. I’d lived in a large city in my previous life, and I had been raised in a werewolf community in my current, so such a possibility hadn’t even occurred to me.

Airia continued without waiting for my reply, “This city’s guild falls within my jurisdiction. They might not make for as effective patrols as armed guards would, but it wouldn’t hurt to ask I imagine.”

I mulled her suggestion over. Her proposal was certainly beneficial for me, but it didn’t serve her interests in any way. In fact, it would make her indebted to the merchants guild. I needed to know why she was doing this before accepting.

“Why would you go so far to help me?”

Her response wasn’t one I was expecting.

“Because I’m grateful to you, Sir Veight.”

“You...are?”

The last thing I had expected was for her to be thanking her conquerors. Airia’s expression softened and she continued, “During the battle, you and your men didn’t attack anyone other than the soldiers. Even though with your strength, you could have easily started slaughtering the citizens.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

I could have, but there really wouldn’t have been any point to it. Nor was it really a reason to be thanking me. However, it seemed Airia thought differently. She bowed her head and said, “I hope you will continue showing such mercy to the people of my city. If cooperating with you will help ensure that, then I will offer up everything I can.”

So if it’s to protect her city, she’s willing to negotiate with the demon army, huh? Even if Ryunheit did get retaken by Meraldia’s forces, they wouldn’t be able to try the citizens as traitors, since they had been acting under the viceroy’s orders. It seemed this cross-dressing woman was no mere coward, nor

a simple pushover. She let herself get flustered a little too easily, but she was otherwise a hardened realist who was well-suited to her post. Now that I knew where she was coming from, there was no reason to not to accept her aid.

“Thank you. I promise to repay this debt someday. So I would like you to use your authority to mobilize the merchants guild.”

“Understood.”

Airia smiled in relief. It was a rather beautiful smile.

Thanks to Airia’s assistance, I was able to solve all of my most pressing issues and get a good night’s sleep. I did post a watch, just in case, but the city remained quiet through the night. By the next morning, life in Ryunheit had already returned to a relative degree of normalcy.

“Last night, we caught some thieves who were hoping to go unnoticed during the confusion of the occupation.”

One of my werewolves came to report that to me first thing this morning. He was looking at me with something akin to hero worship. My standoff with the Garney brothers yesterday must have left an impression.

“What should we do about them, sir? Execute them as a warning to others?”

Had he been in his wolf form, I don’t doubt that his tail would be wagging back and forth right now. He looked just like a puppy begging its master to play with him. However, execution was a little extreme. I shook my head.

“We’re soldiers, not police.”

“Po-lice?”

He tilted his head in confusion, so I explained it in simpler terms.

“Basically, let the humans in charge of keeping order handle it. They’ll be punished according to the laws of the city. Speaking of which, what do Ryunheit’s laws say the punishment for stealing is?”

I turned to the human secretary sitting next to me, and she hastened to reply.

“In the case of theft or property damage, reimbursement equal to the value

of the stolen or destroyed goods must be paid. In the event that reimbursement cannot be made, the criminal is sentenced to forced labor until they have repaid twice the value of the lost goods."

"There you go. Send them to work in the fields until they've paid off their debts."

"Why farm work?"

"Because we've got two hundred fifty-six new permanent residents here, and they need to be fed."

Naturally, I was referring to us. I could get by requisitioning supplies from the citizens, but if I kept doing it for too long they'd begin to resent us. Nothing nurtures a grudge like an empty stomach. As the day progressed, plenty of other people showed up with minor issues that needed resolving.

"The merchants who ended up trapped here because of the fighting are requesting that we let them leave the city so they can resume their journeys."

"According to the canine unit, the sewer system that runs beneath the castle walls is in dire need of repair."

"The Garney brothers are asking for more food."

I was stuck taking care of one problem after another.

"Tell them that no one is allowed out of the city at present. As for their goods, buy all of their stock at a premium and tell them to stay at an inn for now," I replied at once.

The problem is, how am I going to pay for all that... I guess I have no choice but to ask Airia. I just keep putting myself further in her debt.

"It'll be dangerous if we leave the sewage system alone, so tell the canine unit to start repairs immediately. Make sure you post guards around the area as well, it's possible enemies might try and sneak in through there."

Unfortunately, the 200 strong canine unit wasn't large enough to handle this project on their own. Since they worked in shifts, only 60 of them were active at any point in time. Finding manpower to assist them wouldn't be easy though.

"And as for the Garney brothers, give them more work and tell them to buy

extra food with the money they earn. If they wanna eat, they better make themselves useful."

It was almost noon, and I hadn't even had breakfast yet. Now was probably a good time to take a break and get some food. I rose to my feet and stretched my limbs.

"Phew..."

"Good work." A cute, childish voice answered me. Surprised, I turned around to see a young girl sporting a pointed hat and a cape. I instantly dropped to one knee and bowed.

"I am gladdened by your return, Commander Gomoviroa."

"How many times must I tell you, call me Gomo."

Commander of the Demon Lord's third regiment, Gomoviroa the Great Sage, puffed out her cheeks unhappily. She looked just like a child. However, this child-like girl was the strongest mage in the Demon Lord's army, and though she was human, she was one of the Demon Lord's closest aides. She also happened to be my magic teacher.

"I could never. At least allow me to call you Master."

"Why must you insist on being so stubborn?" Gomoviroa sighed, but in the next second her annoyance vanished and she smiled. "No matter. You did well, capturing Ryunheit as swiftly as you did."

"It was all thanks to you, Master. By the way..."

If my master had arrived, that would mean her personal squad of elites should be here as well. I was banking on them to help with managing the city. Gomoviroa's smile grew wider as I trailed off.

"I see my Bone Spears are in high demand. Fear not, I have sent my two thousand men to rendezvous with the canine squad."

"One step ahead as always, I see."

My master's specialty was necromancy. The skeleton warriors she raised were all skilled warriors who moved with precision. If we had her 2,000 Bone Spears, we would be able to hold out against human armies several times larger. Not

only that, since they were undead they didn't require food or rest. My master heaved another sigh.

"I certainly hope you aren't thinking something like 'Undead soldiers don't need food, so I won't have to worry about upkeep if I have them.'"

"Uhh, well..."

"Have you no consideration for the amount of effort it takes to create them? Each and every one of my soldiers is crafted with love and care."

"Says the woman who makes hundreds every day."

"Did you say something?"

"Oh no, not at all."

While my master was an accomplished mage, she wasn't a very skilled strategist. So it wasn't surprising that she didn't understand my hardships.

"If food is your concern, could you not just requisition supplies from the citizenry? Even humans do it to each other."

"I'd rather not, if I could help it. I don't want the people to resent us."

"You are certainly asking for a lot, wanting the people you conquered not to resent you," she said with a chuckle. Though my master was human, her thought processes were just like a demon's. If she felt like it, she could obliterate the viceroy's manor with a snap of her fingers. In fact, she could turn the entire city to ash in less than a day without a second thought. It was hard to say whether she was really even human anymore.

That being said, she still remembered what it was like to be human, and she was part of the more moderate faction within the Demon Lord's camp.

"Though I suppose it was because of your considerate personality that I took you on as my disciple in the first place. I would never teach my secrets to one who thirsts for blood."

"Glad to hear it."

I still clearly remember the conversation we had the first day I met her.

“You wish to become a magician? Why would a werewolf turn to magic?”

“I’m...not really that strong. But I want to be!”

“For what purpose?”

“I want to protect everyone in the village. Also... I kinda want the other kids to respect me more.”

“You’re one honest kid... Very well, I suppose we can at least find out whether or not you have the aptitude to use magic.”

“Really!? Thank you so much!”

“But know that if you lack the talent, you will have no choice but to... Are you even listening to me?”

Gomoviroa smiled wryly at me; she must have been thinking back to the same conversation.

“I knew it was theoretically possible for werewolves to possess the necessary talent, but I never thought you would come so far. A shame you have no affinity for necromancy whatsoever.”

“Well, I *am* a werewolf.”

I was most skilled in body strengthening magic, mostly because I could only use magic that affected living creatures directly. If I were to explain it in RPG terms, I was basically a support buffer class. And though I’d originally taken it up as just a hobby, I’d become somewhat proficient in healing magic as well. Thanks to my magical abilities, I’d become one of the strongest werewolves around. And since werewolves were one of the stronger demon races, in terms of overall rankings, I was pretty high up there. My career had ended up stalling at mere vice-commander, though...

“By the way, Master, what are you doing here? I thought you were staying in the castle?”

When I’d talked to her at the Demon Lord’s castle, she had said she would remain there. The second and third regiments had planned on invading multiple cities simultaneously, and so the commanders had planned to remain behind

with the reserves and dispatch them as the situation developed.

Still smiling, Gomoviroa said, “I stayed behind to support the army most in need of assistance. It seems to me that would be yours, would it not? All of my other disciples were provided with ample soldiers, so they have no need of my help.”

“I-I guess that’s true.”

So we really did spread our forces too thin. Still, under my command we’d managed to capture our assigned city. I puffed my chest out proudly.

“Though, I did manage to capture my city with the smallest squad out of everyone. With zero casualties, too. Pretty impressive, wouldn’t you say?”

“I will admit you did well in utilizing your werewolves’ unique traits to their maximum, but I also have no doubt you spent the night cowering in fear of a revolt.”

“How did you know?”

“I know your personality in and out, boy.”

With a smile, she floated into the air and alighted on my shoulder.

“Is there anyone you can delegate leadership to?”

“Ah, yes. I’ve already put Fahn in charge of the unit at the castle gates, so that’s one burden off my shoulders. Did you meet her on your way in?”

“Ah, that girl you fancy.”

“How do you know that?”

“I know your tastes in and out, too.” She grinned mischievously. “Teasing aside, I would like to borrow you for a moment. We need to report to the Demon Lord.”

“You want me to go too?”

I found it strange that the Demon Lord would want to listen to a report from a mere vice-commander. Normally, it was the commander’s job to send reports to him. However, Gomoviroa shook her head and said, “The Demon Lord expressed that he wished to hear the particulars from the general who led the

operation. Stop asking questions and follow me.”

My master chanted a spell in a singsong voice. A second later, my vision grew blurry and the space around me warped.

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—Gomoviroa’s Memoir, Page 160—

My beloved disciples have grown up splendidly. They have risen to prominent ranks in the Demon Lord’s army, and all lead a squad of soldiers. My werewolf disciple, Veight, has made much progress as well. As far as I am aware, he is the only werewolf mage in history. That makes his growth all the more spectacular. Though I must admit, he is quite a peculiar child. One would have to be peculiar to aspire to be a mage as a werewolf, but that’s not the only thing odd about him. It’s true his talents lie in strengthening magic, but even so, his understanding of a person’s body is phenomenal.

Take, for example, detoxification. It is known that concentrating one’s magic in the right side of their stomach when attempting to expunge poisons is the most effective method. The prevailing theories as to why are either that toxins gather in that area of the body, or that somewhere near there lies an organ that assists with detoxification. When I’d first taken Veight on as my apprentice, he’d already known that. Once I’d taught him the basics of detoxification magic, he seemed to understand instantly why his right flank was the correct place to concentrate his mana. To be honest, it shocked even me.

Veight seems to have a natural sense for which parts of the body need the application of strengthening to achieve the effects he wants. As such, he knows that the best way to alleviate exhaustion is to focus mana into one’s right flank. And that to slake thirst, mana should be applied not to the throat, but one’s waist. He even knows that focusing on the back and waist muscles, rather than one’s arms or legs, is more important when it comes to close-combat fighting.

These are all things normal practitioners don’t notice until they have accumulated more experience. And yet, Veight figures out the optimal way to apply each spell the moment he learns it. It’s possible I may have picked up a hidden genius. But the reason I value Veight isn’t just his magical talent. His

perspective on life is nothing like a normal demon's. For a werewolf, he's unbelievably passive, and slow to anger. Though he is by no means physically weak, he's unsuited to the style of combat most werewolves prefer. But his wisdom and unorthodox methods are precisely what the demon army needs right now. It is for this reason that I have not yet passed down my final techniques to him. For him to reach his peak as a simple magician would be a colossal waste of his talents.

There is an ancient saying that goes "To serve muddy water in a cup of gold is the height of folly." I wish for him to grow further before bestowing upon him the secrets of magic. However, the fact that I have taught this to all my disciples but him seems to have given him the misconception that he is inferior by comparison. This misconception will need to be remedied eventually. After all, it is my hope and expectation that he will reach the pinnacle of strengthening magic.

Regardless, I have recommended Veight to the Demon Lord. My other disciples are of course all splendid as well, but he alone is special. There is no one like him within our nation.

It is my firm belief that he will accomplish great things.

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—The Demon Army's Operating Headquarters, Grenschtat Castle—

While the castle name sounded impressive, the truth was it was just a run-down border castle. It had originally been a human fortress that had been abandoned centuries ago after an internal conflict between human kingdoms. The demons had found it much later, repaired it with magic, made it nigh-impregnable, and were now using it as their forward base. The fortress was surrounded by a dense magical fog that made it both invisible and impossible to approach. Any human that touched the fog would be left paralyzed, and sensors inside the mist would inform the castle of their location. Even if the humans sent an army, they would just be annihilated before reaching the castle.

I walked through the mist, my master riding atop my shoulder. To us demons,

the fog just felt mildly pleasant. Teleportation magic was sealed within the castle, so we had no choice but to go on foot from the main gates. I was in my werewolf form to avoid causing any misunderstandings with the guards.

“Despite how creepy it looks, it’s actually kind of nice here.”

“I happen to be a human, so I’m afraid I cannot say the same—but I suppose it’s not unpleasant, at least.”

So she really has thrown away half of her humanity. The dragonkin guarding the gates recognized my face and let us pass without question. All of the guards within the castle were highly skilled dragonkin. They belonged to the first regiment, which was headed directly by the Demon Lord himself. As I strode across the castle’s courtyard, I sensed a figure approaching from beyond the mist. Whoever it was, they were massive.

“Him, huh?”

At Gomoviroia’s muttered words, I too realized who was coming. I would recognize that stench of blood anywhere.

“If it isn’ da third regimen’s commander.”

The mist parted to reveal a giant with the face of a beast. He was easily three meters tall. Twice my height. He was also an ogre. Ogres in this world didn’t look too different from how RPGs had envisioned them. He was wearing only a crude loincloth and carried a massive steel club.

This man, Dogg, happened to be a Vice-Commander of the second regiment, and the general who led the ogre corps. His name might have sounded funny, but laugh at it and you’d likely get your brains bashed out. Apparently, among ogres, the name meant ‘Mad Dog.’ Which, to be honest, just made it sound more laughable.

Without even the barest hint of respect to my master’s title, he gave her a coarse greeting before turning to me.

“Goin’ ta give your report? Took ya long enough,” he sneered.

I guess that means he already finished giving his. He couldn’t have beat us here by more than a few minutes at most, but all this lump of muscle cared

about was winning, even when it wasn't a competition. When he saw I wasn't going to take the bait, he tried to needle me some more.

"I dun care if ya took down a tradin' city or whatever, is it really worth comin' all da way back here to report about in person? I'll have ya know I took down da minin' city of Boltz."

Dogg puffed his chest out proudly and raised his club up high. *Is that really something to get that excited about?*

"Do ya get what dat means? I took down a *minin'* city. Dat means tis got ore. Tradin' cities dun got no ore. Dat means dey worthless."

Oh, that's where he's going with this. Basically, he was trying to emphasize how much better his achievement was. I doubt this halfwit understood what kind of value a trading city might offer us. In fact, most of the people in this world, whether they be human or demon, seemed unable to understand a lot of simple concepts. I knew just how important a stable flow of goods was to a nation's economy, but it would take far too long to explain that to him, so I didn't bother. Instead, I just shrugged my shoulders.

"Must be nice to have it easy."

Dogg's face flushed bright red. Apparently, ogre blood was as red as human blood.

"Are ya makin' fun of me!? I'm da strongest, smartest, ogre der is—I'm da great Dogg!"

Smartest, huh... Well, I guess most ogres have the brains of a toddler. Since he's at least as smart as a middle schooler, I guess that does make him the smartest.

"And I happen to be a werewolf mage. A genius like you should easily be able to tell which of us is stronger, right?"

"Of course! Me!"

Oh god, he's a moron. I turned back to my master for backup, but she'd floated a short distance away and was now watching impassively.

"You two vice-commanders have fun, now."

“Master...”

My master found fighting as much of a pain as I did. Sighing, I turned back to the ogre.

For demons, power was everything. The weak submitted to the strong. *I guess I’ll give him a taste of what I can do.*

I glared at Dogg and said, “Stop blocking my way with your fat ass, weakling.”

“What was dat!?”

Without warning, he swung his massive club down. But I wasn’t fool enough to let it hit me. To a werewolf’s superior eyesight, his club looked like it was falling in slow-motion. I leapt backwards, and Dogg’s club smashed into the ground in front of me, sending stone splinters flying everywhere.

“Oi, don’t go breaking the Demon Lord’s precious castle.”

If he really wants to fight that badly, I suppose I can indulge him.

“Rowdy kids like you need to be punished.”

Ogres tended to be physically stronger than werewolves. Considering the difference in size between them, that much was obvious. With their massive clubs, ogres could easily mow down scores of enemies with one swing. When it came to brute force, they were the best. However, there was one fatal flaw with their physiques. Due to their size, they were abysmally slow. That being said, it still took a good deal of courage and skill to take the initiative against one. Especially because dealing a serious blow to their tough hides with a single attack wasn’t easy. Even if you could, that wouldn’t stop their swing from crushing you. They were quite a terrifying opponent. For humans, anyway.

While I mused on the ogre-human matchup, I dodged another one of Dogg’s blows. No ogre could give me trouble, vice-commander or not. Dogg’s club, which wasn’t even spiked, wasn’t much of a threat when it was that slow. And I wasn’t nice enough to give him time to get off a third swing. I leapt forward and drove a powerful kick into Dogg’s chin.

“Ugwah!?”

A human’s skull would have shattered from that blow, but ogres were made

of sterner stuff. I managed to crush Dogg's jaw, but that was all. He really was built like a tank. Most other foes would have thrown in the towel at this point, but Dogg hadn't risen to his position by backing down.

Fighting spirit still burning fiercely, Dogg swung his club up at me.

"Whoa."

His aim may have been poor, but if even one of his blows struck home I'd be down for the count. I hopped out of the way and prepared to land the finishing blow. *Come to think of it, Master's watching me right now. Maybe I should use a little magic.* I twisted my fingers into a magical sign and poured mana into the palms of my hands.

"Sorry about this."

My claws began emanating a dark light, and a second later they were enveloped in black flames. I'd used a spell that temporarily enhanced the sharpness of a weapon. I dug my flame-wrapped claws into Dogg's shattered jaw.

"GRAAAAAAAAAAH!"

After pushing my way inside his face, I grabbed a fistful of cracked and broken bone, and crushed it in my fist. Even Dogg couldn't bear that kind of pain. He dropped his club—all will to resist gone. Against a human opponent I could have ended the fight long ago, but with demons you had to beat them thoroughly or they'd never accept you. I had to prove to him beyond a shadow of doubt that I was stronger. And so, I mercilessly flipped his body around and lifted him up by his broken jaw, forcing his body into an awkward position. Had his neck not been so thick, it would have broken.

"Feel like surrendering now?"

Stubborn to a fault, Dogg only screamed in pain. *Looks like I've got no choice.*

"Fine, I'll just put you to sleep, then."

I slammed his head against the ground. His skull was tough enough to break boulders, but that didn't mean it didn't hurt. His eyes rolled back in his head and he fell unconscious. That last blow must have given him a concussion. The

rest of his body slumped to the ground with a thud. He wouldn't be getting back up any time soon.

If there was no one better in a contest of strength than ogres, there was no one more suited to murder than werewolves. And though this fight had been brutal, it was rather standard when it came to contests of strength between demons. It was because demons were so prone to violence that humans feared them so.

"Alright, that's enough. Mmm, that was a good match."

Her tone made it clear that she didn't care one way or another about the fight. She floated down and healed Dogg's shattered jaw with healing magic, then patted him on the shoulder.

"Your gallant display was most impressive. I see your title was not just for show."

"O-Oww... Gah...it hurds..."

Though his wounds should have been healed, Dogg was still groaning in pain. It appeared my master had used the most painful recovery spell to heal him. She'd strengthened Dogg's own natural healing powers. Doing so drained his scant mana reserves to close his wounds, but left him in excruciating pain until he was fully healed. My master definitely had a cruel streak to her.

Once she was finished, my master turned around and smacked me on the head, a displeased expression on her face.

"What kind of fight was that? I expect better from one of my disciples."

"Y-Yes, Master..."

I thought I'd won pretty handily, but apparently my master wasn't satisfied. Still floating in front of me, she muttered, "For a moment, I feared he might defeat you. Seriously, were you trying to give this old lady a heart attack?"

Oh, she was just worried. She may have had a cruel streak, but Gomoviroa was also pretty protective of her disciples.

We left Dogg to his suffering and went to meet the Demon Lord. This would

mark my second meeting with him. When we arrived at the imposing steel doors that marked the entrance to his chambers, I took a few deep breaths. The Demon Lord was the strongest demon in the realm, a true king who ruled over tens of thousands of people. If he wanted to, he could kill me with a puff of his nostrils.

“Commander of the third regiment, Gomoviroa, and my Vice-Commander, Veight. We’re here to deliver our report,” My master said in a calm voice. A second later, the massive double doors creaked open. The Demon Lord’s room was modest, but stately. Polished obsidian pillars lined the halls, each giving off an ethereal gleam. They had been gilded with the canines’ famed silver. Black was the main motif of the room, but it was highlighted with occasional silver accents.

Personally, I thought a little more silver would have been better, but it was possible he’d kept it subdued to make people want more. If the room had been filled with silver, it wouldn’t have left as lasting an impression on visitors. Also, it just wasn’t practical to have your entire room decorated in silver. The dragonkin guarding the Demon Lord’s personal chambers had black scales, and they were armed with short spears tipped in silver. They fit perfectly with the overall theme of the room.

A deep voice boomed from the back of the room.

“Enter.”

I involuntarily flinched, but it wasn’t like I’d done anything wrong. Plus, I had my reliable master at my side. *Maybe I’ll mess up my greetings a little or something, but it should be fine.* Besides, even if I died, I might end up getting reincarnated again. I calmed my nerves and tried to walk as confidently as possible. My footsteps echoed across the vast room.

Wait a second. That’s weird. My footsteps aren’t sounding when my feet actually touch the ground. If I had to guess, the positioning of the pillars caused sound waves to be reflected out of time within the room. My decision to walk boldly had brought me a valuable piece of information. I had heard that dragonkin were all pragmatists, and it seemed that really was the case. Even with art, they found a use for it.

Dragonkin were basically the lizardmen you see in RPGs. However, they loathed being likened to lizards. And in truth, they were far more intelligent than the lizardmen you saw in games. They just happened to look draconic. The main reason that they served as the Demon Lord's personal bodyguards was because the Demon Lord himself was a dragonkin. There was no special race of demons that the Demon Lord had to belong to. And the man currently holding the throne was Demon Lord Friedensrichter. As you might expect from the Demon Lord, he was no ordinary dragonkin. For one thing, he was as large as an ogre. Most dragonkin stood just shy of two meters tall, which made him massive. Furthermore, his scales weren't the usual dark brown or green that most dragonkin had. No, they were a fiery red. In fact, it often looked like he was wreathed in flames. His horns were long and intimidating, proof that he'd lived a good number of decades.

What frightened me the most about him, though, was his mana. Since I was a mage, I could see the mana swirling around him. He was overflowing with such a huge quantity of it that he expelled a little with each breath he took. It was unthinkable for one person to possess so much. Most dragonkin didn't possess anywhere close to that amount. I probably wouldn't be able to beat him even if I had my entire village and my master backing me up. That was how huge the difference in strength between us was. As a demon, I had no choice but to respect him. I squeezed out what little courage I could and addressed my lord.



“Vice-Commander of the third regiment, Weremage Veight, reporting.”

Weremage was a title I had received directly from the Demon Lord. All of the demon army’s generals were granted a unique title. Only the rank and file soldiers didn’t have any.

The Demon Lord turned his golden eyes onto me. I reflexively stood up a little straighter.

“I have successfully captured the trading city of Ryunheit. At present, the city is under our complete control.”

“Well done.” His voice wasn’t loud, but it carried a weight that made even the pillars shake. With this, my report was finished. I figured I’d get to leave back now, but it seemed that wasn’t the case. “I would like you briefly explain the tactics you used to capture the city,” he continued.

“Y-Yes, sir!?”

I hastily saluted and thought about how best to answer this question. *I guess I should just explain the final plan.*

“I launched a surprise attack against the viceroy’s manor, my lord. I had my werewolves infiltrate the city under the guise of travelers, then used my canines to create a diversion.”

The Demon Lord watched me silently for a few moments. *Should I have explained it in more detail?* While I was worrying, the Demon Lord nodded in satisfaction.

“You effectively utilized your werewolves’ unique traits for this battle. But tell me, what benefits did this grant you?”

Now that was an easy one to answer.

“I was able to keep my forces’ casualties to a minimum. On top of that, it made ruling the city once it had surrendered an easy task.”

“Explain to me the importance of the former point.”

He just won’t give it a rest, huh? But this was another easy question.

“Werewolves are the elite troopers of your army, my lord. They are not easily

replaced. Considering the overall situation of the war, I thought it prudent to conserve my forces as much as possible."

"Very well, now explain how your surprise attack achieved the latter point."

Figures he'd ask about that, too. This reminds me of when I was studying for entrance exams... Since demons fundamentally valued strength, they didn't nurse grudges over their defeats, regardless of how they were beaten. After all, if they didn't like the result, they could always challenge their opponent again. But humans weren't like that. If you killed their comrades, they would resent you forever. Even if they submitted at first, they would just wait for a chance to get their revenge. That was their nature.

"The surprise attack allowed us to limit damage to the enemy's forces. This was done to prevent the humans from harboring grudges against us. I have opted to let the viceroy retain her position as well, and have obtained her cooperation in managing the city."

At that, the Demon Lord roared.

"HOW IS THAT SUPERIOR TO RULE THROUGH FORCE!?" The air in the room changed.

Crap. This is the worst question he could have asked. Let me repeat it, demons firmly believed in rule through force. The Demon Lord was no exception. However, my methods went against that philosophy. Since I had attempted something unorthodox, I now needed to prove why my method was superior to the orthodox one. But doing so would make it appear as if I criticized the Demon Lord's methods.

Impatient, he rumbled loudly, "Answer me!"

"Y-Yes, sir!" I steeled my resolve. At this point, my life was in peril whether I answered or not. "I believe that avoiding needless bloodshed and turning the conquered humans into our allies is the surest way to win, my lord."

Well, the cat's out of the bag now. As I'd feared, the dragonkin guards didn't react favorably to that. On the surface, they looked as stoic as always, but I could smell the bloodlust coming off of them. They were getting ready for a fight.

What do I do now? Should I just try and flee, or take at least a few of them down and hope I'll get reincarnated again?

However, it appeared the Demon Lord himself didn't seem too bothered by my explanation. He nodded indifferently and said, "Very well, you are dismissed."

It appeared my audience was over. The bloodlust that had filled the room moments ago vanished as fast as it had appeared. I heaved a sigh of relief. *Guess I'm not dying here after all.* Just as I was about to turn to leave, the Demon Lord spoke again.

"Such a method of rule requires ample funds. I will grant you ten thousand silver coins to use as you see fit."

"You are most gracious, my lord!"

"If you find this to be insufficient, you have my permission to request more."

In truth, I had just started worrying about how I was going to pay for everything I would need. The fact that the Demon Lord had understood that from my earlier explanation proved that he was much sharper than other demons as well. *I can see now why even master respects him.*

Gomoviroa, who had been silent until now, finally spoke up, "Are you certain about this, my lord? That is a rather large sum to send over to a single city."

"I do not mind." Indeed, the Demon Lord seemed utterly unconcerned about the amount. "The second regiment required no funds to conquer their assigned territories. I see no reason why the ten thousand coins they brought me as spoils should not be sent to a unit who has more need for the money."

"Understood. Allow me to thank you as well, on behalf of my disciple."

My master bowed deeply, and this time our audience truly was over.

It was only after we left the Demon Lord's chambers that I could breathe normally again.

"I thought I was going to die there, Master."

“You always were quite the coward.”

My master smiled wryly at me from atop my shoulder.

“The Demon Lord may act intimidating, but he’s a surprisingly kind man at heart. Unless you commit a grave blunder, he won’t punish you.”

“I wish you could have told me that earlier...”

I turned away, pouting, and she gently patted my head.

“I expected you to know this already, O inexperienced disciple of mine.”

“Well, excuse me for being inexperienced...”

As we walked out into the courtyard, an ogre appeared from the fog. Dogg. I eyed him warily and said, “Still wanna go?”

But he shook his head and stepped out of the way.

“I dun wanna admit it, but I lost.”

As always, strength was justice. Those who didn’t submit to the strong didn’t live long in the demon world.

“You’re a lot more docile than I expected.”

I kept an eye on him as we passed by, but he didn’t try anything. All he said was, “I’ll knock ya flat next time.”

“So you still wanna go after all?”

I can’t believe he hasn’t learned his lesson even after I beat him to a pulp. But then, I guess that’s how demons are. Personally I just found it a chore, but the strong weren’t allowed to turn away challengers.

“Ya better be ready for me, punk!”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Dogg watched me go with a creepy smile on his face.

After we left the castle, my master turned to me and said, “Don’t let your previous victory get to your head. He’s no ordinary ogre.”

“Yeah, he seems like he actually understands battle tactics a little.”

I nodded, and Gomoviroa followed up with, “Not only that, he understands the importance of honing his skills. Because he trains, he’s much faster and stronger than other ogres. He lacks many of the usual weaknesses enemies his size would have.”

“Really?”

“Well, I suppose he would still be no match for a werewolf.” Master happily patted my head. “He may be a genius ogre who will go down in history, but your abilities far outstrip his. After all, you are my disciple.”

She hopped off my shoulder and alighted on the ground.

“Now then, I unfortunately have paperwork I must see to, so I’m afraid this is where we part ways.”

“What about the Bone Spears you left behind?”

“They will listen to your orders. Feel free to use them as you please. Don’t hesitate to call me if you need my assistance. I will come anytime.”

“Okay...”

It was a bit disheartening to know that she’d be leaving, but she was the most skilled commander the demon army had. I could see why she had to go.

“Alright, I’ll do my best to keep Ryunheit in demon hands.”

“Mmm, keep a close on the Meraldia army’s movements. Also, do not underestimate humans. They are capable of more than you know.”

“Yes, Master.”

Gomoviroa waved to me with a smile, then chanted a short spell. A second later I was in Ryunheit, inside my room in the viceroy’s manor, where I had been before I left. *I hope things didn’t get out of control while I was gone.* I had only been absent for about an hour. At least, I guessed it was around that long. There were no clocks in this world.

“Oh wow, it’s already here.”

Bags of silver coins lay piled up in a corner of the room. It seemed the Demon Lord was expedient, on top of everything else. He must have had one of his

mages teleport the money here for me. There were a number of things I wanted to pay for before the day was over, so I was glad he'd worked quickly.

"Alright, let's get all this administrative stuff out of the way."

I returned to my human form and got to work. First, I took out a map. Before I did anything else, I needed to figure out my future defense plans. Meraldia was a nation composed of an alliance between 17 city-states. While the Meraldian Senate was the highest authority, they still didn't wield absolute power over the city-states.

Conquering all of Meraldia was the Demon Lord's current goal. He had sent his second regiment to conquer Meraldia's northern cities, while the third regiment had been tasked with taking the south. At present, three of Meraldia's northern cities and two of their southern cities had fallen.

"The second regiment's going pretty fast..."

As an aside, the 'city' Dogg had captured wasn't part of the 17 main cities. In fact, it wasn't a city at all, just a small town, which meant his achievements weren't particularly relevant here. Though, it was interesting to note that the second regiment was actively conquering key strongholds in addition to their assigned cities, since it meant the army was probably going on a rampage through the country.

Well, all they have to do is kill people and break things. If that was all our mission entailed, we would be much faster too. The question was, how would Meraldia's army respond to this invasion? Meraldia's primary purpose was to maintain order, and to defend the cities participating in the alliance, but their standing army was small, and had no experience in siege warfare. Furthermore, they couldn't just dispatch all of their forces and leave the remaining cities unguarded. My guess was that they would siphon a few soldiers from each city and combine them into one force. But even then, they'd only be able to muster a few thousand men, meaning they'd only have enough to attack either the north or the south, not both. At least not at once.

"If I had to guess...they'll probably go north?"

The second regiment was rampaging across Meraldia's northern countryside. Because they'd advanced recklessly without heed to the high number of

casualties they were racking up, they'd even sacked Schverm, the lynchpin of the northern defense line. Meraldia had supposedly stationed 2000 of their elite heavy cavalry, along with another 3000 of their infantry, so I was actually surprised the second regiment had managed to take it. *I can't imagine how much bloodshed it must have taken to capture the city.* The thought left a bad taste in my mouth.

At any rate, if Meraldia was going to be focusing on the north, I wouldn't have to worry about our defenses for a while, at least. *Though maybe I should double-check how many men I can muster, just in case.* First, there was my unit of 56 highly trained werewolves. Individually, they were strong, but they were also few in number. Second, I had my 200 canines. However, they were tiny, and unsuited to combat. Even with their larger numbers, they wouldn't be as effective as my werewolves. Fortunately, my master had also lent me 2000 of her Bone Spears. Those skeleton warriors were tough. Not only were they immune to arrows, their coordination was impeccable. So long as they were here, I had nothing to fear.

All in all, my army was 2256 men strong, but I only had to worry about feeding 256 of those men. Undead warriors had no need for food or sleep. *Thank you, Master.*

"What're you grinning about, Veight?"

Startled, I looked up from the map to find Fahn looking down at me.

"Wha? Wh-What do you need, Fahn?"

"Well the thing is, I could use a little help. I don't know what to do with the Sonnenlicht Order."

"Oh, those guys."

There were a number of different religions within Meraldia, but the one with the most influence was the Sonnenlicht Order. Their doctrine espoused cooperation between all and charity for the poor, but many elements of the church ascribed to a much more totalitarian interpretation of the religion's tenets. Plus, for all their preaching of cooperation and harmony, they were extremely intolerant toward nonbelievers. Fahn toyed with her ponytail as she heaved a weary sigh.

“The bishop’s making all sorts of demands in the name of his faith. Like how we have to let him open prayers again and let his Seekers leave the city so they can continue their pilgrimages and stuff.”

“Hmmm.”

I folded my arms and considered my options. Letting the believers pray wouldn’t cause much of an issue. It was possible they might start plotting something if we let them gather in number, but it wasn’t like forbidding assembly would deter revolutionaries anyway. Allowing them to leave on pilgrimages, however, was a lot harder to approve. The Sonnenlicht Order had a number of sites that they considered holy, and, according to the documents I’d hastily gathered, all believers were required to go on a pilgrimage to at least one every two years.

“Ryunheint’s got a population of about three thousand, and nearly forty percent of them are part of the Order. That’s a good twelve-hundred people.”

“Yeah, and half of them need to do a pilgrimage this year.” Fahn replied with a troubled expression. I totally sympathized. I scratched my neck and weighed the possibilities.

“If we let them go, a hundred or more regular civilians could easily try and slip into the group to escape.”

“Don’t forget that there might be spies mixed into the group when they come back.”

“Oh yeah, didn’t think of that.”

Fahn saw the worried look on my face and said, “Guess we’ll have to forbid it, won’t we?”

“Yeah. But I’d like to avoid restricting their religious practices, if possible.”

I came to a decision and stood up. I’d learned all too well in my past life how much strife and bloodshed could be born from religion.

“Ask the viceroy to gather all the leaders of all the faiths in the city here.”

“*All* of them?”

Fahn’s eyes went wide with surprise. I nodded firmly.

“The Sonnenlicht Order, the Mondstrahl Church, even those who lead pagan cults.”

As I expected, the meeting had a very awkward start. Everyone shot wary looks at me as they entered the audience chamber. First came the bishop of the Sonnenlicht Order, the spiritual leader of nearly half the city’s population. After that was the Mondstrahl Church’s head medium; about 20% of the city looked to her to connect them with God. Lastly, the shamans who led smaller cults in nature worship or animism filtered in. Because this was a trading city, there were more faiths represented here than in most places. There were even a few people who worshiped werewolves. Unlike the others, they broke out into tears when they saw me. I didn’t mind them getting emotional, but I’d really rather not be worshiped. Once everyone was gathered, the Sonnenlicht Order’s bishop stood up, his stately robes brushing against the ground. He was middle-aged, but he had the build of a fighter.

“My name is Yuhit, I serve as this city’s bishop for the Sonnenlicht Order. You are the demon army’s Commander, Lord Veight, correct?”

“Correct. I am the demon army third regiment’s Vice-Commander, Veight.” I said in a dignified tone, and placed the petition he’d sent on the table in front of me.

“I have read your petition. Before I give you my reply, there is something I wish to tell all of the religious leaders in this city. It is for this reason that I have gathered you here. May I please have a moment of your time?”

The bishop nodded in agreement.

“So long as you give us your reply afterward.”

He’s surprisingly calm. When I’d read the petition I’d gotten the impression that these guys were all religious zealots, but this bishop seemed rather reasonable. Seeing as I had everyone’s attention, I decided to move to the main topic.

“This is how the Demon Lord’s third regiment has decided to handle the matter of religion within Ryunheit.”

Everyone's expressions stiffened. Well, everyone but the werewolf worshipers, who were hanging on to my every word. *No seriously, stop worshiping me.* I pointedly avoided meeting their gazes and continued.

"We will respect your religious freedom and allow you to freely practice your faith within the city, just as you have been until now."

I smiled, and the religious leaders all breathed a sigh of relief. A few of them even smiled back. *Whoops, now's not the time for this. I still need to warn them.*

"However, the following three things are hereby forbidden. First, under no circumstances are you to take hostile action against any member of the demon army. Any such act will be seen as an attempt to revolt, and an insult to the Demon Lord's majesty. That being said, we have no intention of forcing you to worship our Lord. All I ask is that you respect our authority."

I swept my gaze across the room. No one seemed to find my first rule disagreeable.

"Secondly, you must follow the laws of Ryunheit. So long as I rule, secular law supersedes religious law."

Again, no one voiced any discontent. Though if anyone was unhappy with my edicts, they'd probably take it up with Airia anyway. But it was the third edict that was the most important.

"Finally, I will not allow any acts of persecution against those of other faiths. If you wish for your religion to be respected, then you must respect other religions in turn."

Surprisingly, the bishop seemed the least taken aback by this proclamation. Because the Sonnenlicht Order had the largest following, there was a huge pressure to convert. Not only because they were the majority, but also because of how hard they pushed their religion onto others. However, the missionaries themselves believed they were doing good, so I thought the bishop would protest this edict. Especially since, from his perspective, it probably looked like I was favoring the other religions over his.

"Our army has no interest in forcibly converting any of you, nor will we allow any other religion to forcibly convert others. Just as we worship the Demon

Lord, the citizens of Ryunheit shall be free to worship whichever being they please."

The werewolf worshipers broke out in tears, but I ignored them. Naturally the bishop didn't seem too happy, but his reaction was milder than I expected. After all, I had effectively banned them from proselytizing. But that was also why I'd decided to throw them a bone. I smiled at the bishop and said, "However, we will respect the Sonnenlicht believers' tenets and allow them to go on their pilgrimages. As this is wartime, certain restrictions will be placed on how many can travel and where they can go, but it will all be done in accordance with Ryunheit's wartime laws. Do you have any objections?"

The bishop quickly painted his frown over with a smile and bowed.

"I humbly thank you for your magnanimity. I did not expect you to allow us such freedom."

He's a sly one, alright. Still smiling, I continued.

"All I ask is that you don't incite a rebellion."

"Hahaha, but of course."

Yuhit laughed, and this time there was real human warmth behind it. I still didn't trust him completely, though. He was someone I'd definitely need to keep an eye on in the future. I'd only called everyone here to explain my decrees, so the meeting ended once I had done so. The other leaders had had a few requests of their own, but I'd forestalled most of them by allowing everyone freedom of expression. While the other leaders were filing out, the Mondstrahl Church's medium walked up to me. From the looks of it, she was in her mid-thirties. Unlike Yuhit, who had come dressed in ostentatious robes, the medium wore simple civilian clothing.

"Lord Veight, you have my gratitude. On behalf of all of Mondstrahl's followers, I thank you for your generosity." She bowed deeply. Though she didn't say it outright, it was obvious her followers had been harassed by Yuhit's before. Without waiting for a reply, she continued, "I and all of my followers will wholeheartedly support you, Lord Veight. However, please understand that our support does not extend to the Demon Lord's army as a whole."

While working for the Demon Lord's army might have been a step too far, it seemed they were willing to assist me personally at least.

"Thank you. Mondstrahl's precepts of respecting individuality and achieving enlightenment through diligent study are quite respectable, in my opinion. Unfortunately I cannot give your religion any preferential treatment, but I promise I will continue treating you as fairly as possible."

Never thought I'd find myself talking like a politician. Then again, I guess I technically am a politician right now. These were all the words of encouragement I could give her right now. Mondstrahl's medium nodded with a smile and proffered her hand to me. I took it. *Come to think of it, this is probably the first time a werewolf and a human have ever shook hands.*

"Lord Veight, if you ever find yourself in need of assistance, do not hesitate to call on me. I shall use my magic to aid you, inexperienced though I may be."

"You're a mage?"

Still smiling, she said, "My apologies for my late introduction. I am Mitty, the headmistress of Ryunheit's astrology academy."

If I was being honest, I did prefer the Mondstrahl Church over the other religions. Because their teachings emphasized individualism, enlightenment through knowledge, and an overall policy of noninterference, the majority of their members were craftsmen and mages. Though they were few in number, they were highly influential. Of course, they were still in a tenuous position because they were the minority, but it still wasn't wise to make an enemy out of them.

"Thank you very much, Lady Mitty. I happen to dabble in the magical arts myself, so I would love the opportunity to talk with you further in the future. I look forward to our partnership."

As a werewolf, my specialty lay in body strengthening magic. Most humans, however, had an affinity for scrying magic, magic that let one see into the past or future. If I had to guess, it was probably because it was human nature to be obsessed with fortune-telling. Due to their anxieties and hopes for the future, they naturally tended toward scrying.

This meeting proved more fruitful than I expected. I mused as I headed back to my room. I had no time to rest, though. There were plenty of other things I needed to do to keep the population's discomfort to a minimum. And they all needed to be done before Meraldia's army showed up on my doorstep.

The 10,000 silver coins the Demon Lord had gifted me proved more useful than even I predicted. Firstly, it allowed me to afford decent accommodations for my canine teams. I'd asked Airia to announce that I was looking to buy up older homes and unused inns, and almost everyone living near the viceroy's manor had hurried to offer me their property.

"Well, this area has turned into the demon army's base now. I can see why so many of the wealthy residents would want to move."

Airia reported to me with a troubled smile.

"Do you wish you could move somewhere quieter too?"

"I am this city's Viceroy, and so I will not leave this manor. It is my duty to make sure you fulfill your promises to me."

What an upright governor.

In order to avoid any future complaints, I made sure to purchase all of the property at higher than market value. With this, I was finally able to let my canine army into the city as well.

"Sir Veight, thank you so much for finding us places to stay!"

"What an amazing house! And you're even giving us silver coins!"

"Those are to pay the bills! Don't go smithing them into something else!"

Now that I'd gotten those overexcited canines into their new pens, I could finally close the main gate. That alone did wonders for the city's security. My master's undead knights would have terrified the citizens had I let them into the city, so I kept them on standby in the nearby forest. Unfortunately, the forest was off to the west. If Meraldia was going launch an attack, it would come from the north, which meant we would get no advance warning. Incidentally, the forest they were hiding in was the same one we'd used to

launch our surprise attack. It was dense enough that no one would be able to spot the undead warriors, even from the city walls. Because they were undead, they didn't need to make campfires that might be spotted from a distance, nor did they get restless. Until I gave them new orders, they would stand like statues within the woods.

Buying everyone lodging had cost me a total of 3000 silver coins. I knew it would cost a lot to comfortably house 256 people, but the hit to my coffers still hurt. All that was left now was the upkeep costs to feed everyone. In this world, a day's worth of meals cost around 1-2 silver coins. With that, an average person could eat their fill. Depending on the location, the value of a single silver coin went anywhere from a couple thousand yen to 10,000 yen. Mary, the old lady who ran the general store, was the one who currently handled our finances. I went to ask her how long we could keep everyone fed with our current funds.

"You know how we are, us werewolves eat like ogres. It's costing us 300 silver coins a day to pay for food."

"Are you kidding me?"

That meant we'd be out of money in less than thirty days. *Should I ask the Demon Lord for more money? No, that's not a good idea.* In truth, the demon army didn't have much money to begin with. Demons didn't really use human currency. Even when they pillaged human settlements, they were more interested in looting food and clothes than money. *If I don't have any other options I'll go back to the Demon Lord for money, but for now let's see what I can do on my own.* This might end up being the first real test of my governing ability.

"Those who don't work, don't eat!"

I addressed to the 200 canines gathered in front of me.

"Once the sewer systems are repaired, you'll all be working in the fields!"

We would be stationed in Ryunheit for quite some time. Which meant we needed to find a long-term solution for our food costs.

“This is an important job, as we need a source of income to pay for food. I understand some of you may be dissatisfied with hard labor, but...”

To my surprise, the canines’ eyes starting sparkling. One of them stepped forward and said in an enthusiastic voice, “Leave it to us, Sir Veight. We will work hard to fulfill our duties!”

“V-Very well... You guys are a lot more excited about this than I thought.”

They all responded at once, “That’s because we love digging holes!”

Well, I guess they are dogs.

We may have been conquerors, but until now we were also freeloaders. At least with this, we wouldn’t have to resort to pillaging. The last thing I wanted was the citizens working against us when Meraldia’s army finally arrived. For that reason, it was imperative we earned their goodwill. Not being hated wasn’t good enough. We needed them to be happy under our rule.

“You want us to take care of thieves?” The Garney brothers grumbled about their new post, but their dissatisfaction was the least of my concerns.

“The city garrison won’t cooperate with us, which means mundane tasks like these are our job now. You can rough them up a little if you like, but don’t kill them.”

“You’re sure asking for a lot, Veight...” The younger brother mumbled unhappily.

“If the city falls into anarchy because of our arrival, we’ll be a laughingstock. I want people talking about how much better life’s gotten now that the demon army is in control, not the other way around. If you do a good job, I’ll give you extra meat rations.”

“Hell yeah! We’ll do it!”

Thank God they were so easy to manage. The next few days kept me so busy I could barely catch my breath. Due to our sudden invasion, travelers passing through the city had become trapped here. On top of that, I still had to deal with the Sonnenlicht pilgrims. I didn’t want to let anyone who’d seen our tactics

firsthand out of the city. Not yet, anyway.

With no other choice, I made a statement to the effect of “The demon army’s most vicious warriors are still fighting in the nearby regions, so for the citizens’ safety, no one will be allowed out of the gates for some time.” The few believers who absolutely needed to go on a pilgrimage were granted a special religious wartime pardon, which was jointly signed by Airia and Yuhit.

There were a number of other laws that needed to be revised, and negotiations with the trading guilds that needed to be settled, but thanks to the viceroy and all the religious leaders’ help, I was able to get everything finished. In human society, most things couldn’t be solved by force. However, thanks to this less violent approach, Ryunheit was able to return to normalcy in a few days. The city had lost some of its vigor because trade was still halted, but we’d just have to live with that for a while longer.

“Sir Veight, I have a report from the gate garrison! There’s a group approaching the city from the south!”

A canine messenger ran up to me, his breath coming in short gasps. I stopped signing the document in my hands and turned to the shiba-faced canine.

“What do they smell like?”

“Like us, sir!”

I grinned.

“They’re here.”

I’d finally gotten the one thing a trading city absolutely needed to survive: traders.

“Are you the Commander of this unit, Veight?”

A canine with a beagle’s face asked me as I arrived at the front gates. I nodded.

“Yeah, that’s me. Vice-Commander of the Demon Lord’s third regiment, Veight. I guess I’m technically the one in charge here.”

I held out my hand, the canine gripped it in a firm handshake.

“My name is Kuu. A pleasure to meet you. You have my thanks for keeping my brother safe.”

“Zoi’s an excellent soldier. It’s reassuring to have him on my squad.”

Zoi was one of the canine youths who’d served as part of my messenger corps during the assault. I hadn’t been lying when I said he was an excellent soldier either. At some point, I wanted to promote him to a management position within the canine squad. The fact that his older sister had come here as well was no coincidence. I’d known from the start that I would need to bring in merchants after I captured the city, so I’d gone to the canine merchant association before the operation. When I heard Zoi’s older sister was one of their merchants, I figured I might as well ask them to send her.

Negotiations went smoothly. The canines jumped at the opportunity to trade with humans. Their only demands had been that the demon army guarantee their safety.

Behind her, Kuu’s merchants were unloading their cargo. It seemed they’d carried everything here on hand carts. Impressive, considering how much they’d brought.

“What cargo did you bring?”

“Deer jerky, carved horn ornaments, parquetry, and our famed silverwork pieces.” Kuu puffed out her chest proudly. “Most of it is handicrafts, but the quality is far superior to what human artisans can make, so I’m sure they’ll sell.”

Canines had smaller and more dexterous hands than humans. Plus, the natural padding over their fingers made them perfectly suited for crafting. For procedure’s sake, I ordered my canine soldiers to inspect the goods.

“Check over the cargo. If I find anyone accepting bribes to allow smuggled goods through, it won’t be pretty.”

“Yes, sir!”

A canine with a dachshund’s face started organizing the inspection. Goods from outside Meraldia were rare here. Demon-made goods all the more so. Ryunheit’s merchants would almost certainly be dying to get their hands on these. *That reminds me, I almost forgot about my other favor.*

“Hey, Kuu.”

“Yeah, boss?”

Kuu was in the middle of bribing one of my soldiers with a piece of jerky, but she turned around without batting an eye. I didn’t bother reprimanding her, and instead asked, “I’m looking to buy charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter. Do you think you could find some for me?”

“Hmm...shouldn’t be too much of a problem, I think. But what are you planning on doing with all that?”

I grinned in response.

“Military secret.”

Now that I had a steady stream of funds, it was time I got started developing gunpowder. I came from a world of advanced science, though it was easy to forget that at times.

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—Viceroy Airia’s Official Records—

It is with great surprise that I, Airia Lutt Aindorf, find myself writing this record. A few days prior, my city of Ryunheit came under attack by the Demon Lord’s army.

It has been scant more than a year since my father passed away due to illness and the Senate appointed me his successor. While the demon army’s recent movements were worrisome, I did not expect them to launch such a sudden assault on a trading city. I did not think demons were capable of understanding the value of trade. That assumption led me to be careless. Because of my immaturity and inexperience, I was unable to do anything against the sudden demon assault.

The commander of this army is a werewolf with jet-black fur. I unfortunately know very little about werewolves, but supposedly they turn into wolves during the full moon and attack people at random. Also, I’ve heard that only silver weapons can hurt them. According to the histories I’ve read, humans drove

them to extinction long ago. That's the extent of my knowledge on them.

But seeing as they still exist, whatever knowledge I have on them can't be trusted. Especially considering how they attacked the city in the middle of the day. When their commander made it to the manor, I prepared myself for death. I thought I would be eaten. But when the black werewolf grabbed my saber out of my hands, this was what he said: "Please surrender and cooperate with the demon army." He promised not to needlessly slaughter the citizens, and asked me to surrender. I had no choice but to comply. His werewolves had overpowered Ryunheit's soldiers without any effort. We couldn't beat them. Surprisingly though, only 70 men had actually died, and the demon army's commander even healed those who were still alive.

He kept his promise not to hurt the people, even when I thought he might make an example out of the soldiers for not taking orders from him. It was a relief, but also very confusing, for both me and the soldiers. To be honest, I find the Vice-Commander Veight's government policy to be rather strange. He gathered all of the religious leaders of the city just to tell them that religious freedom would be respected. We'd all been expecting him to force his religion on to everyone, so this too was both a relief and rather confusing. How does allowing us this much freedom benefit him? That being said, the citizens are certainly happy with his rule. We were terrified at first, but he seems reliable. Which has led to us steadily coming to support the demon army...no, Veight's rule. He is completely unlike any demon I have ever seen. Upon taking control of the city, he forbade all looting. If he needs something, he will of course take it, but only after paying a fair price for it. When he told me he needed space to lodge his soldiers, I thought I would be forced to vacate my manor, but instead, he went and bought houses for everyone. This is the first time I've ever seen such a well-mannered occupation force. It's unsettling. From the stories my grandfather told me, it sounds like the Meraldia Unification War was far more brutal than this.

Most surprising, perhaps, is that Veight understands that this is a trade city. He is actively working on maintaining public order, and even brought demon traders in to stimulate our economy. Naturally our merchants were wary of dealing with demons at first, but now they're more than happy to trade for

demon goods. The canines are upright and honest traders. Furthermore, their goods are all of the highest quality. There haven't been any issues at all. It honestly baffles me.

But still, I won't lower my guard. Veight is still a demon, and his master is the Demon Lord. I mustn't forget that he took this city by force.

However, he appears to be a wise, rational, and considerate person. It's possible Ryunheit will prosper more than ever under his rule. But for all that, there's something unfathomable about the man. I must remain vigilant. But every time I see how peaceful Ryunheit is, it becomes a little harder to stay suspicious of him. And ever since the demon army took over, my own job has become easier...

In fact, I find ruling the city together with Veight to be almost enjoyable. I pray Meraldia retakes this city swiftly. Before I find myself charmed even further by this werewolf.

Please, hurry.

* * * *

Half a month had passed since we took over Ryunheit. Now that trade was flowing through the city once more, it had become a much livelier place. That being said, before we arrived it had been a crossroads for multiple trade routes, so it wasn't as bustling as it used to be. But in return, it had a brand-new business opportunity: trade with demons.

"How's business?"

I had come down to the southern gate to see how the canine merchants were doing. There were only a few dozen of them. They'd opened up about 10 or so stalls, and the thoroughfare was filled with...more canines.

"Ah, Veight." Fahn, who was in charge of the southern gate, turned to me and smiled. "Business is good. Look, the canines gave me a bunch of silver gifts!"

"How many times do I have to tell you not to take bribes..."

I sighed as Fahn showed off her shiny new silver ring and necklace.

Considering the average demon's mindset, explaining why bribery was bad was an extremely difficult endeavor. In the end, I just gave up.

"Hey Veight, how come canines are so good at smithing silver? I thought their hands made silver rot?" Fahn asked idly, twirling her ring between her fingers.

"That's just nonsense humans made up."

"Why?"

Fahn tilted her head in confusion, so I continued my explanation, "Human craftsmen can't hope to match the canines in skill, so they started spreading unsavory rumors about them."

That was why, in the past, the canines were driven from their mining towns and were forced to hide in the forests. A tragic tale, really. The fact that most canines didn't even resent humans for the persecution they suffered just made them all the more pitiable. Anyway, I needed to get back on topic.

"Are things working out fine with the human merchants?"

"Yeah, everything's great. They were pretty scared at first, but they got used to the canines in no time. Must be because they're so cute."

Upon closer inspection I noticed there were a few humans mingled in with the throng of canines. They still seemed a little nervous, but once one started negotiating prices they fit right in.

"I'm buying your whole set of fifty silver spoons, so don't you think you could at least knock the price of five off of them?"

"Three's as high as I'm willing to go."

"I'll take it."

"Excuse me, sir canine. But don't you think some coastal sea salt would be a wonderful product to sell back home?"

"Well, most of us like sugar more than salt."

"You're in luck, then. I've got plenty of sugar too, though it'll cost you."

Yeah, things are definitely going well here. Though they might not have much value as fighters, I was still glad I'd brought the canines with me. I saw Fahn

drooling as she eyed some of the other silver jewelry on sale, so I reminded her again, just in case.

“Remember, if a dispute breaks out, make sure you report it to Ryunheit’s merchant guild. *Do not*, under any circumstances, take matters into your own hands.”

“Yeeeeah, yeah.”

Though her tone was frivolous, I knew Fahn had a strong sense of responsibility. Everything would be just fine. *I hope.*

I decided to take a short break and bought myself a couple of tropical fruits one of the traders had brought. I bit into one that looked similar to a pineapple but with green flesh.

“Do these really taste good?”

“Mmm, I like them at least.”

The Porzoi-faced canine watched me curiously as I paid him for the fruit. They had a wonderful aroma, and weren’t overly sweet. It made me realize most of the fruit in my old life had had way too much sugar. *Now that I think about it, I don’t even know what this green pineapple-thing is called.* As I was musing over such things, the canines and werewolves in the market suddenly started to get rowdy.

“What’s going on?”

My ears sensed the source of the disturbance even before I got my reply. Someone had blown the emergency dog whistle. Three blasts, and they’d come from the northern gate. That meant an enemy attack. Before I could even start giving orders, Fahn got to work.

“Get everyone inside! Shut the gates!”

I gulped down the pineapple-thing inside my mouth and transformed on the spot.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

That sent the nearby humans into a panic, but I didn’t have time to worry about them right now. I needed to be in this form to howl orders.

“AWOOOOOOOOO!”

At my order to assemble, everyone began to move. They all recognized my distinctive roar. I swept my gaze over the men stationed at the southern gate and picked a few out.

“Jerrick, Monza, Hamaam, get your squads and follow me! The rest of you, wait here until I give further orders! Protect the citizens!”

At my command, the three squads I’d picked out transformed. Even more people started screaming, but there was no time to waste.

“We move!”

With 3 squads, totaling 12 werewolves in number, following behind me, I headed north. As we made our way across the rooftops, I heard a few other roared messages.

“Enemies.”

“Close.”

“Strong.”

Looks like we really are under attack. Only werewolves could communicate instantly over long distances like this. However, because of how simple the howls were, more nuanced information like tense or verb conjugations couldn’t really be conveyed. For example, the message I’d heard that said ‘strong’ could have meant anything from “The enemy’s strong, I’ve fought them,” to “The enemy looks strong.” *Please don’t tell me the fighting’s already started.* As I passed by the viceroy’s manner, I took another 3 squads with me. I now had 24 werewolves behind me, almost half our total force. As I arrived at the northern gate, I found the canines on watch cowering in fear.

“Sir Veight, enemies!”

“Yeah, I got that. You don’t have to keep blowing the whistle. Where are they?”

I jumped up to the lookout tower on the walls. The other werewolves found their own spots to observe the enemy from. Hamaam, the werewolf with dark-brown fur was the first to spot them. He’d come from a desert region, so his

eyesight was better than other werewolves.

“Commander. Judging from their banners, that appears to be Meraldia’s army. My guess is they came from Thuvan.”

Thuvan was the industrial city to the north of Ryunheit. Their archers were supposedly some of the best. However, it made no sense for them to attack. Monza, who had a rather laid-back personality, casually tilted her head.

“But Thuvan isn’t that big, is it? And from the looks of it, between their infantry and cavalry they have around four hundred soldiers total.”

“They don’t have any siege weapons either,” Jerrick, the blacksmith’s son, pointed out.

Ryunheit was much bigger than its population suggested. A mere 400 troops wouldn’t even be able to surround all the walls, and they didn’t seem to be carrying anything to break down the gates with either. But unless they were led by a madman, they hadn’t come here just to die. If they were planning to fight, it was because they thought there was a way to win with their relatively low numbers. I could think of only one possible scheme.

“Monza, Scuzi, take your units and guard the gates! If anyone attempts anything suspicious, apprehend them!”

“Roger!”

“Yes, sir!”

Eight of my werewolves dropped down to the gate below. *I really hope I’m wrong about this...* I still wasn’t sure this was the right decision, but I decided to bring out my trump card just in case. I ordered the rest of my men to be on alert, and then I started chanting.

“You who have returned from the Gate of Gevina, you who have been barred from the Gate of Haurun, behold. In my right hand, I hold the frozen sun.”

My body was enveloped in a swirl of mana, and my right hand began glowing with a cold light. This was one of necromancy’s most basic spells. One that allowed you to give orders to undead under your command. The spell itself was akin to flipping a switch with your mana, so even someone like me could use it. I

raised my right hand high, and ordered the Bone Spears hidden in the forest to advance.

Mobilizing 2000 undead soldiers against an army of 400 might have been overkill. To be honest, I'd wanted to hide their existence until the decisive battle with Meraldia. But I'd rather be doubly sure than hold back my forces and potentially let the enemy into the city. *Better to just remain vigilant and crush this army with all our might.*

Unfortunately, the one drawback to undead soldiers was that they were slow. Their top speed was a slightly fast marching pace, which was why they were best suited for ambushes. As expected, the Meraldia army saw the Bone Spears long before they closed in. *Yeah, there's no way they're catching up in time...* The enemy broke out of marching formation and reformed into battle lines with their cavalry at the fore. It looked like they were planning to charge the city in one go. *Are they seriously going to just abandon their infantry?* The infantry had picked up the pace as well, but they were still slow enough that the Bone Spears would reach them first. I'd be able to crush their formation.

As he watched the army approach, Hamaam muttered, "They've got about...fifty cavalry."

Not too much, then. Cavalry were expensive, after all. Especially horse archers.

"What's the plan, Vice-Commander? I don't think horse archers alone can get through the gates, but..."

Hamaam would have preferred to sit and watch, but I shook my head. I turned to the 16 werewolves still on the walls and shouted, "Intercept those archers before they make it to the gates! Hamaam, Vodd, Slain, Jerrick, take your squads and follow my lead!"

The other werewolves looked at me in surprise, but they knew the pack leader's orders were absolute. They nodded resolutely and leapt off the city walls after me. Though the wall rose a good four stories high, all of us landed softly on the ground. Everyone got into their four-man squads and prepared for battle.

"Hamaam, Vodd, Jerrick, you've got the left! Circle around and flank the

enemy on their right!”

Right-handed archers held their bows with their left hands. That meant firing to their right, especially on horseback, was difficult. My men responded instantly and dashed off toward the enemy’s right.

“What about us, boss?”

Jerrick and his squad looked up at me. After judging the distance between us and the enemy, I confirmed with a reply. “Jerrick, you and your squad are going to be my bodyguards.”

“You got it, boss. We’ve got your back,” Jerrick said with a grin, his glossy gray fur standing on end.

Thuvan’s famed horse archers had continued galloping toward us while I was giving orders, and we were now within bowshot. However, none of them made any attempt to let loose. I had no idea why they weren’t firing, but that gave us an opportunity. I sucked in a deep breath and howled as loudly as I could, casting the spell I was most proficient in: Soul Shaker. But at this distance, even a mana-enhanced howl didn’t have much effect. At point blank, Soul Shaker would have left the soldiers cowering in fear, but they were far enough away that they didn’t even balk. Owing to the amount of stamina it took, it wasn’t a spell I could cast consecutively, either. *I need to be more careful about how I use it in the future.* Fortunately for me, these particular soldiers had been mounted. Though the soldiers were unaffected, their horses were not. They slowed to a walk, unwilling to get any closer. Some of them got so spooked they bucked their riders off. The sudden shift in speed caused some riders to crash into each other, and even more of them fell off their horses. Their formation was a mess. And I knew the twelve werewolves I’d sent to circle around wouldn’t let this chance pass them up. *Now then, I guess I should help out.*

“I’m going to start casting support magic. I need you guys to cover me.”

“You got it. We’ll keep those arrows off ya.”

Jerrick stepped protectively in front of me. The other three in his squad guarded my sides.

I began sucking in a series of deep breaths. With each one, I absorbed some of

the mana in the air. Once I'd gathered enough, I converted it into a spell.

"O blood-drenched moon, grace these crazed warriors with thine light."

The surrounding area grew dim. A second later, the mana swirling around the battlefield gathered around the werewolves.

"Ooooh... Here it comes."

Jerrick wagged his tail happily. The rest of his squad looked expectant as well. I could feel the power welling up inside me as well. A cool breeze wafted over the plains, and suddenly we all felt protected by something. This was another one of the strengthening magic spells I was proficient in: Blood Moon. It wrapped all of my allies in a shroud of mana, offering some protection against enemy attacks. The twelve werewolves I'd sent ahead were close enough that they were affected too. Now that my spells were in place, it was time we joined the fray as well.

"Let's go, men! Wipe them all out!"

"Yes, sir!"

Since joining the demon army, this was the first fight in which they'd been allowed to kill with abandon. The werewolves trembled in anticipation.

"Guoooooh!"

"Uwaaaaaah!"

The Meraldian archers fell into a panic. The werewolves rushed in faster than a galloping horse, barely giving the soldiers time to fire back. The advantage of having mounted archers was their increased mobility and range, but with their horses panicking, they were no different from infantry. And since shortbows were more suited to archery from horseback, their bows didn't even have the force of a yeoman's longbow. All of their advantages had been stripped away. However, it still wouldn't do to underestimate them. I dodged the few arrows that came my way and rushed into the knot of archers. Because of how fast I was going and how fast arrows flew, it was actually a difficult task to dodge while maintaining speed. Though I made it out unscathed, one of Jerrick's men took an arrow and went down. A few members of the flanking team had been shot as well. *Don't any of you die on me now.* I didn't have time to turn around

and see how everyone else was doing, though. We needed to bring the battle into close quarters as fast as possible, or we might still get picked off.

“Graaaaaaah!”

With a mighty roar, I swept up at the bowman closest to me. My talons shredded right through his chainmail, and a fountain of blood erupted from his chest. He let out a gargled scream, then fell silent. I tossed his limp body aside and moved on to the next foe. This one had an arrow to his cheek and was aiming at another werewolf further away.

“Not on my watch!”

I leapt onto a fleeing horse and snapped his bowstring as I passed. My claws took a few of his fingers with it, and the soldier screamed in agony. *Sorry, but you’re the ones who started this fight.* I left the fingerless soldier alone and went to find another enemy still capable of fighting. I pushed further into the enemy ranks and laid about with my talons. Archers dropped like flies, their light armor offering no protection against me. Before long, even I’d become swept up in the thrill of the fight. Then, all too soon, it was over. No enemies were left standing. The only things left alive were a few horses.

“It’s over, boss.”

Jerrick turned to me with a smile. His fur was slick with blood. Throughout the fight, he’d continued guarding me diligently. It was thanks to him that I was unscathed.

Looking out into the distance, I could see my Bone Spears had intercepted the enemy infantry. Because of the overwhelming difference in numbers, it was more of a slaughter than a battle. To be honest, I would have preferred letting them escape, but I couldn’t allow anyone who’d seen our werewolf forms to leave alive. I didn’t want anyone informing Meraldia of our presence here. Even without orders, the Bone Spears would win the battle, but I still raised my right arm and said, “Surround them.”

They switched from a defensive formation to an elimination one. The Bone Spears formed walls of soldiers to box in the enemy on all sides. Once they’d maneuvered skeletons to the enemy’s rear, the Bone Spears began their advance. There was nowhere left for the Meraldian army to run. All that was

left was to use our superior numbers and coordination to grind them into dust. The sounds of battle continued for a few minutes longer, but eventually the battlefield fell silent. Skeleton warriors took no prisoners. So long as their designated enemies continued to draw breath, they wouldn't stop. With this, the first battle to defend Ryunheit ended with our overwhelming victory.

Despite that, this battle left a bad taste in my mouth. I didn't regret my choice to leave no survivors; as one of the Demon Lord's commanders, that had been the right decision. But that didn't mean I'd enjoyed such a brutal elimination. That being said, it was obvious from their equipment and numbers that they hadn't come here to negotiate. If I could have just peacefully convinced them to go home, I would have. But even if it had been necessary, that didn't stop me from being depressed over it. *What kind of idiot general ordered such a reckless attack anyway?*

On our side, we'd only had three injured werewolves. The ones who'd been hit by arrows.

"The three of you fought bravely. Don't worry, with my magic you'll be fine in no time."

I praised them for their valor while healing their injuries. A couple other werewolves had taken minor scratches and bumps, but they were fine, for the most part. I suppose I should have expected as much from werewolves. I left the rest to Jerrick and hurried back to the castle gates. There was one thing bothering me about this attack.

"Ah, Commander."

Monza greeted me with a troubled expression. *Looks like I guessed right.*

"Over here. We found these guys hanging around with knives in their hands."

She pointed to a group of men sitting on the floor. There were silver knives stacked on the ground next to them. Their faces were a bloody mess, and I timidly asked Monza, "Don't you think you went overboard?"

"They tried to run, so I just made them a little more obedient."

Monza grinned. She may have had a laid-back personality, but that also

meant she could torture others with a carefree smile on her face.

I turned to the men and asked, “Who are you guys?”

The three of them flared up.

“We just came to see what all the commotion was about!”

“Yeah, all your infernal howling just made us scared!”

“You’re the one who needs to explain himself!”

How stubborn.

“Okay, so why were you all carrying around knives, then?”

They fell silent. Ryunheit’s laws forbade citizens from bearing arms. Of course, small knives like that were necessary for cooking and the like so it wasn’t strange for someone to own one. I took one of the knives and drew it from its embroidered silver sheath.

“I see.”

The blade, too, was made of silver, with a carving of a flower inlaid into the flat of the blade. Canine work, for sure. All of the other knives were made of silver as well. Silver was both heavy and soft. It wasn’t suitable building material for tools. However, humans were under the misconception that only silver could hurt werewolves. Unlike the rumor that canine hands made silver rot, this rumor hadn’t been spread by people. It had been spread by us werewolves. In order to convince people to attack us with soft, pliable weapons. I glared at the men and pressed further.

“What were you trying to do?”

No one replied. I raised my voice.

“No one would use a silver knife for cooking or cutting rope. So let me ask you again. What were you trying to do with these? Talk.”

They stayed quiet, so I bared my fangs at them. Though they kept their expressions blank, I could smell the fear coming off their sweat. Finally, one of them opened his mouth.

“Th-These knives are our letter openers.”

“Oh really?”

They were trying to pass them off as paper knives. Well, considering they were silver, that was probably the only excuse that sounded realistic. Still, it’s not like anyone would fall for that crappy excuse.

“So you came here to see what all the commotion was, while bringing your letter openers with you?” I grinned wickedly. The three of them fell silent again. I looked up and said in a voice loud enough that the nearby citizens could also hear, “Find out who these men are. Once you do, hand them over to the viceroy. I’ll let her decide how to deal with them.”

I wanted to show the people I was giving final authority over to their human leader. Monza shackled the three men and took them away. As I watched her go, Scuzi came up to me and asked, “You sure that was a good idea, Veight? The viceroy’s a human. What if she goes easy on ‘em?”

My decision didn’t seem to sit well with the young man. To be honest, I wasn’t the happiest with it either. I frowned and explained, “We don’t have any other choice. If we start executing citizens, they’re not going to take kindly to our rule. Besides, while they’re obviously suspicious, it’s not like they actually committed a crime.”

“I...guess you’re right, but...”

Scuzi still wasn’t satisfied. *Can’t blame him, really.* He was a demon, so it was only natural that he’d find it strange I, the victor, was showing so much consideration for the defeated. After all from his point of view, if the citizens rebelled, we could just kill them all. But if we did that, it’d cause problems much further down the line.

“Humans are easy to please. If you treat them with scorn, they’ll be quick to hate you. But on the other hand, if you treat them well, they’ll follow you. To be honest, I wish we could execute those instigators too, but it wouldn’t be a good idea.”

“If you say so...”

He still wasn’t fully convinced, but in the end, he was still a werewolf. While he didn’t hesitate to voice his dissent, he’d still follow his pack leader’s orders.

“Just leave these things to me. I promise I’ll get us the biggest achievements in this war.”

“Yes, sir!”

I gave Scuzi a friendly slap on the back, and he finally smiled.

Just then, the front gate opened and Jerrick returned with the other fighters. I’d asked him to survey the battlefield earlier.

“I found some weird stuff, boss. Take a look at this. They were using silver-tipped arrows.”

He held out one of the arrows the enemy had been using. I leaned in for a closer look. As he’d said, the arrowhead was silver. Jerrick tapped the arrowhead with his finger and said in a disgusted voice, “This silver’s been cast. They must have been in a real hurry. It looks like they melted down their silver coins to make these. You can tell it wasn’t forged properly.”

I lapsed into thought for a few seconds.

“These were obviously made to fight against werewolves.”

“Yeah, no doubt about it. Silver’s softer than iron. Normally, you’d never use it for a weapon.”

“Which means Thuvan’s somehow discovered that werewolves are the ones who captured the city.”

“I don’t get it. All I know is that thanks to them using silver arrows, none of us got hurt too badly.”

Jerrick shrugged. He really was a blacksmith, through and through. The fact that information had been leaked wasn’t something he needed to worry about. Unfortunately, I did. I folded my arms and muttered, “How does Thuvan know werewolves are here?”

Since taking Ryunheit, we hadn’t let anyone in or out of the city. Well, except for the canine merchants. But they only traded in places under the Demon Lord’s control, so there was no reason for any of them to have gone to Thuvan.

“This is definitely strange.”

As I looked over the city, I felt a seed of dread settle in the pit of my stomach. Somehow, information was leaking out.

The main gates opened again, and this time Vodd's squad walked in.

"I finished burying the dead. Never thought I'd see the day I'm holding funeral services for humans."

"Thank you, Vodd."

Vodd might have just been a retired old man now, but in his youth, he'd been a mercenary. He'd pretended to be human and toured dozens of battlefields.

"By the way, Veight. There's something you need to see." The grizzled, white-haired old man held out a bow. "This is one of the bows the enemy was using, right?"

"Mmm. Rather small, don't you think?"

Vodd cracked a smile and continued.

"Horse archers tend to use shortbows, but this is small even for a shortbow. You wouldn't normally use something like this on an open battlefield."

"...You mean it's meant for urban warfare?"

"It is indeed."

According to Vodd's explanation, these smaller bows were designed to be used in confined spaces like city streets. They were lacking in power but were much more maneuverable.

"But they're bad for sieges, right?"

"Indeed they are, my boy. Going by their equipment, it seems these louts were expecting to waltz right through the gate."

That proves it. The only reason they'd attacked with just 400 was because they'd come up with a plan to get inside the city. I thought back to the men Monza had captured. I'd sent her squad to the gates precisely because I'd been worried about something like this happening. It seemed that had been the right decision. The Thuvan army's plan had most likely been to launch a surprise attack. They'd organized and equipped their unit under the assumption that we

hadn’t stationed an army on the walls.

The 50 horse archers armed with silver arrows would have been used to keep us werewolves pinned down within the city, while the 350 infantry soldiers gained control of the streets. That was why they’d sent their cavalry out ahead. The archers were meant to have used their superior mobility to burst through the gates before we had time to respond. According to the plan, their conspirators would have opened the gates for them. Once they were in, they’d bait my werewolves out and then use their mobility to keep a fair distance while pelting them with arrows. The wide streets of a trading city like Ryunheit were perfect for cavalry maneuvers. After they’d whittled down our numbers, their infantry would flood into the city. The canines would be both outnumbered and outmatched, so at that point retaking Ryunheit would be easy. That seemed to have been the gist of the army’s plan.

But most of their assumptions had turned out to be false, so their plan had crumbled before it even began. Whoever the enemy general was, he couldn’t be very competent if he had ordered an attack like this without first thoroughly doing his research. Either that, or circumstances had forced his hand. Had I known, I would have captured some of the soldiers and interrogated them. But once the thrill of the hunt had taken over, I’d stopped thinking...

The first battle to hold Ryunheit ended without incident, and it turned out the post-war cleanup was much more of a hassle than the battle itself had been. Most of the citizens didn’t even know what had happened; though they did vaguely realize that a battle must have taken place outside the walls. And the only people who would be fighting against us would be humans. Which meant most of them knew we’d killed more people. Even if we’d thought of it like a proper ‘battle,’ I didn’t doubt most of the people saw our actions as simple murder. They saw war between humans and demons differently than war between humans and other humans. The question was, how was I going to handle them?

First, I made sure my subordinates had properly buried all of the dead. When I arrived at the spot, I saw a nice, neat row of graves. It would have been nice if we could have prepared gravestones for all of them too, but this would have to

do. The graves were a bit plain, but that was just how werewolves were. *Maybe I can get the city's stonemasons to make one for us.* I offered a small prayer to the men who had been my enemies, and then headed back to the viceroy's manor. *Whoops, I almost forgot to change back into human form. Better do that before I go into the city.*

When I returned to the manor, I was greeted by loud yelling.

"Veight!"

Fahn stalked up to me while dragging the Garney brothers behind her. The last time I'd seen her this mad was a decade ago. *What on earth happened?*

"Veight, sit your ass down right there!"

Uh oh, she's mad at me. I didn't know what I'd done to anger her, but disobeying Fahn was never a good idea. I did as I was told and sat down in my chair.

"Wh-What's wrong?"

"Don't give me that crap!"

Fahn slammed her palms down on the desk in front of me. The Garney brothers who she'd been holding on to stumbled backwards.

"Veight, in that last battle you charged right into the middle of the enemy, didn't you!?"

"Y-Yeah."

I nodded meekly. Fahn shot me a withering glare.

"How can you, the commander, just charge ahead of everyone like that!? If something happened to you, who'd be left to control the skeletons!?"

She does have a point. I'd completely forgotten I was supposed to be commanding an army. Ever since being reborn as a werewolf, I'd come to enjoy fighting a lot more. Even if I had my old memories, this was still the body and brain of a werewolf. The amount of adrenaline, or whatever the equivalent was, pumping through my system during a fight was a lot more than it would be for a human. *Actually, that's probably something worth researching.*

“Are you listening to me!?”

“Uh, I’m listening, I’m listening!”

I involuntarily straightened my back. Fahn pulled the Garney brothers close and leaned forward.

“You’re not just Veight, the kid who lives next door anymore! You’re our boss. Got that?”

“Yeah...you’re right.”

Yeah, I’m definitely the one in the wrong here. When she saw my apologetic expression, Fahn softened her tone.

“Really, you need to be more careful. You’re the only one we can count on here. None of us have any idea how to handle humans...”

It was true that if I died, there wasn’t anyone else who could take over managing my current occupation plan. Chances were, whoever took over would just slaughter everyone here. I bowed my head in sincere apology.

“Sorry, Fahn. I acted rashly. I’ll be more careful and focus on leading from now on.”

“Good. Just leave the fighting to us.”

Fahn finally smiled. It was like the sun had just come out from behind the clouds. *But still, I never knew being in charge was so troublesome...* With Fahn’s anger appeased, I got back to work. There were a few things I needed to address right away.

“Uhh... Oh yeah. Did you put the captured men in prison?”

The younger of the Garney brothers nodded, “Yeah, all six of them. We put them in different cells, like you asked.”

“Thanks. Who’s watching over them?”

“Monza’s squad.”

If Monza was handling it, there was nothing to worry about. If I ever had to make a secret police force, she’d be the one I’d choose to head it. She was that kind of person.

I stood back up and gave everyone their orders.

“Alright, I’m going to go question them. Until I’m done, make sure no one’s allowed near their cells.”

“I take it that’s my job?” Fahn stretched leisurely and gave me a thumbs up. “I *am* technically the second-highest ranking person here. Don’t worry, I’ll keep everyone else out.”

“Thanks. I’m counting on you.”

Now then, it’s time to see what these guys have to say.

* * * *

—Fahn’s Diary—

I remember Veight when he was little. He was a strange one. Even though he was a guy, he wasn’t rowdy like the others. He didn’t get super excited about wild hunting, either. Actually, I think he was the only boy in the village that didn’t like going on wild hunts. They’re so much fun, though.

When a boar’s coming at you all like ‘bwaaaah’ and you stop it with a ‘dwooosh’, it feels so awesome. If you transform too early, your prey’ll get away, so the real thrill of the hunt is staying in your human form until the last possible second. I know there are some guys out there who like transforming right away and chasing down their prey, but personally I think that ‘dwooosh’ moment when you stop something that’s charging at you is where all the excitement’s at. Man, wild hunts are so much fun.

But well...it’s probably because Veight’s the way he is that we can take it easy in the army. How’d it all start again...?

When I first heard Veight had become a mage’s disciple, I wasn’t that surprised. It felt right, somehow. Even though he was younger than me, he was really smart. He knew all sorts of things none of us did. And he was like, really precocious too. He treated me like a proper girl and everything.

Oh yeah, I remember there was that one time he protected me. I think it was back when he was around 10 or so? Anyway, we were attacked by this huge

bear on our way back from picking wild herbs. He jumped on it before I had a chance to do anything. If he'd left it to me I'd have ripped it apart in no time, but he told me, "It's my job to protect you!"

I was pretty amazed. That was the first time I'd ever seen that quiet kid fight so ferociously. He was just 10 years old, yet he actually managed to kill the bear. Though, he was all beat up by the time the fight ended. Now that I think about it, Veight's always been pretty reckless...

But you know, everyone else in the village just treated me like one of the guys, so that was the first time anyone had tried to protect me. To be honest, it felt really nice. Back then, Veight was just like a baby knight.

Oh yeah, come to think of it, when we were little he'd always follow after me asking if I'd marry him. I wonder, is that proposal still valid? Because I'll gladly marry you anytime, Veight.

* * * *

"Ah, Commander." Monza turned to face me as I descended the last few steps to the prison. "Here to question them?"

"Yep. Mind recording the meeting for me?"

"Sure."

Monza left lookout duty to the other three members of her squad and followed me to the cells. I picked out the oldest of the six men being held captive and took him to an empty room. He appeared to be in his mid-40s and was dressed in neat, prim clothing. While the quality of his clothes' fabric wasn't as high as what nobles could afford, it was still expensive.

"What's your name?"

There was no reply. If he didn't want to answer, that was fine. Judging from his appearance, he was definitely part of Ryunheit's upper class, which meant I could just ask around and I'd easily be able to get his name.

"Monza, you think we'd find out who he is if we stripped him naked and put him on display in the city square?"

Monza realized what I was trying to do and she quickly began scribbling notes

with her pen. While she was writing, she lazily replied, “How about we just kill him and ask the next guy? No need to waste our time.”

“Might as well.”

Though the man kept his expression flat, I could smell the fear in his sweat. *A little bit more, and he’ll break.*

“If we’re gonna kill him anyway though, may as well find out who his family is first.”

At my implicit threat, the man paled visibly. His fear transformed into full-blown terror. *This scene reminds me of those cop movies I used to watch in my old life. Didn’t think I’d end up acting one out myself...* After letting him stew in his terror for a few seconds, I said quietly, “You were trying to assassinate my werewolves, weren’t you? If you don’t answer truthfully, I’ll kill you right here.”

This wasn’t an empty threat. If he still insisted on remaining silent I’d dispose of him and move on to the next guy. The man silently opened and closed his mouth, agonizing over whether to talk or not. Finally he came to a decision and said, “N-No.”

“Then what were you after? Talk or you die.”

The man faltered, but then eventually said, “W-We were just trying to find out what was going on...”

“You know, I hate liars. Commander, let’s just kill him.”

At Monza’s words, the man flinched. I had to admit, Monza was pretty good at scaring people. Since she was playing bad cop, that left the role of good cop to me—which was exactly what I preferred.

“Now, now, Monza. He hasn’t done anything...*yet.* As long as he’s willing to cooperate, I don’t see why we can’t let him live.”

“It doesn’t look like he’s all that willing to me... Maybe he’ll talk if we start killing off his family.”

“Calm down, there’s no reason to go that far.”

Even I couldn’t tell if Monza was being serious or not now. Judging from how aghast the man looked, he probably had a wife and kids. Not only that, he cared

more about them than he did for his own life. I softened my expression and said, “So you ran out to see what was going on with a silver letter opener in your hands. Is that right?”

“Y-Yes.”

The man nodded hesitantly while gauging my reaction. That was the same story he’d given when we’d caught him. I grinned.

“So then, there’s no reason not to tell us your name, is there? If that’s all you were doing, the demon army has no reason to harm you.”

In other words, if he didn’t give his name it would prove he had been doing something shady. Which meant there were ample grounds to execute him. It seemed this man was no idiot, and he understood that too.

“My name is Kozun... I’m the branch manager...for the Lafour company’s western branch.”

The Lafour company was one of the merchant guild’s most influential members. And this Kozun was apparently the manager of one of their stores. *Perfect. It shouldn’t be too hard to get the rest out of him now.* Once someone gave into fear and confessed even the smallest of details, squeezing other information out of them became easy. Because after they’d divulged one thing, they lost the ability to judge what they should and shouldn’t keep quiet about.

“The western branch you’re talking about, is that general store with the pointed yellow roof? The other traders told me how they admire your fair business practices.”

“Th-Thank you...”

It was my job to engage in friendly banter and get him to lower his guard. Meanwhile, Monza should still have been glaring sharply at him from behind. I could tell from Kozun’s expression, that she was doing a good job.

“The Lafour company has done a lot to assist us in keeping the peace within Ryunheit. You have my thanks for that.” The unsaid implication was, of course, that his boss was one of my subordinates. No shopkeeper would want to go against their employer. After reminding Kozun of his position as one of my conquered citizens, I returned to questioning him. “I’ll ask you one more time.

Are you sure you weren't trying to assassinate one of my werewolves?"

"I-I wasn't! I swear!"

The man hurriedly shook his head. It looked like he was done staying quiet. I grinned wolfishly and said, "If that really is the case, the demon army won't do anything to punish you. Naturally, we will do no harm to your family or your career, either."

Once again, the unsaid implication was that if he *was* plotting something, he and his family would be slaughtered. Veiled threats went a long way in teaching people their place. Still smiling, I continued applying the pressure.

"If you're telling the truth, we'll let you go back to your family, and this will all end as a simple misunderstanding." I patted the man on the shoulder reassuringly, before delivering the final blow. "Oh yes, I'll return your silver knives to you as well. I'm sure you need them for your work. But it's easy to lose something this small, so you shouldn't walk around with them too much."

In other words, I was saying "Stop skulking around with these." The man nodded vehemently. With this, he'd probably learned his lesson. If he hadn't, well then I'd just kill him next time he tried anything. I'd prefer not to, but if I had to play the villain to maintain control, I would.

After that, I interrogated the remaining men one by one. Each one gave me a little more information to work with. The second interview went like this: "I heard quite a few interesting things from Mr. Kozun."

I laid my elbows on the table and crossed my arms. The man sitting in front of me withered.

"U-Umm...did he say anything about my..."

I grinned.

"As long as you speak truthfully, you'll be allowed to return home safe and sound. But if you tell even one lie..."

Behind me, Monza began transforming into her werewolf form. The young man nearly fainted then and there.

“Are we clear?”

His interrogation went rather smoothly. However, like Kozun before him, he clammed up when I asked him what they were doing there. Whatever secret they may have been hiding, a little intimidation wasn’t enough to wring it out of them. *Hmm, what to do?*

After the last interrogation was finished, Monza tapped her notepad thoughtfully and muttered, “They’re all different ages and have different jobs. I was convinced they’d be part of the same pack, but now I’m not so sure.”

“The second guy definitely sounded like he knew the first. All the other prisoners seem to know each other, too.” I looked into my mirror and straightened out my appearance. “There’s no way a bunch of guys who happened to be in the same place, all carrying silver knives, don’t know each other. They’re definitely hiding something.”

Monza looked up from her notepad and smirked.

“Should we torture ’em, then?”

I shook my head in response.

“If we go too far, the citizens will start to resent us. I think this is as far as we can go for now. Let’s set them free.”

“H-Huh? Are you sure?” Monza asked, a hint of disappointment in her voice. She probably wanted to have some fun with them. Fortunately, I knew just how to cheer her up.

“Don’t worry, we’re not letting them go just like that. I want you to tail them all for the rest of the day.”

“Aha, so that’s how it is. Sounds like fun.” Monza clapped her hands and grinned. But then a second later she tilted her head in confusion. “Wait, I’ve only got four people in my squad...”

“Don’t worry, I’ll let you have Vodd and Hamaam’s squads for this. Split into pairs and make sure one of you is watching your target at all times. Got it?”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

I left the rest to Monza and returned to my room.

“Sir Veight!”

As I’d expected, Airia came running up to me not long after I returned. Fahn was standing behind her, shrugging her shoulders. *Looks like a lot happened while I was down there.* Airia’s complexion was pale, and she was clearly flustered. Though I suppose that was to be expected. She was currently following the demon army’s orders, and that demon army had just annihilated an army comprised of her former allies. That put her in a complicated position.

“I heard there was a battle outside the city. Please tell me the details! Also, who are those men you took into custody?”

I bade her to take a seat and sat down myself before starting my explanation.

“A Thuvan army of 400 men attacked the city, so I sent my forces out to intercept them. The men I captured were ones I found skulking around the northern gate during the battle. They were all armed with silver knives.”

“Silver knives?” Airia looked confused for a moment, but then it dawned on her. “Don’t tell me, they were trying to attack your men!?”

“I don’t know for sure yet, but that seems to be the most likely explanation.”

I purposely said that as nonchalantly as possible and leaned back in my chair. Growing even more flustered, Airia pleaded, “P-Please show them mercy. I don’t want to see my citizens’ blood spilled in the streets.”

“Believe me, Lady Airia, I don’t either.” I grinned wickedly and said, “To be honest, I’d rather not have killed those Thuvan soldiers either. But as one of the Demon Lord’s vice-commanders, I am duty-bound to fight.”

I gauged her reaction before continuing.

“Likewise, as I hold this city in the Demon Lord’s name, I am required to punish any who would defy his rule. Do you understand?”

I purposely phrased my words in a way to make her think that I would execute them. Though in truth I was letting them go so I could find out who was the mastermind behind the operation. The blood drained from Airia’s face.

“W-Wait! Please! At least investigate further!”

“Unfortunately, maintaining public security is of more importance than confirming their guilt. I have no choice but to punish anyone who seems suspicious.”

Airia looked like she might faint. Unfortunately, I hadn’t come here to make friends. If necessary, I’d use coercion to get what I wanted. Though if I pushed too hard, I’d achieve the opposite of what was desired, hence why I offered Airia a deal.

“That being said, these men haven’t done anything yet. And so, their lives are still hanging by a single thread.”

The story of the spider’s thread flashed through my mind as I said that. To be honest, I did think this was an underhanded way of handling matters, but considering what they’d attempted, I’d say it was warranted. By all rights, I should have executed them then and there. Airia waited for my verdict with bated breath. A part of me enjoyed seeing her terrified expression.

“I have no reason to let would-be assassins go free, but I do owe you a debt for assisting us in patrolling the city. I suppose I can be merciful, just this once.”

“Th-Thank you very much...”

Airia breathed a sigh of relief and slumped onto the table. *Was she really that nervous? Well either way, I’ve repaid my debt to her now.* Seeing as I wasn’t planning on killing them either way, you could say what I’d done was devious. But at the end of the day, that was how negotiating worked. Besides, I was a devious person. So I made sure to get as much as I could out of this exchange.

“However, I would like you to make sure no else tries to do the same. If anyone tries something like this again, it won’t end with just their arrest.”

That wasn’t an empty threat, either. I was serious. If anyone tried to hurt me or my men again, I’d slaughter them without mercy. It seemed Airia realized I wasn’t bluffing either, as she hurriedly nodded and said, “Understood. I’ll make sure everyone under my command knows not to defy the Demon Lord’s army. Most of the citizens have been told already.”

“Thanks for your cooperation.”

Honestly, I wasn't sure how much weight her word had, but it wouldn't be wise to ask for more. The most important thing about getting what you wanted through threats was knowing when to quit. *If you push too hard, you lose everything.* All that was left now was to see what Monza and the others found.

Three days passed before Monza came to knock on my door.

"Commander, are you free?"

"Yes, come in."

Monza slipped into the room without making a sound. Despite appearances, she was a master hunter. She pulled out a bundle of documents and placed them on my desk.

"This is everything we found out about the six guys we trailed. To sum it up, they're all members of the Sonnenlicht Order. They all go to the same shrine for worship, and they always go at the same time. That's the only connection between them that we could find."

"I see."

So, the common thread between them was the order. In which case, the surprise attack from a few days ago suddenly made sense. Unless they'd breached the main gates, Thuvan's archers would have been useless. No one would have attempted such a reckless tactic unless they had some reason to believe the gates wouldn't pose a problem.

Monza grinned and asked, "Want me to kill 'em all for you?"

By 'all', she was referring to the Sonnenlicht Order in its entirety. It seemed like overkill, but for demons that was normal. Anyone who bared their fangs at the strong had to be prepared for death. However, I didn't want to take such a hardline approach with humans. It would just make the city hate us.

I shook my head and said, "Don't eat your chicken until it's laid eggs. Let's monitor the situation for a while longer."

"Tch."

Monza clicked her tongue in displeasure. She was being pretty cheeky toward

her boss. But I knew that was just her way of venting her frustration. So I grinned evilly and said, “I want you to keep an eye on Yuhit... That guy who runs the Sonnenlicht Order. If he does anything suspicious, report to me right away. Also, find out his history; I want to know if he has any connections to Thuvan.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” Monza said with a lazy salute.

It turned out I was right to mistrust Yuhit. Apparently, the man who had been appointed bishop of the Ryunheit flock had originally come from Thuvan; he had been serving as a deacon in Thuvan before his promotion to bishop of Ryunheit. Naturally, that meant he knew a good number of people there. Furthermore, more than half of the Meraldian soldiers stationed in each city were devout followers of Sonnenlicht. And if that wasn’t enough, Monza had brought even more proof.

“Also, it turns out those six guys are huge fans of Yuhit. They’re some of his most zealous missionaries. All of the nonbelievers aren’t very fond of them.” Monza idly sniffed the tea leaves in my room as she gave her report.

“Oi, those are my favorite leaves. Don’t leave the container open, you’ll weaken the aroma.”

It had taken ages to find tea in this world that resembled Japanese tea. I snatched the box out of Monza’s hands and locked it inside my desk drawer.

Monza scowled and grumbled, “Don’t be so stingy, Boss. Anyway, what do you want me to do next? Can we finally...”

“Afraid not.”

I smirked and said, “From now on, I’ll handle the bishop. You go back to watching the six men. I’ll be taking Jerrick’s squad with me to see Yuhit.”

“Why? Oh, are you going to kill him yourself?”

“No... Why do you want to kill him so badly, anyway?”

Perhaps killing for the sake of it was natural for demons, but I couldn’t bring myself to accept that way of thinking. I opened another one of my desk drawers and took out a sealed envelope.

“I’ll deal with humans the human way. Don’t worry, just leave it all to me.”

“But you’re a werewolf too, Commander.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

There were multiple Sonnenlicht shrines scattered throughout Ryunheit, but only one temple where official ceremonies were held. Ryunheit’s temple was a majestic stone edifice.

I’d come during the night, so the only illumination was a series of lamps leading to the temple entrance. The flickering of the lamps caused the giant sun carved into the arch above the entrance to glow with a mystical light. I ascended the stone staircase and told the guards at the front door that I wished to meet with the bishop.

“Veight, Vice-Commander of the Demon Lord’s third regiment humbly requests an audience with the bishop, Yuhit.”

I was led into an opulent waiting room, where I sat and waited for Yuhit. After a few minutes, the old man entered the room.

“My apologies for the delay. The evening prayers ran late.”

“Oh no, it’s my fault for coming here unannounced.”

Now then, let the battle begin. I started by apologizing for imprisoning six of his followers. This was a light jab to see how he’d react.

“As it was an emergency, I had no choice but to thoroughly investigate the six men’s backgrounds. While it may have been necessary, please forgive me for my rudeness.”

“Oh no, you have nothing to apologize for.”

Hmm, he doesn’t seem too shaken. I didn’t smell any emotion from him either. Seeing as he was a bishop who led over 1000 people, I suppose it made sense that he wouldn’t be easily read.



“By the way, is it true that you hail from Thuvan?”

I didn’t miss the slight twitch in his eyebrows. However, his voice remained calmer than a still lake.

“It is indeed. Why do you ask?”

Trying to play dumb until the bitter end, huh? I was the one in a position of strength here. If he wanted to feign innocence, I had no obligation to indulge him.

“Bishop Yuhit, did you incite Thuvan’s Sonnenlicht followers into attacking us?”

He didn’t bother to deny it. He just fell silent, probably because he knew I wouldn’t believe him even if he did deny it. After a moment, Yuhit heaved a weary sigh and muttered, “Back in Thuvan, I used to raise pigeons inside the temple.”

I didn’t do anything to interrupt him, and he continued.

“When I came here to Ryunheit, I brought some of those pigeons with me. They still remember the route to Thuvan’s pigeon house.”

Ah, so he used carrier pigeons, basically. This time, it was Yuhit who asked me a question.

“Are you going to kill me?”

I didn’t answer his question. Instead, I said, “Because of you, I was forced to fight four hundred men I held no grudge against—and killed all of them.”

At that, Yuhit paled. It had been a battle on the open plains, so Yuhit probably thought most of them had retreated. In truth, had it been a normal battle they probably would have after losing 100 or so of their number.

“A-All of them?”

The bishop’s voice trembled. I grinned wolfishly, intimidating him further.

“You seem to have underestimated us, bishop. The Demon Lord shows no mercy to those who defy him.” I watched him drown in despair for a few seconds before leaning close and saying, “Opposing us was a foolish move,

bishop. But I have to know, why did you feel the need to go so far? Was granting you freedom of religious expression not enough?”

Yuhit sighed again and scratched his cheek.

“Humans...”

He trailed off. Then, gathering his resolve, he pushed forward.

“Humans can never allow themselves to be ruled by another race!”

Ahhh, I see now. As a former human, I could understand his feelings. Having to submit to werewolves was likely a vexing experience. So instead of getting angry, I simply asked about what I needed to know.

“Is that your opinion as a leader of the Sonnenlicht Order?”

Yuhit shook his head.

“Of course not. It’s simply my own personal stance.”

“Funny, isn’t it? Even though you hate us so much the very thought of cooperating with us disgusts you, you lack the power to drive us away.”

I gave him a sardonic smile. Whether he lived or died was up to me. If I felt like it, I could send his head rolling across the crimson carpet right now. Despite that, Yuhit didn’t flinch. He stared me in the eyes and said, “It is humans, not demons, who deserve to rule this world. Just as they have for centuries.”

Any other demon would have scoffed at him, but I understood his pride. That being said, we were the ones who were controlling Ryunheit through force. Mere words wouldn’t be enough to wrest that control out of our hands. Moreover, the fact that he refused to accept demon rule meant that I couldn’t meet his demands. I may have been a former human, but that didn’t mean I was just going to give him whatever he wanted. Now that I understood his stance, I knew there was no point in discussing things any further. I brought my face to within inches of his and gave him the most malevolent grin I could. I’d practiced evil grins for just this kind of moment.

“Interesting. Then let’s settle this case with the power of humans.”

I pulled the letter out of my pocket.

* * * *

—Bishop Yuhit's Journal—

As I walked through Ryunheit's gates, I turned back to look at them for what would probably be the last time. I would likely never walk through those gates again.

When I learned the demon army was comprised of only a few werewolves and a few hundred weak canines, I thought that Thuvan's famed horse archers might be able to defeat them. The commander of Thuvan's garrison was actually my best disciple, from when I was a deacon there. So when I told him the situation via carrier pigeon, he didn't hesitate to start recruiting soldiers in secret. However, not even a city's viceroy possesses the authority to mobilize troops without Senate approval. A mere garrison commander would normally be executed for marching without orders.

Despite this, 50 of Thuvan's horse archers agreed to go with him anyway. Not only that, 310 civilians volunteered to be infantry for the expedition. I'd thought that as long as they were armed with silver weapons, an army almost 400 strong would be able to drive out the demon army. As long as my disciples here could get the gates open, Thuvan's archers would be able to storm the city. I was certain that there were enough sympathizers within the city that we could suppress the demons once Thuvan's army was in. It was a gamble, but one with good odds. Or so I thought, anyway...

That werewolf saw through all of my foolish schemes. According to the report my followers brought back to me, he only sent a dozen or so werewolves to deal with the army of 400. And yet, if what that werewolf commander told me is true, those dozen men were more than enough to slaughter every last soldier.

Not only that, he'd managed to capture all of my agents and successfully deduced that I was the mastermind behind the battle. I had honestly been prepared for death at that point. In fact, I'd been prepared for death since the moment I resolved to fight against the demons. Even if it meant betraying the viceroy's decision to coexist, I had wanted to save Ryunheit from those

werewolves' clutches. If all it took to achieve that was my life, it would have been a small price to pay.

But even after my defeat, the werewolf commander didn't kill me. He listened to my story, and even more surprisingly, he seemed to understand my viewpoints. I can scarcely believe it... He's a demon, the enemy of mankind. He shouldn't be able to understand my feelings. Yet I'm certain of it. The things I said resonated with him, even if only a little... Naturally, he didn't admit as much to me. But when he finished his questioning, I could have sworn I saw a look of profound disappointment on his face. It vanished quickly enough, though, and was replaced by a sardonic grin. I doubt I'll ever forget the words he spoke next.

"Interesting. Then let's settle this case with the power of humans."

He then handed me an envelope and said, "This is a letter addressed to the viceroy of Thuvan. It contains the details of the battle, including the fact that we buried the dead. Seeing as you're so popular in Thuvan, I think you'd make the perfect messenger to deliver it."

While he didn't strip me of my rank, sending me off like this is tantamount to exile. Naturally he didn't say that explicitly, but I'm not so foolish that I can't see it for what it is. The question is, why didn't the werewolf commander simply kill me outright? As I begin the trek home, it is that question that hounds me.

Though I don't wish to admit it, it's possible he did so out of pity. Unbelievable as it is, that werewolf might have sympathized with me. Unfortunately, his act of kindness is a meaningless one. For once I reach Thuvan, I will almost certainly be executed. The deaths of the 50 archers and 310 volunteer soldiers are my responsibility.

Even if the viceroy forgives me, I cannot forgive myself. But I would much rather die at the hands of my comrades than to my enemy's plot. Then again, it's possible this is all within that werewolf's calculations too. He wishes for me to die at human hands. That way he won't have to dirty his own, and Ryunheit's citizens will be none the wiser.

Not only that, with me gone there will be no one left among Sonnenlicht's

clergy to take up the flag of rebellion. All of his problems...solved in one fell swoop. This werewolf is a terrifying tactician.

But that matters no longer. I staked my entire life on a showdown with the demon army, and I lost miserably. All that's left for me is to use what little time remains to atone for my blunder.

I'll return home to Thuvan. And there I will die.

* * * *

I watched Yuhit depart from atop the watchtower. While he may have been an enemy, and a poor strategist to boot, I couldn't bring myself to hate the man. There were probably plenty of other people like him who couldn't accept that they'd suddenly been conquered by a band of grotesque monsters.

Well, Yuhit'll probably be fine. Officially, I'd granted him the position of Viceroy Airia's personal messenger. Plus he was still a bishop, so Thuvan would probably treat him well. *And since that annoying old geezer'll be stuck there, I won't have to worry about him anymore.* Monza, who was watching along with me, didn't seem all that pleased, but that was hardly my problem.

"Are you *sure* you don't want me to chase him down and kill him?"

"Yeah."

I grabbed Monza by the head and held her back.

"Humans may be weaklings, but killing them's more trouble than they're worth. They're kinda like bees. Frail, but a pain in the ass."

"Oh yeah... I really don't like bees."

When she was a kid, Monza had tried to imitate a bear and smashed a beehive to get at its honey. To this day she was still afraid of bees. *At least that got her to understand.*

I jumped off the watchtower and started walking down the main street. Monza hurriedly followed after me. I bought 20 meat skewers from a nearby stall and gave half of them to Monza as a reward for completing her mission.

"The Sonnenlicht Order should quiet down now, hopefully."

“Mmmm. This sauce is really good.”

“From the taste, I think it was probably made with fermented beans or something.”

“You know how to cook, Commander?”

“Nah, I just like eating different things.”

It tastes just like soy sauce, but it’s not like she’d understand if I said that.

As I’d hoped, the Sonnenlicht Order quieted down after Yuhit left. Without their leader, they had no real organization. And because I’d just sent him off to deliver a message, there was nothing for them to get angry about, either. Though, I doubted he would ever be coming back here.

Without him, there was no one left to make important decisions for the order. But they couldn’t elect a new bishop, or it’d cause problems when Yuhit came back. Hence, they were forced to wait for a Yuhit who would never return.

Airia was the only one who’d realized there was something suspicious about his departure. One day, she came over to ask me if anything had happened the night I’d met with him. Of course, I had no obligation to tell her anything. This affair had been between him and the demon army; it had nothing to do with Ryunheit. In other words, the viceroy had no need to know.

“We just had a chat about pigeons.” She didn’t seem satisfied with that, so I elaborated a little more. “He was a very kind man.”

“That’s all well and good, but...”

She gave me a dubious look. *I’m afraid you’ll have to be content with that until the time comes that I can explain everything.* Regardless, I had achieved what I’d wanted. While there were still members of the order dissatisfied with demon rule, they were no longer capable of doing anything. One of the books I’d read in my old life had mentioned how wounding your enemies hurt them more than killing them. *I think I’m starting to understand why now.*

Although many of Ryunheit's citizens had been worried at Yuhit's sudden disappearance, telling them he'd been dispatched as Airia's messenger had easily quelled that unease. In just 10 days, the battle outside the walls had become a distant memory in the minds of the citizens. Just as planned. As I was gloating to myself in the privacy of my office, I heard a knock on my door.

"Enter."

A young girl wearing a pointed hat strode into the room. It was my master.

"Where did you come from!?"

"From outside the door, you dunce. I knocked, did I not?"

Honestly, I shouldn't have been that shocked. I watched as Gomoviroa waved her hand and floated up to eye level.

"I heard you skirmished with the enemy."

"I did, Master. It went exactly how I wrote in the report."

After the battle, I'd sent one of the canines back to headquarters with a detailed report of the battle.

"My apologies, some of your Bone Spears were destroyed in the battle."

While it had been 2000 against 350, the infantry had fought to the death. It was a testament to how tough my master's undead soldiers were that only 100 of them were defeated. In a sense, you could have still considered it a flawless victory. I'd moved the surviving 1900 soldiers back into the forest, so they'd be ready for the next fight. However, Gomoviroa seemed unsatisfied still.

"It will take a whole day to restore that many soldiers..."

"That's not so bad, really. Thanks to that, we didn't lose any werewolves or canines."

"People like you will never understand a necromancer's pain."

Because of her youthful appearance, her complaints sounded like those of a pouting child. *Oh yeah, I should probably tell her everything that happened after, too.* I explained to her how the bishop Yuhit had been behind the assault, and how I'd banished him to Thuvan.

“I see. It’s just like you to handle things in such a manner.” Master nodded in approval. “By removing the organization’s head, you paralyze its limbs. Though you used a rather roundabout method.”

“But you would’ve done the same thing in my position, wouldn’t you, Master?”

“I suppose I cannot deny that. Dealing with the people’s resentment would be much more of a hassle, but it would depend on the situation.” She looked up into my eyes. “I daresay you’re far more human than me, the actual human here.”

Gomoviroa grinned knowingly. It almost felt as if she could see through the fact that I had memories of a past life. Since she already dabbled in the secrets of life and death, she might actually believe me if I told her I was reincarnated. But if I did that, I’d have to explain what the previous world I’d lived in was like. It was still too early to reveal that to anyone. Master stared into my face for a few seconds longer before turning away with a shrug.

“I suppose studying under my tutelage caused some of my humanity to rub off on you.”

“Th-That’s probably it.”

She didn’t bother pursuing the matter any further, and gave me a carefree smile.

“Regardless, you did well in protecting this city, and dealing with the instigators of the attack.”

“Th-Thank you very much.”

“So now, you needn’t worry about explaining yourself to the Demon Lord.”

“Huh?”

Dumbfounded, I watched as my surroundings began to twist and warp. Seconds later, I was standing in the fog that surrounded Grenschtat. I sighed heavily and transformed out of my human form.

“So why exactly do I need to explain my...”

I trailed off as I turned around. Master wasn’t next to me. It appeared she’d

teleported me here alone.

"Is she staying behind to look after Ryunheit while I'm gone?"

I tilted my head quizzically and headed to the front gate.

Grenschtat castle was the acting headquarters for all three regiments of the demon army. The first regiment was composed entirely of dragonkin elites. They also functioned as the Demon Lord's personal bodyguards. No one knew exactly how strong they were, but my guess was they were tougher than the second and third regiments combined. All of the dragonkin clans had sworn absolute fealty to the Demon Lord, so they were also his most trusted regiment.

The second regiment was made up primarily of ogres and giants; demons with high destructive power, mostly. They also tended to be the most aggressive of the demon races, hence why I had a hard time dealing with them. While they made for a strong army, they were also all muscleheads. You couldn't really rely on them for anything requiring finesse.

Lastly, the third regiment was composed of werewolves, vampires, and other races that possessed peculiar traits. Really, it was more just a mishmash of all the races who were too peaceful by nature to make it into the second regiment. Almost all of the other vice-commanders were also disciples of Gomoviroa the sage, which naturally meant they were also mages. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call us the demon army's brains. Unfortunately, the third regiment was also the smallest of the three. Our low numbers meant we could only take cities through unorthodox tactics or surprise attacks.

The three regiments always competed with each other to prove they were the best: Which regiment had the most achievements, which had the best-trained men—anything that could be turned into a contest was. And for some reason, the second regiment was being oddly showy today. Even the regiment's newest recruits were decked out in shimmering armor. They dashed through the corridors with nervous expressions on their faces.

"Is there a big operation coming up or something?" I mused to myself as I sat in the reception room, waiting for my turn to see the Demon Lord. The dragonkin guard who'd guided me here brought me some ironstone tea and

chicken biscuits to tide me over while I waited. *It'd be rude to say it, but ironstone tea really just tastes like rusty pipe water. The biscuits taste like hardtack, too.* Even though it was the Demon Lord who'd supposedly asked for me, I was left waiting for quite some time.

I'd gone through all of the biscuits and was on my second cup of tea when the door finally opened. I stood up immediately, thinking the Demon Lord had come to see me, but it was just one of the dragonkin officers. He was Baltze, one of the first regiment's vice-commanders. He'd been granted the nickname "The Azure Knight" by the Demon Lord.

"It's been a while, Sir Baltze."

I saluted, and the blue-scaled dragonkin nodded lightly in response.

"Indeed. My apologies for making you wait."

As dragonkin had the faces of lizards, it was hard to decipher their expressions. From what I could tell, though, Baltze really was apologetic. He also seemed rather tired.

"The Demon Lord has only just concluded his war council and is rather tired. I beg your understanding."

"Of course."

I'm not exactly sure what I'm supposed to be understanding here, but it looks like I came at a bad time. Guess I'll need to watch my words more than usual. I followed Baltze to the council room, a room which was normally reserved for the highest ranking members of the army. This would be my first time going inside it.

The moment I entered the room I brought my arm up in a crisp salute.

"My lord, Vice-Commander of the third regiment, Weremage Veight reporting for duty."

"At ease."

The Demon Lord nodded from across the large round table sitting in the middle of the room. Like I said before, dragonkin expressions were hard to read, so I had no idea what the Demon Lord was thinking. Our audience began with

the Demon Lord asking me a question.

“Wight, there’s something I must know.”

I always hate it when he says my name. Because of how dragonkin mouths were shaped, they couldn’t pronounce the ‘v’ in my name. So whenever the Demon Lord called me by name, it sounded like “Wight.” *I’m sure he thinks he’s getting it right, but it just sounds so wrong to me.* I’d risen all the way to the position of vice-commander, but it still hurt my feelings to be likened to a wraith.

The Demon Lord took no notice of my discomfort, and continued, “I have heard that you ordered large quantities of charcoal, sulfur, and saltpeter from the canine merchants.”

“I have indeed, my lord.”

Ah, so this is about the gunpowder. I was hoping to craft muskets for the canines, in order to raise their combat potential. Though canines were physically weak, they were quite dexterous and relatively smart. They’d make for good marksmen. That said, I wasn’t sure explaining gunpowder to the Demon Lord would be wise. However, his next words upturned all of my expectations.

“Where did you learn the formula to create Dragon Breath?”

“Huh?”

You mean this world already knows about gunpowder? Seeing my confusion, Baltze stepped in to explain.

“Dragon Breath is a special powder that explodes when ignited. Its existence is highly classified. Even within the army, there are only a few dragonkin who know of it.”

“I-I see.”

Well, this isn’t good. The Demon Lord observed me silently, waiting for my reply. If I didn’t come up with a good explanation, I’d be executed for stealing confidential military secrets. I steeled my resolve and said, “When I was training under Master Gomoviroa, I read through her library of books. Based on my

findings, I surmised that this combination of chemicals might be able to create an explosive powder."

"Mmm, from Gomoviroa's library?"

The Demon Lord nodded, and I continued my explanation.

"I ordered the materials to test my theory. I thought that if it worked, I could make better weapons for the weak canines. I had no idea this was meant to be a military secret."

I wasn't ready to tell anyone the truth, so I pinned everything on my master. If worse came to worst, I could always apologize to her later. Claiming I'd figured it out from her books was a pretty lame excuse, but it was better than staying quiet. However, it appeared that the Demon Lord bought it.

"I suppose I should have expected no less from the Great Sage's star pupil. I see you are not only a master strategist, but a master chemist as well. Very well. In deference to your wisdom, I will inquire no further into this matter."

Looks like I'm safe. It felt like every meeting with the Demon Lord shaved a few years off my life. Seeing my relief, the Demon Lord continued.

"However, I doubt even you would know the ratio needed to create Dragon Breath."

"Indeed I do not, my lord."

That was the truth. I had been planning on testing different ratios of each until I got it right. The Demon Lord shook his head.

"By weight, it is ten parts saltpeter, two parts charcoal, and one part sulfur. You would do well to remember that. However, because of how dangerous the mixing process is, I am afraid I must forbid you from making any."

I never knew you needed that much saltpeter... Still, what was the point in telling me if you're going to forbid me from making it?

As if reading my thoughts, the Demon Lord said, "Instead, I will grant you a small quantity of Dragon Breath. It is a fickle chemical that needs experts to manage it properly, so I will also dispatch a squad of dragonkin engineers to your city. Use them as you see fit."

“Yes, sir! Your generosity is most appreciated!”

“However, know that if this secret is leaked, you will be punished most severely.”

“...Yes, sir.”

Too late for regrets now.

All I could do was accept and salute.

“By the way, how goes your occupation of Ryunheit? I heard you were invaded by a small army.”

Oh yeah, I still need to report about that. I explained to the Demon Lord how the Sonnenlicht bishop was behind the attack, and how I exiled him to Thuvan.

“I see, so the clergy used their influence to spur the people.”

Demons had no organized religion. Their faith was tied to worshiping the Demon Lord, and normally a single Demon Lord reigned for decades or even centuries. However, the Demon Lord nodded in understanding.

“Faith can often drive humans to radical courses of action. Perhaps we have no choice but to subjugate them by force after all.”

He wasn’t wrong, but that was still the last thing I needed to hear. Unless I convinced him quickly, my plan for a peaceful occupation would go up in smoke. I hurriedly prepared an argument.

“F-Fortunately, I was able to limit unrest within the streets. As I banished their bishop without stripping him of his rank, the order won’t be able to appoint a new leader. I’m confident that without someone to guide them, they’ll remain docile.”

The Demon Lord observed me carefully for a few seconds before asking, “If you wish to rule the city your way, you will eventually have to come to an agreement with the religious orders of the city. You understand that, correct?”

“I do, my lord. I am prepared to do anything it takes.”

In truth, I actually had no idea how to deal with the order. I hadn’t been much of a religious person in my old life, so I couldn’t understand the feelings of the

deeply devout. But I wanted to avoid killing outside of combat as much as possible. *I'll figure something out, somehow.* I wasn't sure whether or not I was able to convey my resolve to the Demon Lord, but he didn't push any further.

"From the start of this campaign, I had decided to leave ruling the occupied cities to the commanders in charge of subjugating them. So long as Ryunheit remains firmly under our control, I am willing to allow even your unorthodox methods."

"Thank you very much, my lord."

My life was going to get harder from here on out, but at least I'd survived this meeting. The Demon Lord continued by saying, "I just concluded a war council with the second regiment on the state of the northern battlefront. Are you aware of the current situation?"

"I have heard rumors that it's not progressing favorably."

Supposedly the second regiment had lost a lot of their earlier steam. At least, that was what the canine traders had told me. It appeared their information had been accurate, since the Demon Lord nodded.

"The humans' counteroffensive was fiercer than we predicted. In order to turn the situation around, the second regiment's commander volunteered to personally depart to the front lines."

I see now, so that's why all the second regiment soldiers in the castle are so dressed up. I looked down at the table for the first time and saw a large map dotted here and there with markers. A cursory glance told me that one of the three cities the second regiment had captured had already been retaken. Furthermore, the demon army seemed to have suffered consecutive defeats in the field.

The Demon Lord, noticing my interest in the map, pointed to a specific location with a knotted finger.

"I have heard that the two southern cities the third regiment took are still firmly under our control. They will play a vital role in our tactics from this point onward, so be sure not to lose them."

"Yes, sir!"

I straightened my back and saluted. The Demon Lord waved his hand, indicating that I should take a seat.

“Sit. The official meeting is over. From here on out, this audience will be an informal one.”

Usually, only regiment commanders were allowed to sit in the Demon Lord’s presence. While this was a great honor, I couldn’t help but feel nervous. I timidly settled into the chair across from him. I glanced backwards and noted that Baltze was still standing. I kind of wish he’d sat with me, but he remained in parade rest, his expression unreadable. Still a little uneasy, I turned back to the Demon Lord and waited for his next words. Now that I was sitting this close to him, it hit me again just how intimidating he was. The whirlpool of mana swirling around him was so thick that just breathing required effort.

“For a long time now, I’ve been hoping for a chance to talk with you at length. Among my generals, you are by far the most unorthodox, and the most resourceful.”

“Th-Thank you for your kind words.”

The Demon Lord’s tone was far more casual than before.

“For example, I’ve heard that you organized your werewolf soldiers into squads of four men. Knowing you, surely you must have a reason for picking four specifically.”

I bowed my head.

“You’re very perceptive, my lord. I did indeed.”

I wasn’t lying, either. Dangerous missions had a much higher chance of success if two people tackled them instead of one. That held true for both humans and werewolves. It was why the police always operated in two-man units. Back when I was in elementary school, we’d always taken swimming lessons in pairs, too.

However, I’d realized there was a limit to how effective a two-man pair could be. If one member of the team was injured, the other was forced to retreat with their injured partner, nullifying the entire team’s combat potential. Even if their partner wasn’t so seriously injured that they needed to retreat, a single person

wasn't even half as effective as a pair.

Hence why I'd doubled the number from two to four. A four-man unit could withstand the loss of one of its members without losing too much of its combat capabilities. The remaining three could still fight as an effective team. And even if two of the four went down, the remaining two would still be able to fight at slightly over half capacity, since they could still operate as a team. Furthermore, four-man teams could split into two for scouting missions, where one team scouts out ahead while the other secures a base of operations. Though, none of this was something I'd come up with on my own. I'd learned it all from a game I'd played back in my old life, so it wasn't something I could take credit for. *But you know, that's the first time anyone's asked me about that.* After listening to my explanation, the Demon Lord nodded slowly.

"You have given me much to think about. Adjutant, please record Wight's earlier words."

Seriously, guys, it's Veight. I'm not some undead lich... Well, that's just how their vocal chords are, so I guess I can't blame them. Baltze penned down our earlier conversation with a practiced hand.

"I have recorded General Veight's words as requested, my lord."

Wait a second, Baltze just got my name right, didn't he? Ignoring my confusion, the Demon Lord changed the topic.

"Oh yes, this is a good opportunity to ask. Is there anything you believe the demon army does inefficiently or could implement better?"

"You want *my* opinion?"

I was just a lowly vice-commander. The title may have sounded impressive, but I was only a few steps above a middle-grade officer. I never expected someone of my rank would be asked to give his opinion on the workings of the army, and by the Demon Lord no less.

"Fear not. This is an unofficial audience, so you will not be censured for your statements."

That's not the problem here. In truth, the demon army was far more modernized than I had expected. When I'd first enlisted, I had been surprised to

learn that the concept of supply trains had already spread throughout the army. Even this castle, Grenschtat, served as a resupply base for the front lines. It was because the first regiment guarded our supply lines that the second and third regiments were able to fight without worry.

Meanwhile, humans still relied on foraging and purchasing supplies from the locals to keep their armies fed. In extreme situations, they even let their soldiers pillage freely. Had I been reincarnated as a human in this world, I could have revolutionized their military by introducing supply trains, but the demon army had already figured things out by the time I'd joined.

Their recruitment and training methods were also highly organized. A fresh recruit in the demon army was transformed into a capable soldier in the span of a few months. The humans seemed to be under the impression that the Demon Lord was summoning legions of soldiers from hell, but the truth was he'd just created a very streamlined recruitment system. Seeing my expression, the Demon Lord gently nudged me to speak.

"There is no need for concern. Speak your mind."

"Yes, sir!"

I just don't really have anything to say... Oh, wait.

"With all due respect, my lord, there is one thing I noticed. It has to do with the army's command structure."

"Go on."

In the past few years, the demon army has grown monumentally. At first it had been comprised only of dragonkin soldiers, but as the army grew in popularity, demons of all races began to join. Because of its rapid expansion, there was a lot of confusion about hierarchy.

Take, for example, my position. Was I an Adjutant, or just a Vice-Commander? When I'd joined the demon army, it had been split into the Dragon Regiment, the Giant Regiment, and the Demon Regiment. In other words, the army had grown large enough that it needed to be split into regiments.

However, within each division, the hierarchy of everyone below Commander rank was rather vague. For example, Baltze was the Demon Lord's personal

aide, and thus an Adjutant, while Dogg was a mere Lieutenant. On the other hand, I was Ryunheit's governor and held the rank of Field General. If we were to order our status in descending rank, it would go Baltze, then me, then Dogg.

At the same time, we all held the equivalent rank of 'Vice-Commander.' On top of that, no one knew whether Vice-Commander was a rank equivalent to Adjutant, or above or below it. One would assume they were equivalent, but who knew?

"Considering the current scope of the demon army, the chain of command is far too vague. I suspect that will cause problems later on."

I snuck a glance back at Baltze when I said that, and as I'd feared, his expression had stiffened up. I was probably the only person in the entire army to criticize it to the Demon Lord's face. However, the Demon Lord didn't appear angry. Instead, he nodded.

"An astute observation. But as demons only serve the strong, codifying ranks within the demon army would cause its own share of problems."

Wait, he's keeping them vague on purpose? Why?

"Were I to create a rigid ranking system, it would be more than likely that intelligent officers who are physically weak would rise above stupid soldiers who have nothing but brawn on their side. While that would be ideal from our perspective, demons haven't matured enough to accept such a system."

Ah, that makes sense. There's plenty of fools who like picking a fight with me, too...

"It is for that reason that I leave command structures within each regiment up to the individual commanders. Your point is a valid one, however. Eventually we will need to reform the system."

It came as a surprise that the Demon Lord was as critical of the 'survival of the fittest' ideology as I was. *Regardless, I need to apologize for my rudeness.*

"My apologies for overstepping my bounds, my lord. Please forgive my indiscretion."

"Of course. Besides, your observation was a valid one. I see now why you

have had such success in governing Ryunheit.”

A faint smile played across the Demon Lord’s lips.

“I had wondered why Gomoviroa spoke so highly of you before, but now I understand.”

Wait, what on earth did Master tell him? However, the Demon Lord didn’t bother explaining any further, and brought the meeting to a close.

“I learned much from our conversation. From now on, I want you to deliver update reports in person. I’m expecting great things from you.”

“Yes, sir.”

With that, I was finally freed from my audience with the Demon Lord.

As I made my way out of the conference room, Baltze called out to me.

“Hold a moment, Sir Veight. Would you mind accompanying me for lunch?”

Dragonkin had an unsavory reputation because of their scary appearance, but in truth, most of them were wise, rational people. Baltze happened to be a rather quiet, gentle fellow. Though we were both vice-commanders, he technically outranked me. It would have been unwise to refuse him, so I agreed to lunch. *Besides, I’m kind of curious what food the officers’ mess hall has.*

“Thank you for the invitation. I’m quite hungry, so I’ll gladly accept.”

The two of us headed to the officers’ mess together. The dragonkin guards at the entrance let us in with a salute. We saluted them back and strolled through the double doors. I’d never had the opportunity to go somewhere this fancy in my old life, so I decided to thoroughly enjoy this lunch.

That said, the technology of this world was so far behind that a family restaurant back in Japan would probably have food just as tasty. A canine waiter came to take our orders. I got the deer saute along with a potato stew. Since it was lunchtime, I only got three orders of the saute. It wouldn’t do to overeat in the middle of the day.

For some reason, Baltze was staring at me in awe, but this really was normal for werewolves. All he ordered was a grasshopper stir-fry; dragonkin were fond

of eating insects. While we waited for our food to arrive, we chatted about the same things officers everywhere chatted about—work.

“Is the northern battlefront really doing that badly?”

“It is. Don’t tell any of your men, but we might be pushed out of the north entirely.”

It was precisely because rank and file soldiers weren’t allowed in this cafeteria that we could have a conversation like this. Baltze sipped his lemonade and heaved a weary sigh.

“No one in the second regiment has any appreciation for tactics. They don’t even surround cities during a siege. All they do is rush the main gate until it breaks and charge the city.”

And because of that, it seemed the citizens of all the captured territories escaped before they fell and fled to nearby cities. They became refugees, in other words.

“And then, those refugees volunteered for the army and joined the campaigns to recapture their homes. Because they’re fighting to get their lives back, morale on the human side is higher than ever. We’ve lost a lot more troops than we expected.”

“But they’re all hastily formed militia without any proper training. Shouldn’t they be no match for the second regiment’s ogres and giants?”

They may have been idiots, but they were tough. However, Baltze shook his head.

“As I believe you’re aware, the Sonnenlicht Order’s influence is strongest in the north. Because they’re already used to religious hierarchy, they don’t need much training to become capable soldiers.”

The harsh climate of the north naturally led people to accept Sonnenlicht, which espoused cooperation and harmony. Mondstrahl’s ideology of individualism and self-reliance would be a hard sell in a place where winters killed the lone traveler.

“They may be volunteer militia, but they have the discipline of real soldiers.

They don't mind sacrificing their lives for the sake of victory. We've lost more men than I'd like to them."

The food arrived then so we put our conversation on hold and dug in. A werewolf's fangs were perfectly suited for tearing into gamey deer meat. *Anyway, if they want to avoid a war of attrition, there's plenty of ways to do it.*

"If you don't want to get bogged down in a battle of attrition, why not just focus on defending your captured cities?"

"Because everyone from that blasted second regiment loves wanton destruction. They've reduced the gates and walls of every city they captured to rubble." Baltze muttered angrily to himself as he picked at his stir-fried grasshopper. "The second regiment has no leadership and no rules. It's like they don't even realize they're supposed to be representing the demon army here!"

Sorry, it's not like I act like a representative of the demon army, either. We continued eating in silence for a few minutes until a newcomer entered the room.

"Oh, if it isn't Veight. Don't see you here often."

A beautiful woman with pale skin and black hair walked up to me. She wore a revealing dress which showed off her ample cleavage. I nodded to her and said, "It's been a while, Miss Melaine."

"I thought I told you to call me *Lady* Melaine."

"Don't wanna."

Melaine was another one of the third regiment's vice-commanders, but she was the highest-ranking among us. She was also Gomoviroa's top disciple, which technically made her my senior. Oh, and she was also a vampire, though she dressed like a succubus. Baltze greeted her as well and invited her to join us. With a smile, Melaine settled into the seat next to mine.

"So what secret deals are the Azure Knight and the esteemed governor of Ryhunheit making?"

"We're not doing anything of the sort. I was simply telling Sir Veight about the situation in the north."

Too serious to get the joke, Baltze calmly explained what we were talking about. Melaine flagged down a waiter, ordered a glass of ghost wine, and leaned back in her chair with a sigh.

“You sure have it tough, Baltze.”

“I’m sure my troubles are nothing compared to you, Lady Melaine. You have to deal with ruling over humans, after all.”

Like me, Melaine and her army were occupying one of Meraldia’s cities. She was in charge of the city northwest of Ryunheit, Bernheinen. Her style of government was the polar opposite of mine, though. She shrugged her shoulders and said, “It wasn’t that bad. I just turned all the important people into vampires.”

Indeed, not a single one of Bernheinen’s nobles or generals were human anymore. Melaine’s method of conquering Bernheinen had been rather unorthodox; she’d launched a night attack with about 100 of her vampires. Instead of capturing the city, they’d just made sure to transform the viceroy and the city garrison into vampires. After that, they’d let their new servants loose into the streets.

Though the events of that night were disastrous for the viceroy and his citizens, it was still a much better outcome than it could have been. At least with Melaine’s strategy, the city was able to continue running like usual. Naturally, the converted vampires were forced to obey all of Melaine’s orders, but otherwise, things hadn’t changed much. As Bernheinen housed Meraldia’s royal library and other educational facilities, Gomoviroa hadn’t wanted it to get too damaged in the fighting. Still, I felt like Melaine might have overdone it a little by turning the city into vampires.

I idly watched as the waiter brought Melaine’s drink. Thick white steam rose up from her glass of ghost wine, which she downed in one gulp.

“If anything, I imagine you’ve got it pretty tough, Veight. You haven’t even brainwashed them. It’s gotta be pretty hard getting regular humans to follow you. Just what kind of magic did you use on them?”

I’m just using my human memories as reference. Of course, I couldn’t say that. So I cleared my throat and replied, “Werewolves are experts at blending in with

human society, so we can understand them better than most."

"Hmmm." Melaine grinned and poked my forehead. "Well, our conquered cities are right next to each other so we may as well work together. Oh yeah, think you could start trading with us? Things have settled down on my end, so it should be safe."

"Yeah, I don't mind. As long as you're willing to secure the roads, that is."

"You crafty little kid... Well, I guess I can do that."

Melaine patted her bountiful bosom and winked at me. Baltze, who'd just finished eating, wiped the corners of his mouth with a napkin and turned to Melaine.

"By the way, Lady Melaine, who will be put in charge of Thuvan's conquest?"

"Mmm, I'm definitely passing on that. My vampires have their hands full managing Bernheinen's defenses. Sorry, but I'll probably have to put one of our more promising new recruits in charge of that."

Oh, so we're taking Thuvan next? I only just got rid of Yuhit, so I hope losing Thuvan doesn't drive him back to Ryunheit... The three of us continued complaining about our respective responsibilities and our bosses for a while longer after that. While Master may have been a master necromancer, she had absolutely no interest in tactics. Hence, she'd focused on raising an army of undead warriors to overwhelm Meraldia with sheer numbers. Doing this meant all the strategic planning for the second regiment fell onto our shoulders.

It appeared that Baltze had his fair share of stories about the Demon Lord as well. Supposedly, the Demon Lord was always so focused on planning that unless someone else fed him, he'd completely forget to eat. And because he even spent his meals thinking with a serious face, the young dragonkin who served him his food were all terrified of him.

"To be honest, I wish he would be a little easier on himself. We'd be more than happy to share some of his burden."

Baltze looked somewhat lonely as he said that. *He must really respect the Demon Lord.* Seeing as it was the current Demon Lord who'd reformed the army into the organization it was today, I wasn't too surprised that he had a lot to

think about. Strength alone wouldn't have been enough to get so many different races of demons to follow him. Even if they did worship strength, he would have needed wisdom and popularity to grow his empire this large.

I'm kinda glad I decided to join the Demon Lord's army now. With our lunch concluded, I shook hands with Baltze and headed out into the hallway together with Melaine.

"What are you planning on doing now?"

"I already finished reporting to the Demon Lord, so I'll probably go back to my city."

"How are you planning on getting there?"

Right as I asked that, Gomoviroa floated in through one of the castle's windows.

"So this is where you two were."

Melaine rushed over and embraced her.

"Master! I wanted to see you so bad!"

Normally it would have just looked cute if a young woman was hugging a little girl, but the young woman happened to be a vampire while the little girl was actually one of the world's most accomplished necromancers. Gomoviroa frowned in annoyance and pushed Melaine's face off of her.

"Stop clinging to me. You're smothering me. Besides, you spoke with me but moments ago."

"But I still missed you!"

If anyone else saw this they would be surprised, but all of Master's disciples were used to Melaine's behavior. She clung to Gomoviroa as if the witch was her mother. Gomoviroa pulled Melaine off her with some difficulty, then lightly smacked her head.

"It has been fifty years since I took you on as my disciple. When will you learn to show restraint?"

Melaine and I looked at each other and shrugged.

“Listen up, you two. The cities you captured will become vital to the future of this war. You’ve been informed of the situation in the north, correct?”

We nodded. If the northern front collapsed, we’d only be able to invade from the south, which would then make our two cities the new frontline for the war. Gomoviroa put a hand on each of our shoulders and muttered, “As your master, it was my responsibility to create a place for the two of you two freely enjoy studying the mysteries of magic. I am truly sorry that things have devolved to this point.”

At heart, our master was a researcher. She truly regretted that her disciples had been wrapped up in a war. However, Melaine smiled at Gomoviroa and said, “Weren’t you the one who taught us that practice is the only real teacher, Master? Plus, this is a perfect opportunity to practice to our hearts’ content. I’m sure Veight agrees too.”

“Absolutely. Besides, it’s because we’re here that this war hasn’t had too many casualties yet.”

It was up to us, the third regiment, to make sure the second regiment didn’t get too out of hand and slaughter everyone. Naturally we wouldn’t be able to stop everyone from dying, but as long as we were around, both human and demon casualties would be kept to a minimum. Master nodded and patted us on the head.

“I’m blessed to have such wonderful disciples. It pains me to burden you, but I will be needing your assistance in the battles to come as well.”

“Okaaay, Master.”

“You can count on us.”

The two of us smiled and bumped fists with each other.

After that, Gomoviroa teleported us both back to our respective cities. Fortunately, the city could still function despite my frequent absences. Airia handled most of the day-to-day operations of running the city, and my squads handled the rest. Of course, final responsibility for everything still lay with me. And so, I was hardly surprised when I found a stack of documents awaiting my

approval upon my return.

“The hell is this?”

All the businesses in the northern, eastern, and western sectors of the city had signed a petition they’d delivered to me. Supposedly, since the canine traders had set up around the southern gate, business had dried up in the other sectors. *Like that’s my responsibility...* Still, if I didn’t address this, a lot of people would go out of business.

“Hmm... Oh, I know.”

I could just grant all the other store owners permits to open stalls in the southern sector. *That should tide them over until trade with Bernheinen starts.* Since it was northwest of us, once goods were flowing the northern and western districts would start to flourish again. *As for the east...I guess I could have the canines open up a workshop there.*

With that, most of the city would be taken care of. All the other reports weren’t as serious; just a warning that the Garney brothers had gotten drunk and ruined another bar, and a paper detailing the progress of the plantation the canines were cultivating, and so on. I’d have to knock some sense into the Garney brothers later. There was, however, one other report that caught my attention.

“A request to address the city garrison’s issues, huh?”

Airia was the one who had submitted the request, and it had been co-signed by the commander of the city garrison. As each city’s garrison was technically under the Senate’s command, it was the Senate who paid their salaries. Naturally, this meant the garrison wasn’t getting paid anymore. At present Airia was covering for their missing pay, but she couldn’t keep it up forever, so she was asking me to handle it.

I’d underestimated the city garrison a little. Originally I had thought they were just your everyday foot soldiers, but it seemed they were specialists at maintaining public order. On top of that, many were career soldiers. There were only 200 of them, and if the city faced an emergency, they generally bolstered their numbers with volunteer militia. Apparently, the other cities had a similar system. But that meant each of the garrison soldiers needed to be able to lead,

so they could take charge of squads of militia. Effectively, even the grunts were low-ranking officers.

“Hmmm...”

My intuition is telling me this is a good opportunity. If I negotiated this well, I would be able to get a very favorable deal for the demon army. I changed into something more formal and headed to the garrison barracks alone.

“Is the garrison commander here? The Vice-Commander of the demon army’s third regiment, Veight, is here to see him.”

When I arrived in the barracks courtyard, the soldiers were in the middle of their training routine. Even when they didn’t have any work, they weren’t slacking off. The soldiers exchanged uncertain glances, and a burly middle-aged man with a thick beard walked up to me.

“I’m Ryunheit’s garrison commander, Wengen.”

He had an imposing presence and looked pretty tough. Even though I knew I could tear him to shreds in my transformed state, I still felt a little daunted. And because the entire courtyard was filled with the soldiers’ sweat, I couldn’t read his feelings from his smell either. *This might be a problem.* I watched as Wengen’s men crowded protectively around him. *I should probably tell him why I’m here.*

“I read over Lady Airia’s request regarding the issue of your wages. I intend to discuss my decision with her as well, but I would first like to hear your opinion.”

Wengen tilted his head in confusion.

“Our opinion on what, exactly?”

“You gentlemen have pledged your services to the Meraldian Senate, correct? That means your salary comes from them.”

Therein lay the problem.

“Although you men have surrendered to the demon army, you are, of course, not part of it. Therefore, the demon army is unable to pay your wages.”

The soldiers nodded; that much was obvious. I had to admit, their loyalty to Meraldia impressed me.

“That being said, you aren’t the viceroy’s personal troops, either. Though she is technically your commanding officer, she is not your employer.”

“It is as you say.”

Wengen nodded solemnly. I looked into the eyes of the man who stood head and shoulders above me and said, “Originally, your job was to patrol Ryunheit and maintain order in the city, but at present, my men and the members of Ryunheit’s trading guild are filling that role.”

The soldiers said nothing, but their expressions darkened. However, I maintained a cheerful tone throughout.

“I won’t ask you noble gentlemen to swear fealty to the Demon Lord. You may remain the Senate’s soldiers, but won’t you at least help keep this city safe? If you agree to return to your posts, I will return your weapons and swear not to interfere in your affairs.”

The soldiers were taken aback.

“You’ll return our weapons to us?”

“You didn’t come here to demand we serve you?”

“What’re you playing at?”

Please don’t think I’m as stupid as other demons. These soldiers were brave enough to face me, a werewolf, head-on without backing down. I wasn’t so foolish as to believe I could break their loyalty with fear.

“If you’re willing to take up your old jobs again, the viceroy will have an excuse to officially pay you. Ryunheit’s laws haven’t changed since we captured it. Your duties won’t be any different than they were before.”

The soldiers started whispering furiously to each other.

“We can have our old jobs back...”

“Won’t that technically mean we’re helping the demon army?”

“But keeping the citizens safe is our duty.”

I waited for the hubbub to quiet down before continuing.

“Decide for yourselves whether you wish to remain absolutely loyal to the

Senate, or if you're willing to compromise and serve the people of Ryunheit. The demon army will respect your decision either way."

Silence filled the courtyard. Reading the looks on his men's faces, Wengen finally came to a decision.

"Sir Veight, we would like to have our weapons returned to us."

"Understood."

I took the armory key out of my pocket and handed it over. Wengen gave it to one of his subordinates, who ran off with his squad. Within minutes, the entire garrison was armed once more. Wengen turned to his men and yelled, "Form up!"

Footsteps pounded on the hard-packed ground as the soldiers lined up into neat rows. Standing in front of 200 armed men left even me a little nervous. If these guys decided to try something like Yuhit had, I'd be forced to repeat the massacre of a few days ago. Wengen drew his sword in one fluid motion and barked out another command.

"All men, draw swords!"

Oi, don't tell me you're actually gonna fight? He continued in a booming voice, "We men of the Ryunheit garrison may be Meraldia's men! But it is our duty to protect the people of this city!"

Wengen lowered his voice, and his tone grew solemn.

"And thus, from this moment onward, we will temporarily be leaving the Senate's command! Under my command, we will return to patrolling Ryunheit! Lend your swords to this city, men!"

The soldiers all raised their blades up with both hands. *Don't scare me like that, sheesh!* I looked up and realized Wengen and the others were all staring at me.

"Sir Veight, there is something I've been meaning to tell you for some time now."

"Yeah?"

"Though you are far stronger than us, you don't treat us with contempt, nor

do you belittle us. You always afford us the respect of warriors and negotiate as if we were equals. For that, we are eternally grateful."

If I were in their position, I would want to be treated with respect too, so it only made sense that I did the same for them. Wengen grinned impishly at me.

"That being said, you sure gave us a beating last time. I hope you can forgive our little prank. I just wanted to get back at you a little."

Wily old man. I smiled ruefully and nodded.

"Please don't try to scare me too much. I get easily frightened. The next time you do something like that, I'll have to report you to the garrison."

The soldiers laughed heartily, and I laughed with them. With this, the soldiers were able to start working again while technically maintaining their neutrality. Making humans do what you wanted really was a pain in the ass. Still, at least now my werewolves wouldn't have to work as hard.

After that, I was able to enjoy a few days of relative peace. Trade with occupied Bernheinen started up, and Ryunheit continued to prosper. Though all the traders coming from Bernheinen were vampires, I didn't mind, so long as they didn't cause any mischief. Thanks to the garrison's help, the streets were much safer than before, too. While the soldiers were still wary of us werewolves, I'd occasionally spotted human and werewolf squads chatting and joking with each other. Finally, the goods I'd been waiting for arrived.

"Thanks for bringing these all the way here."

I went to the southern gate to greet the squad of dragonkin that had arrived. They began unloading a number of waterproofed barrels from their carriage. The leader of the group stepped up and saluted.

"I am the captain of the squad transferred to your unit, technical officer Kurtz. I have with me twenty-four military engineers, all in good health."

"Understood."

I saluted back and raised my eyebrows slightly as I realized Kurtz had blue scales.

“Would you happen to be a relative of Sir Baltze, Sir Kurtz?”

“I would. Baltze is my younger brother. It brings me great pride to see how far he has risen in the ranks.”

Considering their names were so similar, I’d thought that was a possibility, and it seemed I was right.

“Baltze has always spoken highly of you, Sir Veight, so I am glad to finally make your acquaintance.”

It appeared Kurtz hadn’t been granted a title by the Demon Lord, which meant he was just an average soldier. From the looks of it, he was more brains than brawn, so it had probably been smart not to promote him too far. If Dogg or the like picked a fight with him, he’d be flattened in seconds. However, I could tell from my subsequent conversation with him that Kurtz was a valuable asset. Chances were, the Demon Lord knew how important Kurtz really was, too. He was probably just as necessary to the army as I was, if not more.

I invited Kurtz back into my office, and we discussed the specifics of the Demon Lord’s gunpowder over some of my prized green tea.

“Dragon’s Breath is a very powerful weapon, but it is also very difficult to handle, making it inefficient to use.”

I was hoping to create muskets with Kurtz’s gunpowder, but if I let on how knowledgeable I was about guns, the Demon Lord might grow suspicious again. Besides, it was entirely possible he was already in the process of developing guns.

“However, I was able to create a much more stable mixture of Dragon’s Breath that we were able to use in various weapons.”

Oh, are we getting guns after all? I leaned forward, and Kurtz proudly held out a small spherical object. *Looks like I was a little off. We’ve got bombs, not guns.*

“This is one of our newest inventions, the Dragon’s Jewel.”

“Oho.”

“It uses metals of various properties.”

So a frag grenade, basically. Impressive.

“Red, blue, yellow, green...”

“Wait, what are you talking about?”

Kurtz smiled and said, “By burning the different metals, the jewel will create different-colored flames. Then by adding a primer, you can explode those multicolored flames in different patterns.”

Wait, so the demon army’s newest weapon is fireworks? Though it was rather disappointing to hear we didn’t actually have weapons, the fact that Kurtz was able to develop fireworks meant his engineering skill was the real deal. *Besides, there’s still a way to put those fireworks to use.*

“If we launch these into the sky, we can use your Dragon’s Jewels to relay messages to units far away.”

Kurtz looked up at me in surprise.

“You’re absolutely correct. But how did you realize that so quickly?”

“I figured if the Demon Lord sent these to us, they had to have some kind of utility. It was really just a guess.”

Dog whistles could only be heard by werewolves and canines, but signal flares would be understood by everyone. And these were both faster and much more visible than smoke signals. They could also be seen at night. *They might not be guns, but I’ll still gladly take these.*

“That’s a truly amazing invention, Kurtz. I suppose I should have expected no less from the esteemed Baltze’s older brother.”

“You flatter me. At any rate, I see you’re every bit the shrewd general my brother said you were. You figured out the value of these Dragon’s Jewels with a single glance.”

I wouldn’t really call myself a shrewd general, but it did feel good to be praised.

“By the way, I spotted a number of armed humans manning the gates earlier.

Who were they?”

Kurtz had likely seen some garrison soldiers. It was probably rare to let defeated enemy troops remain armed in your city.

“They’re the Meraldian soldiers who were stationed to Ryunheit.”

“WHAT!?”

That was the first time I’d heard a dragonkin scream.

“Wait, wait, calm down.”

“M-My apologies, sir. But aren’t they our enemy!?”

Oh yeah, I guess that is how most demons would see it.

“They surrendered when we took the city. Now they’re working independently to maintain order in Ryunheit. You can think of them as neutral guards now.”

“Neutral, you say...”

Disbelief written all over his face, Kurtz looked out of the window, observing a group of soldiers. They were armed with swords and short spears; more than enough equipment to harm dragonkin or canines, if they so wished.

“Are you sure it’s alright to leave them roaming around like that?”

To be honest, I wasn’t sure myself, but since the werewolves alone weren’t enough to patrol the whole city, I had no choice but to trust them.

“They’ve pledged their services not to the Meraldian Senate or their gods, but to the people of Ryunheit. I have faith that they won’t start a fight in the city.”

“I’m afraid I still don’t understand...”

His worries were to be expected, but he’d get used to their existence soon enough.

Ryunheit was now home to werewolves, canines, dragonkin, vampires, and humans. While the werewolves were an aggressive lot, they swore absolute obedience to me and thus didn’t harm anyone. On the other hand, the canines were perfectly amicable. Kurtz’s dragonkin were all rational, intelligent types,

and vampires weren't really any different from humans, except that they liked drinking blood. When I saw humans and demons of all kinds mingling together in the streets, I felt the exhaustion of the past few weeks melt away.

Though Airia's workload had increased, the amount of tax revenue she was bringing in had also risen, so she should have had no complaints. The real issue now was the conquest of Thuvan. Since the northern armies were on the back foot, us southern forces needed to achieve something. Unless we started racking up a string of victories, the demon army's morale would plummet. Demons only followed the strong. And while the Demon Lord himself boasted strength rivaling a demigod, if the army looked weak, it would lose the respect of its soldiers. People would start to desert. *Master should be dropping in today, so I may as well report to the Demon Lord.*

"Unfortunately, we lost another city to Meraldia's forces."

Having given my report, I was once again eating lunch in the officers' mess hall with Baltze. He looked more worried than when I last saw him. While picking at the grasshopper stir-fry he'd ordered again today, he sighed. I never thought I'd see the Azure Knight, the first regiment's pride and joy, look so defeated. Then again, I suppose he didn't need to keep up appearances for his men here.

"We can't get the different races in the second regiment to cooperate. They keep operating independently, each competing with the other to bring home the greatest achievements. And because our supply lines are in tatters, Meraldia's able to isolate and overpower squad after squad."

The Demon Lord had modernized his army by introducing supply trains, but it wasn't enough to solve everything. Because of how rapidly the situation changed at the front lines, the second regiment's generals were in charge of battle plans there. And in the second regiment, people like Dogg were considered skilled strategists.

"Apparently, the second regiment's been so hard-pressed that they haven't even had time to send a general back to report. I've been serving as a liaison between the Demon Lord and the second regiment in the meantime, but it

really hurts having to bring him bad news over and over."

As he finished eating, Baltze pulled out a small paper bag from his pack. He poured a small pill-shaped rock into his hand and swallowed it whole. When he noticed my curious gaze, he said, "Oh, this? I've been suffering from stomach aches recently, so I got this gastrolith from the army doctor. It hasn't been doing much, though."

I guess this is what fantasy stomach medicine's like.

"You have my sympathies, Sir Baltze."

I was starting to grow pretty close to this dragonkin. *Guess I need to work hard for the sake of my worrywart friend over here, too.*

"I promise the third regiment will conquer all of Meraldia's southern territories. The situation in Ryunheit has calmed down now, so if you would like, I can help take Thuvan."

Baltze stretched his arms over the table and tightly gripped my hands.

"My lord is expecting great things from you as well, Sir Veight. Please bring us some good news so I may have something favorable to report to him for once."

Poor Baltze really had it tough.

It appeared the Demon Lord and Gomoviroa had held a secret council after that to discuss how the third regiment would conquer Thuvan. They'd decided who the commander of the operation would be as well, and my life got a lot busier after that. Ryunheit was the closest city to Thuvan, which meant it would serve as the invading army's forward base. I started by ordering the canine soldiers to begin building extra barracks outside the city's western gate.

"The incoming army'll be tired from their long march! All they need is somewhere to take shelter from the wind and rain! It doesn't need to be fancy or anything, just get it done fast!"

It was a pretty cruel thing to say, but I didn't have the resources or manpower to make something better on such short notice. According to what I'd heard, kentauros would make up the bulk of this attack force. Half-human and half-

horse, they were basically centaurs, which I guess is what kentauros meant.

At any rate, they were a troublesome lot, mostly because each one required a room the size of a stable to house, which meant no place in the city was capable of lodging them. *And we need to take care of 500 head of them... Actually, wait, they're a sentient race, not beasts, so I probably shouldn't call them that.* This was why I was rushing to build new barracks as fast as possible.

"Sup, boss. So this is where you were."

The resident werewolf blacksmith, Jerrick, walked up to me. Shirtless and covered in sweat, he proudly held up a horseshoe.

"Kentauros' hooves aren't the same size as regular horses' so I had to make new ones from scratch. You think this'll do?"

"Don't ask me..."

I took it from him anyway, but it's not like I knew anything about kentauros anatomy.

"I trust your skills, though. I'll leave it to you."

"Alright then, I'll get back to work. You better not schedule me for any patrol shifts."

"Don't worry, I won't."

After he left, Fahn came up to me.

"Veight, what do kentauros eat? Hay?"

"Well, their upper halves are human, so I don't think they do, but..."

With demons you could never really tell, though. It was entirely possible they did just eat hay. I'd asked Fahn to prepare twice as much food for each kentauros as a normal human would eat. I doubted their appetites could match those of werewolves, but they probably still ate a lot.

"What do I do? We don't have that much meat lying around."

"Pretty sure us werewolves are the only ones that are hung up on meat. Just get some dried fruit, and bread too."

"Gotcha, I'll get right on that."

Fahn hurriedly ran off. Since each race had different customs and a different biology, providing for them was a Herculean task. While we were running around trying to get things ready, one of the canine guards came up to me.

“There are people approaching the southern gate, sir! About fifteen hundred of them!”

“F-Fifteen hundred!?”

“They appear to be cavalry!”

That’s odd. There shouldn’t be that many kentauros. I ordered the canines to halt construction and had them take refuge inside the city. *What the heck is going on?*

I rushed over to the south gate and ordered it closed. Once I was done, I howled to my werewolves to assemble. Upon hearing my emergency summons they all dropped what they were doing and rushed to the south gate.

“Veight, today’s the day the kentauros arrive, isn’t it? What’s there to be worried about?”

“Yeah. Besides, no enemies would be coming from the south.”

They may have thought it a needless worry, but I just wanted to be safe. Caution was what had saved me during the Thuvan incident. And while it was definitely hoofbeats that I heard in the distance, I couldn’t rule out that they weren’t human cavalry. As they grew closer, though, I realized they really were kentauros.

Their upper bodies were clad in armor, while their lower halves, about the size of ponies, were left bare. They looked rather gallant, dashing through the plains like that. Though that didn’t change the fact that there were way more of them than I’d been told. They lined up in front of the main gate, and a kentauros on the smaller side stepped forward. They were armed with a short spear and a shield, the latter of which they whirled overhead to announce their presence.

“Hear me! I am one of the third regiment’s Vice-Commanders, Firnir the Swift Gale! Open the gates and let us pass!”

Surprisingly, it was a woman's voice that rang out. Firnir was the name of the general who I'd been told would be coming, so that part at least fit the report. I jumped off the ramparts, my worried werewolf companions following behind me.

"I'm Veight, another of the third regiment's Vice-Commanders. This is the first time we've met, right?"

The kentauros girl nodded happily.

"Yep, it is! I'm no mage, but I also consider myself one of Master Gomoviroa's disciples! Nice to meet you, Vait-o!"

"Y-Yeah, nice to meet you too."

I can already tell this girl's going to be a handful.

After our initial meeting, I escorted Firnir and the other kentauros to the western forest.

"There are no facilities suitable for housing you in the city, so I had my men prepare a new barrack here. It's only large enough for five hundred people, though."

"Huh, why'd you make it so small?" she asked sulkily.

I sighed and explained, "Because that's how many people you said would be coming in your letter."

"Oh yeah. Truth is, I was only supposed to bring five hundred, but everyone said they wanted to come along, so... Ehehe."

Don't give me that! Left with no other choice, I told the canines to set up tents for the other kentauros. It wasn't much, but I couldn't just let men of the demon army sleep out in the open. This would have to do.

"Lady Firnir."

"I'm younger than you, so you don't have to be formal with me or anything," Firnir grinned childishly.

Is a cute, innocent girl like this actually capable of commanding an army?

“Alright then, Firnir. Listen up. We’re not some disorganized mob, nor is this army a charity. You have to report things accurately, or you’ll cause problems for others.”

At my rebuke, Firnir straightened up and saluted.

“Yes, sir! I promise not to make the same mistake again!”

Good, she’s more diligent than she looks.

“So please don’t get mad at me, Vaito.”

“Could you stop calling me that?”

Afterwards, I escorted Firnir to my office in the viceroy’s manor. Firnir’s hooves didn’t do the manor’s carpet any favors, and everywhere she passed turned into quite a mess. *I’ll need to apologize to the maids later. But first, business.*

“The invading army will consist of your fifteen hundred kentauros, Melaine’s three hundred Wax Corpses, and a thousand of Master’s skeleton soldiers, correct?”

“You’re not gonna participate, Vaito?”

Seriously, stop calling me that. It’s embarrassing.

“I need to keep the werewolves here to defend Ryunheit...”

I doubted the garrison would rise up in revolt, but that was no reason to leave the city unguarded. No way I could move my werewolves in this situation.

“Don’t you have the two thousand bone spears Master lent you?”

“I can’t send those out either. I need them to defend the city.”

Firnir smiled cheerfully and replied, “It’s fine, even if Meraldia does send soldiers, it’ll be to defend Thuvan first.”

I looked over the map on the table. As Ryunheit was a trading city, it had roads connecting it to all other nearby cities. That made it easy to invade, but hard to defend. However, Meraldia was focusing most of their efforts on the northern front, which meant they didn’t have many soldiers to spare for the south.

“Still, it wouldn’t be wise to let my guard down.”

Seeing my reluctance, Firnir leaned forward and said, “Vaito, conquering Thuvan is essential if we want to take control of the southern front... The future of the war depends on it. We absolutely cannot fail, so please lend us your strength.”

Her gaze was surprisingly serious, and I nodded without thinking.

“I-I guess you’re right...”

“Besides, if we take Thuvan, Meraldia will focus their efforts on taking it back, so Ryunheit will have a buffer city protecting it.”

Firnir reverted back to her cheerful demeanor. However, that austere expression from earlier had been burned into my memory. Moreover, she made a valid point. It appeared she hadn’t been appointed vice-commander just for show; she clearly had a good eye for strategy.

“Firnir, can you command Master’s Bone Spears?”

“Nope!”

“Guess that’s that, then.”

Firnir’s face fell at what she thought was a blunt rejection. But then I stood up and patted her on the back.

“I’ll have to lead them, so ask Master for permission for me to go.”

Firnir’s face lit up again and she leapt forward and hugged me.

“Thank you so much, Vaito! You’re the best!”

Seriously, please stop calling me that.

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—Firnir’s Diary—

I met Vaito for the first time today. He’s a vice-commander in the third regiment, just like me. Or wait, was he actually an adjutant? Well whatever, it doesn’t matter. Anyway, Vaito’s apparently a really strong werewolf. Master told me that he easily beat that famous general from the second regiment,

Dogg. I'm pretty sure Dogg was supposed to be one of the strongest guys in the second regiment.

I still haven't fought any warriors stronger than me, so I'm really curious about how strong he is. Also, I heard that Vaito's supposed to be a really smart general too. He conquered Ryunheit with just 56 werewolves, and he didn't lose a single soldier. Now that's amazing! There's no way I could conquer a city this big with just 56 kentauros.

Not only that, he's supposed to be really good at magic too. I don't really understand magic that well, but that's what Master said, at least. Oh, and by Master, I of course mean the Great Sage Gomoviroa. I can't use magic, but I'm still one of Master's disciples.

Because Vaito's a werewolf mage, the Demon Lord gave him the really cool title of Weremage. It's unbelievable. He's a strong fighter, a smart tactician, and a skilled mage. The most awesome thing about him, though, is how he governs humans. Vaito used a totally different method than Melly did. He even let the human viceroy keep her position. Can you believe it? And now even the city's soldiers are on Vaito's side. I'm serious. I saw them patrolling the city earlier! We kentauros may look the same as humans from the upper half, but really we're nothing like them. After all, we're proud demon soldiers. So there's no way we'd know what humans are thinking.

I'd heard werewolves were meant to be really demon-like hunters, but apparently Vaito's not like that. Everyone says he can tell what humans are thinking. At least, that's what the rumors say. I wonder if he can read minds or something? Can he read my mind? No wonder he's so trusted by the Demon Lord. He's amazing.

I heard the Demon Lord even sent him some of his personal soldiers to help Vaito out. I actually saw them for a few seconds when we were walking through the city. Even Master, the commander of the third regiment, doesn't have dragonkin soldiers working for her.

I totally get why everyone calls him the demon army's strongest vice-commander now. But you know, what surprised me the most was meeting Vaito. It was a heart-pounding experience. Like, he's just so cool! Even though

he’s a famous commander that everyone talks about, he didn’t put on airs or anything. He just talked to me normally! Just thinking about it makes my heart skip a beat! And even though I completely forgot to mention that we had three times as many people coming, he just handled it like it was nothing! I mean he did scold me, but he was really mature about it. That’s why he’s worthy of my respect.

Oh, and it’s kinda cute how he looks annoyed every time I call him Vaito. The coolest thing, though, was when I asked him for reinforcements. I thought he’d just say no, but he’s actually gonna come fight with us personally! Man, he’s really just way too cool.

Ah, I shouldn’t get too ahead of myself. The fate of the Kentauros race hinges on this battle. For centuries now, the humans have been expanding their domain, leaving us with less and less space to live. The plains are our home; if the humans turn all of those plains into farmland, we’ll have nowhere left to go.

I guess demons who live in the forests or mountains don’t have to worry about that as much. That’s probably why kentauros end up fighting with humans more than everyone else. Our elder told me that our numbers have been dwindling. If things keep up like this, we’ll go extinct. We tried to avoid all-out war for as long as we could, but now that it’s come to this, we have no choice.

Originally, I’d only planned on bringing the 500 warriors of my tribe, but since our future is riding on this, warriors from all the other clans said they wanted to help too. And now we’ve got a full 1500! To be honest, it’s kind of frightening being entrusted with the lives of so many. More than half our race’s warriors are under my command right now. Our fate rests in my hands. One mistake, and I might doom our entire species. It’s terrifying to think about.

That’s why I begged Vaito for help. He’s so famous, even people who aren’t in the army have heard of him. Every kentauros knows of the Weremage Veight. Though Vaito spends all his time in Ryunheit, so he probably hasn’t even realized that.

When I told my men Vaito would join the battle, they were so happy. I guess it makes sense; he’s the strongest person in the army after the Demon Lord and

the regiment commanders. There's no greater honor for a kentauros than being able to fight by the side of a seasoned warrior. I'm sure with him around, we'll be able to fight better than ever.

But I guess I shouldn't be relying on Vaito for everything... I need to pull myself together. I'll pile up as much experience as I can, and then become a splendid general like Vaito! Maybe he'll praise me if I do a good job during the battle.

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All of the generals participating in the upcoming battle were called to Ryunheit to hold one final strategy meeting. We borrowed one of the viceroy's rooms to use as our conference center, and began to strategize.

"Does anyone happen to know how sturdy Thuvan's front gate is?"

Melaine, Queen of all Vampires, rested her cheek in her hand as she spoke. She was Master's number one disciple, and a skilled necromancer in her own right. On top of that, she wasn't a half bad diplomat or strategist, either. However, she had absolutely no knowledge of tactics.

"Melaine, think back to how big the gate in your city was."

"Bernheinen just had an iron grille gate..."

Bernheinen was an old city, more famous for its scenery than anything else. Which meant that for quite some time, the demons had had no interest in it. Because of that, a simple gate had sufficed. If Thuvan's gate was as small as Ryunheit's, we'd be able to just assault it head-on. But because the city was Meraldia's industrial hub, I had no doubt they'd keep it well-guarded with state-of-the-art technology. Taking the city wouldn't be that easy.

Melaine's biggest strength lay in her ability to convert humans into her vampire servants, but that was also the only thing she was capable of. Ideally she'd be able to sneak in, bite their commander, and have him betray his city from the inside. However, while vampires in this world weren't weak to sunlight or holy crosses, neither could they transform into bats or fly in the sky. In fact, they were basically just bloodsucking humans.

"Veight, I know that look. You just thought I'm going to be useless in this fight,

didn’t you?”

“Nope, not at all.”

“Even if we can’t break down the gate, can’t you just jump over it and use that...Soul Shaker spell of yours or whatever to beat everyone, Vaito?” Firnir, Master’s newest disciple, asked casually. It was her first time being in a city, and she was currently enamored by the peculiar scent of the windows’ glass.

“That’s really just meant to be used in magic duels. It has a short range, and I can’t cast it in succession, so it wouldn’t really work for a large battle.”

Besides, I’d read reports of the massive ballistae sitting on Thuvan’s walls. Werewolf or not, even I’d die if a bolt the size of a javelin pierced me.

“As I feared, we have no choice but to send out the undead soldiers first and overwhelm the gates,” muttered the Great Sage Gomoviroa.

Since she could summon undead no matter where she was, she was basically a mobile reinforcement base. That being said, 100 soldiers were the most she could create in a day, and that was if she ignored all her other duties. If taking the city cost us 1000 Bone Spears, she’d be tied up for 10 whole days replacing them. And naturally, we couldn’t have one of our commanders leave her other responsibilities for that long.

The problem was, no one in the demon army had any experience with siege warfare. I guess it wasn’t surprising, considering for the past few decades they’d just been skirmishing with the humans’ subjugation forces. They hadn’t had any opportunities to assault a castle or city, so it stood to reason that they had no knowledge of it.

Though it wasn’t as if the humans had any real experience with siege warfare, either. It had been quite some time since the Meraldia unification wars, and no one had invaded a city since. However, my biggest concern was the same one that the other commanders here had: the relative rigidity of our forces. While kentauros were skilled fighters, they couldn’t dismount within a city. Obviously not, seeing as their lower halves were part of them. That still put them at a disadvantage against Thuvan’s mounted archers though, since they could dismount within the city and become regular foot archers.

It was this difference in adaptability that had led past demon armies to be defeated by human soldiers time and time again. *Come to think of it, there was this one game I played back in my old life where all the demon units had restrictions on their equipment and low overall growth rates. They couldn't change classes, either.*

Thuvan's main streets were wide to accommodate all the raw material they needed to import into the city, but the rest of the city was a chaotic mess of side streets and workshops all jumbled together. For kentauros who needed space to maneuver, it was the worst kind of terrain. Once we breached the main gate, Firnir's forces would have a hard time. Hence, it was imperative that we at least take the gates with minimal casualties.

The other option was of course to send Master's undead soldiers in. They were disposable, and perfectly capable of fighting in narrow spaces. However, they were also mindless creatures, and could only obey simple commands. They couldn't differentiate between soldiers and civilians, nor did they have the intelligence to comprehend the meaning of surrender. If we let them loose into the city, it would become a massacre. Our mission was to capture the city, not raze it to the ground.

If only we'd had a few giant stone-slingers from the second regiment, the main gate would have been no obstacle with their might. Or if we'd had a few dragonkin soldiers from the first regiment, they'd have no problem fighting in the city. Unfortunately, neither regiment was in any position to send over reinforcements.

Because of their unique characteristics, each race of demons was more or less locked into a particular fighting type. They couldn't be versatile like human soldiers. My werewolves were relatively more flexible, but there weren't many of us. The canines wouldn't be of any use in combat. And frankly speaking, Melaine's vampires weren't all that good in a fight either. Plus she had her own city to take care of as well.

It wasn't a very favorable situation, but coming up with a strategy regardless was the job of us commanders. The question was, what options were left? There were a few viable strategies for taking down the main gate, but as we didn't know just how sturdy Thuvan's walls were, we couldn't be sure any of

them would work. As for occupying the city after that, we had no choice but to send the kentauros in and prepare ourselves for heavy losses. It appeared Firnir had already steeled herself for that.

Still, she clearly didn't want to lead her soldiers into death, hence why she gave Melaine a pleading look.

"Umm, Melly... I mean, Melaine, can't you just turn Thuvan's viceroy into a vampire?"

It looked like she treated Melaine with respect, but not me. Judging from her attitude, Melaine had probably scolded her harshly about it sometime before. Upon closer inspection, I realized there was a small lump on the back of Firnir's head. *That was probably Melaine, huh.* Melaine thought about it for a few seconds, but then shook her head sadly.

"Mmm, I don't think it's possible. It worked last time since they didn't know we were coming, but the humans are ready for us this time. Even if Veight or I tried to sneak in, magic would reveal our true identities pretty easily."

There was a reason humans had had the upper hand in these past few centuries of warfare. One of the simplest magic spells was a charm to detect whether or not someone was a demon. It was so easy to use that even apprentices could cast it. That was why our ancestors had left human settlements and created hidden werewolf villages to live in peace.

In the end, we were unable to come up with a solution, and started reminiscing about our early days training under Master. I could understand everyone's desire to treat this like a class reunion, but I really wish we could have come up with an effective plan first. It was then that I heard a knock on the door. Before I could reply, Airia timidly stepped into the room.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Ryunheit's Viceroy, Airia Lutt Aindorf. This may be a little presumptuous of me, but I have prepared dinner for you all. If you would like, please come to the dining hall later."

Airia's arrival got the other girls excited.

"Veight, you never told me such a pretty girl is Ryunheit's viceroy! My, she

looks so dashing!”

“Because every time you spot someone you like you try to suck their blood, Melaine. Seriously, you need to stop doing that.”

If Airia was turned into a vampire, all my careful planning would go to waste. And that was the last thing I needed right now.

“Master, is Vaito popular with the ladies?”

“I’m not sure I’d say that. He’s a rather serious-minded man, after all. Oh yes, back when he had just become my apprentice there was a time...”

Firnir’s face lit up, and she leaned closer to Master. *What are you, a middle schooler?*



“Please tell me more, Master.”

And why’re you taking out a notepad, Firnir? Smiling, Gomoviroa started talking about my dark past.

“This happened when Veight was around your age. He was practicing exorcism magic when one of the evil spirits he was supposed to purify fell in love with him.”

“A girl spirit!?”

“But of course. The spirit of a young human girl, no less. Hoho, that turned into quite the incident.”

“Master, do you *have* to tell everyone that story?”

To be honest, it had been kinda scary having a spirit stalker. Before I knew it, she’d snuck into my room and tried to possess me so that we would be together forever. The whole issue could have been resolved if I’d let Master exorcise her, but I’d taken pity on her and tried to convince her to move on peacefully instead. It had taken a full week. It was thanks to that incident that she’d decided I had no aptitude for necromancy. In her own words, *“While understanding the feelings of spirits is important, you must learn to keep your sympathy in moderation.”*

Well it wasn’t my fault! Memories of my past life made it hard to just ignore her! Firnir looked at me and sighed.

“Vaito...if you’re kind to every girl you meet, you’ll just end up hurting them, you know?”

Look, that isn’t my fault. I looked up ruefully and saw Melaine grinning at me.

“But you know, that spirit was totally his type. She looked kind of like you actually, Firnir.”

“Really!?”

I waved my hands in dismissal.

“Firnir looks nothing like her! Not one bit!”

In truth, I’d been too busy trying to get rid of her back then to get a good look

at her face. Still, it was better to deny any similarities, just in case. Firnir's face fell as she heard my rejection. *See, this is all your fault, Melaine.*

"Really? Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

Besides, wouldn't it be insulting to Firnir if I likened her to a ghost? Better to resolve the misunderstanding now.

"You are way cuter than she was, so don't worry."

At that, the entire room fell silent.

"Huh? What?"

Seeing her confusion, I hurriedly clarified.

"I mean look, there's no way a dead person could look cuter than a living one, right? Like, you're all healthy and stuff, and you've got a way more agreeable personality and everything."

For some reason, my attempts to smooth things over seemed to be making it worse. Firnir blushed and went quiet. *Now it looks like I'm sexually harassing her!* I guess praising her hadn't been the right move here. Melaine broke the silence with a pointed cough.

"Is that how you got Airia to fall for you too?"

She was glaring coldly at me.

"What...do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm sure an upstanding werewolf such as yourself is no womanizer."

There was something dangerous about the way Melaine was grinning. *It just keeps getting worse.*

"Look, Lady Airia's an important ally and strategic partner! We need her if we're going to coexist with the humans! So stop saying those kinds of suggestive things! You're being rude to her!"

"So she's your life partner after all, Vaito!?"

“Don’t twist my words either!”

The two of them continued teasing me about my relationship with Airia for some time afterwards.

I lost my chance to convince them to try a different strategy, but whatever, I don’t even care anymore. Besides, it’d probably be impossible to teach a bunch of mages how to run a siege... In the first place, I wasn’t all that versed in siege tactics myself. Though the demon army had grown exponentially in scope, it lacked talented officers.

Next time I see the Demon Lord, I need to tell him to start teaching all his units how to run sieges. This is something our army needs. As I finished my preparations, I swore to myself that I’d ask him, no matter the consequences.

The next day, our army departed for Thuvan. Command of the operation had been given to Firnir the Swift Gale. The bulk of the invasion force consisted of the 1500 kentauros she’d brought with her. Melaine, queen of the vampires, led the army’s reserves. She’d summoned 300 wax corpses to function as emergency reinforcements. Furthermore, my master, Gomoviroa, had summoned 1000 skeleton soldiers to serve as cannon fodder. Lastly, I’d brought along the 2000 Bone Spears she’d given me before to serve as ambush troops. All told, our army numbered close to 5000 troops.

On the other hand, Thuvan’s population was roughly 5000. My guess was, their garrison usually consisted of roughly 150 to 200 mounted archers. And since I’d annihilated 50 of them in the battle a few weeks ago, they were likely undermanned. Mounted archers weren’t easy to train. There was likely a good number of militia soldiers as well, but I couldn’t begin to guess their exact numbers. Half the city’s population was men, and I’d guess about half of those men were young and fit and willing enough to serve, so they had maybe around 1000 or so? According to the reports I’d read, all citizens of Thuvan trained with the crossbow, so most of them were skilled archers.

The biggest problem, though, was Thuvan’s walls. They were larger and sturdier than Ryunheit’s, and protected by the city’s prized ballistae. They fired

bolts with enough force to skewer through charging cavalry and destroy siege equipment. Considering how tough the city's defenses were, I honestly wondered if anything other than a surprise attack would work.

"We've finished surrounding the city, sir," Kurtz whispered in my ear. He was in charge of handling the gunpowder—or Dragon's Breath, as he called it—that the Demon Lord had given me. I'd brought him along in case a frontal assault looked hopeless and I needed to blow the whole gate off its hinges.

Thuvan strictly regulated the traffic coming in and out of the city, which was why there were only two gates, one each at the north and south. They liked to keep their technology a secret, so they kept a tight grip on the flow of information. However, this also meant we only needed to focus our assault in two places. Master's 1000 skeleton soldiers, Melaine's 300 wax corpses, and Firnir's 1500 kentauros were stationed at the south side. The undead would be used to take the walls, while Firnir's troops would be used to storm the city.

On the northern side, Melaine had taken control of the 2000 Bone Spears Master had given me. Once we'd finished our encirclement, Firnir sent off a messenger to demand the city's surrender. Her messenger didn't even make it to the gates before he was turned into a pincushion by a hail of crossbow bolts. *Looks like they're not interested in negotiating.*

The kentauros bristled with anger. Firnir's messenger had been clearly unarmed, yet the humans had shot him anyway. They wouldn't be satisfied until they had their fill of blood. A short distance away, Firnir waved her spear at me.

"Vaito! Could you send the undead soldiers in? Thanks!"

...You could stand to act more like a commander, you know. Well, whatever.

I nodded, twisted my fingers into the appropriate sign, and chanted, "You who have returned from the Gate of Gevina, you who have been barred from the Gate of Haurun, behold. In my right hand, I hold the frozen sun."

The spell used to command the undead never changed. By the way, Gevina was apparently the dark afterlife where spirits slept, and Haurun was the glittering world where spirits went to get reincarnated. I didn't know whether eternal rest or eternal reincarnation was better, but either way, it got these

guys moving. The undead soldiers stirred at my words, and I ordered them to advance.

“First wave, raise your shields! Watch out for arrows!”

The skeletons raised their shields in unison.

“Your target is Thuvan’s southern gate! Charge!”

500 skeletons raised their spears and shields and marched forward as one. Before they were even halfway across the field, a hail of arrows rained down on them. As I’d feared, Thuvan’s crossbows had a long range. They packed quite a punch, too. Plenty of bolts pierced right through the skeletons’ shields. While the skeletons may have been technically immortal, they still crumbled if their spines were crushed. Fortunately, they could lose as many ribs as they wanted and still be fine, which meant arrows were little threat to them.

Because of their slow march, however, more than half of them had been incapacitated by the time they reached the gates. More of them had survived than I expected. If the kentauros had attempted such a feat, they would have lost far more.

“Now it’s just a battle of attrition.”

I nodded at Kurtz’s worried assessment.

“For now, we just have to endure. At any rate, time for phase 2.”

I spotted Firnir waving her spear at me again, and I ordered the second wave forward. Their advance was timed so that they started forward just as the first wave crowded around the gate. I’d based this strategy on my experiences playing tower defense games in my old life. Though I was on the attacking side this time.

The first wave had taken severe losses, but thanks to their sacrifice, the second wave was able to approach relatively unharmed. After all, crossbows had to be rewound manually. At the rate the soldiers were firing, it was no surprise many of them were growing tired. Plus, a few of their weapons had probably snapped from repeated use. Furthermore, the second wave had Melaine’s wax corpses. As the name suggested, they were undead soldiers made of decaying flesh. In other words, zombies. Thanks to their unique

characteristics, they were the lynchpin of this strategy. The spell used to summon zombies allowed them to stay active for extended periods of time. In that time, however, the corpses continued to decay, and their waxy, rotted flesh burned easily. They were essentially walking candles. Normally that would be a weakness, but here it would prove to be an asset. The skeleton soldiers escorted the zombies to the gate, acting as unliving shields. Once the zombies arrived, as per their orders, they blew themselves up. It was too far away to make out the aftermath of the explosions from here, but chances were, the field in front of the city had turned into a grotesque spectacle. No doubt the gates were splattered with flammable, rotted flesh. The southern gates were made of sturdy, dry wood—the kind that burned fast.

Still, it was too early to celebrate. If Thuvan caught wind of our plans, we'd be in trouble. There were plenty of simple ways to prevent a fire. All the defending soldiers had to do was douse the gates in water and we'd be toast. Hence why I'd made such a big show of sending in waves of soldiers to attack. I needed to make it look like we were trying to brute force our way through. I'd never be able to order living troops to waste their lives so callously, but skeletons and zombies were already dead. They were just mindless puppets, devoid of both emotions and souls. Now that I no longer had to focus on commanding the undead soldiers, I took Kurtz and joined up with Firnir.

"Thanks, Vaito!"

"Everything's going smoothly so far. Also, stop calling me that."

All that was left was to set the wax-soaked gates alight. Unfortunately, none of our troops could get close enough to shoot a fire arrow without first being barraged by the defenders' bolts. And so I'd entrusted starting the fire to Master. The plan was to have her hit the gates with a bolt of lightning. If we'd had some copper wire, this would have been easy. No point in complaining about what we didn't have, though.

Gomoviroa's childish face scrunched up in concentration, and she started casting a complex spell.

"Sir, what exactly is Commander Gomoviroa doing?" Kurtz whispered, unable to hide his curiosity. That was what made him such a good engineer. The spell

Master was casting right now wasn't a lightning spell. Offensive magic wasn't very useful in this world. Spells were usually centered around the caster, and had to follow the laws of physics once they were brought into existence. Which meant hastily chanted fireballs or lightning bolts were as likely to hurt the caster as they were their intended target. There were, of course, ways to guide spells so that you didn't hurt yourself, but considering how long it took to construct such magic, you were better off just smacking someone with a weapon. While I couldn't grasp the precise meaning of her chants, I more or less knew what she was doing.

"She's creating a pathway for the lightning right now."

"What exactly do you mean by pathway?"

Normally, when lightning struck the ground, it was because a pathway of ionized air had linked a thundercloud to the ground. Said pathways were created when there was a difference in charge between the ground and the cloud...or something like that. Anyway, the point was that if Master just fired a lightning bolt off right now, it was more likely to hit one of the armored kentauros than anything. Hence why she needed to create the pathway first.

"Essentially, she's taking aim so that her lightning bolt hits where we want it to. If she didn't do this, there's no telling where it'd go."

"I see..." Kurtz enthusiastically wrote down everything I told him in his notepad. "Can you use magic like that as well, Sir Veight?"

"Nope..."

Please don't remind me of all the magic branches I failed to master.

"Splendid. I'm ready now."

Upon finishing the pathway, Master instantly launched into another chant. This one only took seconds. Converting the mana in the air into electrical energy was far simpler than creating an ion pathway. Master finished casting and swung her staff down.

There was a blinding flash of pale blue light, and a thunderous roar that shook the very air itself. Master's lightning spells were unbelievably powerful. The bolt

slammed into the gate, rocking its very foundations. The globs of flesh ignited, creating a massive conflagration.

“Yes!”

Firnir leapt into the air and raised her spear high.

“Alright, every—”

I hurriedly stopped her before she could dash off.

“Wait! The gate still hasn’t fully burned down! If you go now while it’s still standing, your men’ll be wiped out!”

“Oh yeah.” Firnir scratched her head and lowered her spear. “Nevermind! Stand by a little longer!”

The kentauros, who’d all been ready to charge, fell back into parade rest. Firnir was clearly a skilled leader, though she was a little too hasty. I looked over to my side and found Kurtz holding a long tube up to his eye and looking over at the gate. *I didn’t know he had a telescope.*

“That’s a pretty nifty tool you’ve got there. Mind if I borrow it?”

“You know what this is, Sir Veight?”

Crap. Telescopes are probably cutting-edge technology here. I quickly came up with a plausible explanation.

“You were looking through it, so I assumed it was observation equipment of some kind. From what I can tell, it uses glass to magnify things that are far away, right?”

“I-Indeed. I’m impressed you could deduce that so quickly.”

Surprised, Kurtz handed over the telescope. Upon looking through it, I could tell the south gate had all but collapsed. There was no salvaging it now. The soldiers on the walls were pouring sand and water over it in an attempt to douse the flames, but it was too little, too late. However—I had made one, fatal miscalculation.

“They had an iron gate too...”

As I watched, Thuvan’s soldiers lowered an iron grille into place behind the

burning wooden gate. They had two layers of defenses. Thuvan was far better defended than Ryunheit had been. It made me a little jealous. Regardless, this was a huge problem. Iron didn't burn. I told Firnir what I'd seen, and her expression darkened.

"What do we do now, Vaito!? Is our only option to get the battering ram out and break through by force?"

Our "battering ram" was just a giant tree trunk plated in metal. It would take a long time before a makeshift ram like that broke down the gates. And we'd lose a lot of men in that time.

"Calm down. I made a backup plan since I thought this might happen."

I turned to Kurtz and said, "Bring me all of the powder."

"All of it!? Do you know how much is in that barrel!?"

"I know. Just do it."

At present, Kurtz was under my command, so he just saluted and did as I ordered. It took a couple of dragonkin to roll the barrel of gunpowder over to me, but I was able to lift it up with one hand. A werewolf's strength sure came in handy at times like these. The whole thing easily weighed around 100 kilos, though half of it was the barrel's weight. I was no expert on gunpowder, but I figured that was more than enough to take out a gate.

"I'll be heading out, then."

"Wait, where are you going, Sir Veight!?"

"To go blow up that iron gate..."

"You're one of our commanders! You can't put yourself at risk like that!"

While Kurtz was arguing with me, Firnir walked over and said, "If that's your plan, I'll help you out. Hop on."

"You're the commander of this army. We can't afford to lose you."

"And you're the governor of Ryunheit. It's not like you're any less important. If you can be reckless, so can I."

Kurtz looked like he was about to faint, but I ignored him and asked, "Alright,

I'm gonna need the help of your fastest kentauros. Who would that be?"

I looked over at Firnir's men, and they all turned to her. The young girl puffed out her nonexistent chest proudly and said, "The Demon Lord didn't give me the title of Swift Gale for nothing. I'm our priestess, and our fastest warrior."

Upon closer inspection, I realized that the amount of mana inside her tiny body was far greater than that of the other kentauros. *So she's as much of an exception among her people as the Demon Lord is.*

As I was debating what to do, I heard a series of loud pops come from the other side of the city. Multicolored sparks erupted in the sky; a signal from Melaine. I'd left her a few dragonkin engineers so they could send messages with their fireworks, or as they called them, Dragon's Jewels. Kurtz looked up at the sky with his telescope and translated the signals for us.

"Enemies, main force, south... It appears the bulk of Thuvan's army is headed this way!"

They must have slipped out through the north gate. I'd told Melaine to keep out of their crossbow's range. The city commander had probably taken advantage of that and sent his cavalry out under the protection of the men on the walls. Which meant they'd probably be rounding either the east or west wall soon to strike at us.

There was no time to waste. I nodded to Firnir, and she raised her spear high.

"May our ancestors watch over us!"

She ripped off her helmet and threw it aside. Next, she unbuckled her armor and let it fall to the ground. She continued stripping until all she was wearing was a thin strip of cloth to cover her practically nonexistent breasts. Then, for some reason, she smiled.

What the heck is going on? Half-naked, she raised her spear and shield high and shouted, "Defensive crane formation! Prepare to intercept arrows!"

With practiced movements, the kentauros rearranged themselves. No human cavalry would be able to manage that as smoothly. Firnir walked up to the head of her troops and roused them with a speech.

“I don’t need armor, for you brave warriors are my armor! So long I have you, I’m invincible!”

“UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!”

The kentauros cheered. They weren’t cheering because their commander had stripped for them, either. Firnir’s speech had somehow gotten their blood pounding. The archers slapped their quivers while the fighters banged their spears and shields together.

Now that I think about it, didn’t I read somewhere that kentauros considered extremely reckless stunts a mark of valor? Still, I didn’t think they’d go so far as to ride into battle unarmored.

“Now is the time for us proud kentauros to show our valor! Let’s do this, guys!”

“YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

She sure was a charismatic leader. I could see why she’d been promoted to vice-commander.

Before long, I spotted dust clouds on either side of Thuvan’s walls. It appeared the mounted archers had split their forces and come from both sides in a pincer attack. They were hopelessly outnumbered, and it was clear this was meant to be a surprise attack to take our commander’s head. Unfortunately for them, Melaine had already warned us about their arrival, and we were ready to intercept. Fireworks were more useful than I thought.

“Steady, steadyyy!”

Firnir waited, letting them draw closer. They were almost within bowshot, but still, Firnir didn’t make a move. Thuvan’s archers drew back their bows, and Firnir finally shouted, “Chaaaaaaaaaaarge!”

“UWOOOOOOOOH!”

Both flanks surged forward as one, like one large living creature. The kentauros ignored the arrows whizzing past them and made a beeline for Thuvan’s gates.

“Let’s go, Vaito!”

“You got it!”

I shouldered the barrel of gunpowder and leaped onto Firnir’s back as she thundered past. I’d been worried we’d have to deal with ballistae shots coming from the walls as well as from the mounted archers, but almost no bolts came from above.

“If the crossbowmen above fired now they’d hit their own troops too.”

Because Firnir had waited so long to charge, we were pincered between the mounted archers and the crossbowmen on the wall. Naturally, that put us in a precarious position, but this also meant that the defenders on the wall couldn’t fire their ballistae. The bolts were too unwieldy to aim with any accuracy, and they were just as likely to hit their own men as they were to hit the kentauros.

Firnir was a lot smarter than I’d given her credit for. Not only that, but she really was a cut above the rest of her men. Even though she had a werewolf and a 100-kilo barrel of gunpowder on her back, she was outpacing them with ease. She was sprinting so fast that it was actually hard to breathe. She definitely lived up to her nickname of Swift Gale.

In seconds, we’d closed in on the gate. Thankfully, a good number of our skeleton soldiers were still alive.

“Line up! Raise your shields!”

I had the skeletons create a path and guard us with their shields. A few defenders from above tried to shoot down at us, but thanks to the shield wall they had a hard time aiming, and most bolts missed. We safely made it all the way to the burning remains of the first gate.

“Firnir, when I jump off, get as far away from here as you can!”

“What about you?”

“I’ll figure something out!”

As I shouted that, I leapt off of her back and dashed forward. I ignored the arrows flying past me and threw the barrel of gunpowder as hard as I could toward the gate.

“Eat this!”

I saw the fuse ignite, then a massive shockwave hit me and I lost consciousness.

In hindsight, my plan was beyond reckless. For starters, I'd used way too much gunpowder. But I hadn't wanted to hold back and not bring enough to blow up the gate, so I'd erred on the side of caution and used it all. Still, I'd overdone it by far.

"Haah!?"

My eyes snapped open and I took a look around me. It appeared the explosion had left me sprawled unconscious in front of the city entrance. I'd used so much gunpowder that the iron gate had been blown to bits. Apparently its hinges had been rusted, so it had been even frailer than I predicted. Unfortunately, because I'd used so much gunpowder, the skeletons had all been pulverized. Their bones littered the floor around me. Had I been a human, that explosion would have killed me for sure.

Originally my plan had been to rush the wall with the remaining undead soldiers after taking out the gates, but clearly that wasn't happening anymore. We needed to clear the soldiers above, or Firnir and her men would suffer huge losses charging into the city. And right now, I was the only person near the gates. *Guess it's up to me.* I leapt up onto the remains of the castle gates. Firnir would be here soon, so all I needed to do was buy us some time. I looked around and saw most of the soldiers were still lying on their backs from the force of the earlier explosion.

"Hear me, soldiers of Thuvan! My name is Veight, the undefeated general of the demon army! Face me, if you have the courage!"

I'd always wanted to declare a challenge like this to an enemy army. I'm glad I spent so much time in my past life practicing in secret. However, what happened next was beyond my expectations. Upon hearing my name, the militia started screaming in terror.

"Veight!?"

"It's Veight the Butcher!"

“The one who slaughtered our army of four hundred!?”

“We’re done for!”

They threw down their weapons and ran as fast as their legs would take them. I tilted my head quizzically as I watched them go. *Veight...the Butcher?* But it looked like I wouldn’t have time to ponder for long. Though the militia had fled, the garrison soldiers still stood their ground.

“Show that demon bastard the pride of Thuvan’s army!”

A large man stepped forward. His whole body was covered in plate armor, and he was wearing a full-face helmet, so he looked more like a walking suit of armor than a person. He raised his mace and shield, not even flinching in front of my terrifying visage.

“So, you’re the demon army’s strongest werewolf, huh!?”

“Uhh, I wouldn’t go that far...”

“Well, I happen to be Thuvan’s strongest warrior!”

Great. He’s one of those guys who doesn’t listen when other people are talking. He casually swung his two-handed mace with just one hand and yelled, “My name is Luvarius, Captain of the Southern Gate Guard!”

Ah, so he’s a famous general, too. In that case, I better accept his challenge. Unfortunately, that earlier explosion had damaged my vocal chords. I could talk just fine, but I wouldn’t be able to use Soul Shaker for this fight. To make matters worse, all the surrounding soldiers were stringing their bows. If they loosed in tandem, I wouldn’t be able to dodge all the arrows. Luvarius closed in, seemingly still intent on dueling me.

“En garde! I’ll show you the mettle of the southern gate guards!”

That really doesn’t sound as impressive as you’re trying to make it sound. Still, that guy’s mace was bad news. It was definitely heavy enough to hurt me. I wouldn’t be able to ignore it like I would a sword.

“So long as I draw breath, I won’t allow you to lay a finger on Thuvan’s citizens!”

So he’s more than just a battle-fiend. In that case, I should probably get

serious myself.

"Bring it on."

I kicked off the flagstones and rushed forward. Blunt weapons tended to use gravity to their advantage, which meant they were almost always raised overhead and swung down. While the sight of an armored giant brandishing a massive mace was certainly intimidating, it was right before they attacked that you had the best chance of taking one down.

I threw myself at Luvarius' right arm while it was still raised. He tried to knock me away with the shield in his left, but a flimsy metal disc wasn't enough to stop me. I jumped up, used his shield as a stepping stone, and grabbed his right arm in my claws. I then landed behind him, twisting his arm backwards as I went.

"Guoooh!?"

Luvarius' shoulder popped out of its joint, and he screamed in pain. And since I was underneath him now, his body served as a shield against enemy arrows.



But apparently the mettle of the southern gate guards was greater than I gave them credit for.

“Damn you!”

Instead of surrendering, Luvarius tried for an overhead throw with his disjointed arm. If he succeeded, I’d be lying face-up on the flagstones and an easy target for his crossbowmen. Unfortunately for him, werewolves were far stronger than humans. Even with his full strength, he couldn’t lift me off my feet.

“Ngh! You cretin!”

Just give it up, dude. Realizing he couldn’t throw me, Luvarius fell on top of me. *Is he trying to crush me with his weight?* It was a pretty bold, and actually rather smart move. Dropping to the ground gave him the added advantage of being able to move his disjointed arm again. Unfortunately, it was no use against a werewolf. For one thing, even in armor, he didn’t weigh nearly enough. All told, there was probably only 100 kilos pressing down on me. I could carry that much in one hand.

“Up we go.”

To prove my point, I lifted him up with one hand and held him in front of me. He tried to struggle free, but the armor restricted his movements.

“Surrender. You’re only wasting your energy.”

“What are you fools doing!? I don’t care if it kills me too, shoot him!”

I could tell from his tone that he wasn’t bluffing. After a brief moment of hesitation, the soldiers steeled their resolve and loosed.

“Stop!”

I threw Luvarius to the ground and activated the strengthening magic I’d kept in reserve. By enhancing my kinetic vision, I was able to see the bolts in slow motion and knock them all down in midair. *Dang, that was close.* If I’d been any slower, Luvarius would have died.

“Did you really think your puny arrows could hurt me?” I glared at the soldiers winding their crossbows. In truth, I’d be in trouble if they kept shooting. “If you

continue to resist, I'll slaughter every single person in this city. But if you surrender, I'll spare your lives."

Ah, looks like they don't trust me. Though the soldiers did look shaken, none of them were ready to give up. *Guess I need to be nicer about this.*

"In honor of the courage you've shown, I'm willing to show you and the people of this city mercy. You stood your ground against the man who slaughtered four hundred troops. It would be a waste to kill you."

Perfect, now I sounded evil, *and* persuasive. *But seriously, please surrender.* To my surprise, it was Luvarius who capitulated first.

"Men...lower your weapons."

"Captain!?"

Luvarius struggled into a sitting position and said, "If that werewolf wanted to kill me, I'd be dead already. In fact, he purposely threw me out of the way to save me from being shot..."

He noticed, huh? Luvarius staggered to his feet, turned to me, and took off his helmet. A scarred, middle-aged face looked up at me. He must have been through a lot of fights to have a face that beat-up. He tucked his helmet under his arm and bowed.

"We surrender. I beg of you, have mercy on the citizens."

"As a general of the demon army, I swear no harm will come to them."

When I said that, the other soldiers all dropped their bows and swords. The kentauros flooded in right after, but then stopped when they saw that the fighting was already over. They looked up at me, dumbfounded.

In the end, conquering Thuvan took only an afternoon. When they heard that "Veight the Butcher" had captured the southern gate, the citizens and militia tried to flee through the north gate. But they were quickly surrounded by the Bone Spears I'd left with Melaine, and surrendered. The cavalry that had ridden out to engage the kentauros were overwhelmed by the kentauros' fierce attacks and surrendered. *I barely even got a chance to fight...* And thus, Firnir's

kentauros army was able to occupy Thuvan with only minimal losses.

“That was way easier than I thought it’d be.”

Firnir, who was now fully dressed, walked through the city streets together with me.

“Next time you pull something like that, at least keep your clothes on. You gave me a shock.”

“You were shocked!? I’m the one who should be shocked.”

Since we’d only just captured the city, the two of us were being guarded by a squad of kentauros. Though it was probably unnecessary. Thanks to my sharp hearing, I could hear what the citizens were fearfully whispering about me.

“So he’s the werewolf general that killed four hundred men all on his own...”

“I heard he blew apart the gate with a single punch.”

“All our militia and crossbowmen tried to bring him down, but not a single arrow reached him.”

“I heard he killed the famous Captain Luvarius in one hit...”

I can hear you, you know? Don’t you guys know that werewolves have good hearing? Also, I know rumors tend to get embellished, but isn’t this a little much?

“By the way, Vaito, what was that thing you used earlier?”

Firnir was clearly referring to the Dragon’s Breath. Unfortunately, that was a classified military secret, so I couldn’t tell her. Kurtz, who was also walking with us, gave me a silent look. ‘Don’t say a thing,’ he mouthed. So with no other choice, I replied, “A secret werewolf technique.”

“Amazing!”

“Yeah, I guess it is...”

Thank god she’s simple-minded. Anyway, where’s this rotting smell coming from?

We picked our way to the main square where the viceroy’s manor was supposed to be. Upon arriving, we found something rather strange. A section of

the square had been cordoned off by an iron fence. A large cross rested inside the area, and a half-decomposed corpse was crucified to it. Chances were, the person had been a criminal on death row. Public executions of this nature weren't that rare in this world. Even in Ryunheit, there were public executions for murderers and the like every few years. What caught my eye, though, was what happened to be below the cross. A man was chained to the platform beneath it. Onlookers were throwing rotten food and mud at him, and he smelled like a latrine. I came to a halt, and my kentauros guards stopped with me. Firnir turned back and looked at me quizzically.

"What's wrong, Vaito?"

"There's something I want to make sure of."

I headed over to the cross. The man in chains was old, and wore only a threadbare gown. He was covered in bruises; people must have been throwing rocks at him earlier. Thanks to the squalid conditions he'd been imprisoned in, his wounds were all infected. He was utterly drained, and lay unmoving on his side. His breath came in ragged gasps and he was obviously on death's door.

"Vaito, is he someone you know?"

"I...don't think so."

Just in case though, I asked, "Is that you, Bishop Yuhit?"

The wounded old man slowly opened his eyes. Though his appearance had changed drastically, he was indeed the same bishop of the Sonnenlicht Order that I'd banished.

"Vei..."

His cracked lips trembled as he struggled to speak. I ripped the iron grille out of the way and rushed over to him.

"Yuhit!" Ignoring the stench that invaded my nostrils, I lifted Yuhit up and smashed the shackles binding him to the cross. "Get a hold of yourself! What happened to you!?"

Kurtz looked at the sign next to Yuhit's body and said, "It's written here: The rebel Belit is hereby stripped of his position as commander of the garrison and

sentenced to death. The traitor Yuhit is to be chained up until he dies."

"Traitor!?"

I couldn't fathom Yuhit being a traitor. I mean, he *had* betrayed us, but he would never betray the humans. My guess was, they'd forced him and the commander to take responsibility for the failed attempt to retake Ryunheit. Considering the weight of the decision and the anger of the people whose friends and family were killed, I supposed it was a natural reaction. After all, what Yuhit had done was technically illegal. But that was no excuse to treat an old man so cruelly.

"Listen up, humans!"

I roared loud enough for my voice to carry across the square. A few of the people who'd been observing from the shadows shrunk back in fear. However, I had everyone's attention now.

"Is this how you do things!? Does stringing up a defenseless old man really bring you that much satisfaction!?"

"Hey, Vaito..."

Firnir tried to pull me back, but I shook her off.

"If you want him to pay for his crimes, then you should just kill him! What reason do you have to torture him like this!?"

Shouting calmed me down a little, and I suddenly realized how strange it was for someone in my position to be saying this. I had totally forgotten that, right now, I was one of the Demon Lord's generals. I needed to spin this into something demonic, and fast. *Uhhh, wait, I got it.* I hurriedly organized the story in my head and sneered.

"I must say, this is pathetic! Even when the enemy was at your gates, you wasted your time tormenting a pitiful old man! And thanks to the fact that you executed your own commander, taking your city was a piece of cake!"

I smashed the cross with a well-placed punch, freeing Belit's corpse. My sneer grew wider as I watched wooden splinters clatter to the floor.

"It's because you're like this that you've already lost twice to us demons! You

had best say your prayers, for I won't show you any mercy!"

There was one more thing I needed to say, as Ryunheit's governor.

"This bishop here was sent as an official envoy of the demon army, and he is one of Viceroy Airia's diplomats! Your treatment of him is an insult to my city, and to the demon army!"

What was the point in working so hard to preserve Yuhit's title if they were just going to do this to him? His punishment was my responsibility. Even though I used to be human, I'd failed to anticipate that this would be their response. After threatening the citizens for a while longer, I turned to Firnir and said, "Alright, I've set myself up as the bad guy, so now you have to show you're the kind demon ruler. They're terrified of me, so if you just say some nice things, they'll cling to you."

"O-Oh... I see." Firnir nodded in understanding and yelled in a loud voice, "Uhh, don't worry everyone! I'm going to be the ruler of this city, so I won't let that scary werewolf do anything to you!"

She kept her voice reassuring, but she didn't forget to add, "As long as you don't defy me, at least!"

Yep, that's the way. Rumors of that incident spread fast, as rumors were prone to do, and in half a day everyone in the city had heard of it. Of course, they'd been exaggerated quite a bit. By the end of the day, I was apparently furious that the people of Thuvan had the gall to lock up one of my messengers, and I was looking to slaughter every one of them. Though in this instance, it was better not to set the record straight.

In the confusion following in the wake of the occupation, I snuck Yuhit out of the square and took him to the viceroy's manor. As I was settling into the room I'd commandeered, Firnir poked her head in and asked, "What are you gonna do with that old guy?"

"Since I made him a messenger of the demon army, I have an obligation to protect him."

"You do?"

I didn't, actually. It was normal to treat your messengers as disposable pawns in this world. Incidents like the one where Thuvan had killed Firnir's unarmed messenger were commonplace. Being a messenger for the army was a dangerous profession.

The viceroy's servants had cleaned and bandaged Yuhit's wounds, but he was so emaciated that he didn't have the strength to rise from his bed. It probably didn't help that he was running a fever thanks to his infected cuts. The simplest solution would be to let him die. However, I possessed the power to save him. *I should at least try to heal him.*

I wasn't too skilled at healing magic, but I had the scientific knowledge to know how to disinfect wounds, which gave me an edge. Since his infection was likely bacterial, detoxification magic, which had disinfectant properties, would work well here. Furthermore, I'd be able to bolster his immune system using strengthening magic. After that, I just had to feed him a steady supply of mana and fluids, and hope he made a full recovery. Whether or not it'd work was up to his god, though. Kurtz came with me to watch me treat the old man.

"You're a kind man, Sir Veight," he muttered.

"It's my fault he suffered. I feel like I owe it to him to save him this time."

"Aren't you worried he might betray you again after he's recovered?"

"If he does, I'll kill him myself this time."

Fortunately, it appeared my healing magic did the trick. That evening, his condition stabilized. Given time, he'd heal. When I went to see him, I found him awake and lucid. He was still weak, but he had enough strength to talk.

"Sir Veight... Why are you here? Wait, does this mean Thuvan has fallen?"

"Correct." I sighed, and continued, "Once you've healed, we're going back. Make sure you're ready to leave."

Yuhit's eyebrows rose up in surprise. He struggled into a sitting position and whispered, "You mean..."

"You're Ryunheit's bishop for the Sonnenlicht Order, aren't you? Or would

you rather retire and spend your remaining days in Thuvan?”

After the initial shock passed, Yuhit closed his eyes and shook his head.

“No... I have no right to remain here. I’ll return to Ryunheit.”

I ordered a pair of skeleton soldiers to guard Yuhit and keep an eye on him while I went to check out the other rooms. As I approached the main office, I heard Firnir arguing with Thuvan’s viceroy.

“You killed one of my messengers! Do you really think I’ll show you mercy just because you surrendered?”

“I understand you’re angry, but...”

Still in my werewolf form, I strode into the room.

“How’re the negotiations going?”

Upon seeing me, the viceroy fell to his knees.

“I beg of you, please forgive us! I’ll do anything if it means you’ll spare our lives! Please, have mercy!”

Did he start crying just from seeing my face? While Thuvan’s viceroy was the one who’d sentenced Yuhit to such an inhumane punishment, it was also true that Yuhit had committed a grave sin. I was willing to let that issue slide. *So seriously, stop crying.* The remaining negotiations went incredibly smoothly. I just had to glare or click my tongue, and the viceroy instantly acquiesced. After he’d accepted all of my conditions, the only thing left was to decide how to deal with him.

“Vaito, what do you think we should do?”

“I wouldn’t want to sit at the same table as someone who orders the torture and death of unarmed messengers.”

I bared my fangs, and the viceroy toppled out of his chair. Firnir clopped over and pointed her short spear at his neck. In a low voice, she snarled “You killed one of my messengers too. I hope you realize I don’t like you very much.”

“Eeeek!”

“You’re not welcome in my government. Understand?”

The viceroy nodded fervently. Thuvan's viceroy was neither an incompetent man, nor an evil one. But both Firnir and I agreed that he couldn't be trusted. Average rulers weren't fit to use as allies. The only people we'd let join our side would be those who were exceptional.

We gave him the choice of retiring here or leaving for another city, and to no one's surprise, he chose to leave. Anyone who would abandon their subjects out of fear wasn't fit to work with us. I couldn't care less where he went. It'd be nice if he didn't end up like Yuhit, but if he did it wouldn't be my fault.

I'm glad Airia turned out to be one of the good ones. I should probably be nicer to her. Maybe I'll get her a souvenir from Thuvan. I wonder which she would prefer more, the ballistae we plundered, or the mounted combat strategy books we found?

I couldn't afford to leave Ryunheit unguarded for long, so I ordered Kurtz and his dragonkin engineers to pack up as soon as possible. As all the undead soldiers fighting at the southern gate had been destroyed, I'd only be able to take half the Bone Spears I'd given Melaine back with me; a mere 1000. *It'd be nice if Master could make more, but considering her condition...*

The remaining Bone Spears were needed to guard the city walls and the viceroy's manor. Their presence probably terrified the citizens, but the kentauros couldn't fight well in the city, so they were a necessity. It appeared Melaine would be staying behind for some time as well in order to help Firnir organize the city. *I should probably say goodbye to her and check up on Master before I go.*

As I walked into the main office, I found Melaine perusing Thuvan's most important reports. Master was lying on the bed nearby.

"Melaine, how's Master feeling?"

"As you can see, sleeping soundly. She won't wake up for a few days at least, I don't think."

During the battle, she'd expended all her mana supporting the kentauros and healing the injured. She was quite the terror on the battlefield. But in her sleep,

she looked like nothing more than a cute, innocent child.

Though she was a powerful mage, Master's body was weak, and her heart wouldn't even beat without a steady supply of mana. Apparently long ago, back when she'd still been human, someone had almost killed her. She'd used magic to resuscitate her heart. One side-effect of that spell was that she'd stopped aging ever since.

Anyway, since she needed mana to survive, burning large quantities of it left her physically drained like this as well. There was a complex magic theory that explained the details of how mana interacted with her body. I wasn't able to fully understand it, but the way I interpreted it was basically that her HP and MP were the same now. I wasn't sure if that was technically correct or not, though. *I'm a pretty shitty apprentice, huh?*

In the end, it was two days later that I told Melaine to take care of the rest and hurried back to Ryunheit. Yuhit still wasn't able to walk, so we put him in one of the dragonkin unit's carriages. His family and most devout disciples followed after him. They had all asked to seek refuge in Ryunheit, and I'd found no reason to deny them. Apparently they'd been feeding him and treating his wounds in secret. It was the only reason he'd lasted as long as he had. Most of his disciples were engineers and former soldiers, so I figured they'd be useful to keep around. *Now then, it's time to get going.* I was worried about how my city was getting along. *I bet there'll be a mountain of paperwork waiting for me. Maybe I shouldn't go back after all...* Well, no point in complaining about it.

"All units, it's time to go home!"

1000 Bone Spears, 24 dragonkin engineers, and a couple dozen refugees safely passed through Ryunheit's main gates. The first thing that happened after my return was Fahn marching up to me and lecturing me about not being so reckless.

* * * *

—Melaine's Drunk Ramblings—

Fir! Firnir! Come over here for a sec. Eh, don't worry about the paperwork, it's fine. I'll get it done in a flash later. Come on, just sit with me for a bit. Pour me a drink, will you? Good girl.

You did a pretty good job today. As far as I can tell, the humans are being pretty obedient. It's all thanks to your management. It's nothing to get embarrassed about, really. Besides, if anyone tries to start trouble, I'll turn them into a vampire and make them my slave. So don't worry.

I guess I could just take a leaf out of your book and threaten to bring Veight back here too. Oh, hmm. Yeah, I guess you might be relying a bit too much on Veight's reputation. But honestly, I don't see anything wrong with it. Until you're able to handle everything on your own, you may as well use his name as a crutch. Seriously though, when did Veight get so big? Was I really so unreliable that he had to grow up that fast? Oh yeah, that reminds me of this one story.

You know how you kentauros have had it really hard these past few decades? Well, the vampires are the same way. Ah, thanks for the refill. 100 years ago, when I first became a vam... Err, nevermind. Basically, a while back, vampires were way more impressive than they are now. Our warriors were as strong as the best werewolves, and we could control humans just by staring into their eyes. And you know, back before I became a vampire, we were supposedly even more powerful. Ancient vampires could fly through the sky, transform into mist, and were like, totally invincible. Yeah, just like that.

Anyway, we've been growing weaker over the centuries. Modern vampires can't fly, and they can't control people just by looking at them either. Well, I guess we are practically immortal now, and we've built up a resistance to the sun and holy crosses, but that's really it. Because we got complacent with our strength, our race started this long decline. I actually went to Master's place to learn magic because I was worried we'd have no future unless I did something about our weakness.

That was when I first met Veight. He was just a little kid back then, a really cute little kid. But you know what he said when I told him all that stuff about vampires and how I was worried about our future?

“Regression is just another form of evolution.”

At first I was just like, what’s this kid yapping about? I thought he was just saying whatever because werewolves have always been strong and he’d never had to worry about stuff like that. The more I thought about it, though, the more I felt like I got what he was trying to say. Our ancestors had been really strong, but they’d been practically wiped out by humans. Meanwhile, we’re doing just fine. We can pass through gates that have crosses carved into them no problem, and the sun can’t hurt us. So we’re way better at surviving than the vampires of the past. We might have lost a lot of our old strength, but we’ve become a lot more tenacious too.

When I figured that out, I realized that little twerp was a way smarter disciple than I gave him credit for. I figured I’d look after him as thanks, but it turned out he was way more mature than I thought. When I told him I’d realized what he meant, he said something about natural selection or something that didn’t make much sense... And he said we were like the “Native Americans.” Is that a werewolf term or something?

Anyway, the point is thanks to our Master, I found a way for vampires to survive in this world. Apparently most of our race has a strong affinity for necromancy. You know, I can make 5...no wait, 7...no wait, 10 undead soldiers in a day! And after I had some of my followers train under Master too, they were able to summon a single skeleton a day. You might not know this, but once you can summon undead creatures, you’re considered a fully-fledged necromancer. I know Master can create like 100 in a day, but she’s insane so it’s different. Point is, now there’s a way for us vampires to thrive. We just need to take our race in a new direction. Veight put it pretty well before; if we want to survive, we have to throw away our old selves. Have you heard of this saying? “Yesterday’s sun will never rise again.” I think it’s pretty apt.

Okay, enough gloomy talk! Fir, you got any interesting stories to tell? Come on, I’m sure you’ve got a few. If not, we can always talk about love. It’s obvious you’ve got a crush on Veight. You’re so easy to read. Huh!? Of course not, he’s like my little brother, there’s no way I’d be in love with him. Seriously! Besides...that guy’s way too dense...

He’ll get reincarnated before he ever learns how to take a hint. Well, I’m

rooting for you. If you ever need advice, you can always come to the beautiful Melaine. Big sister here'll point you in the right direction. Oh yeah, thanks for reminding me. I almost forgot about the documents. I'll handle them tomorrow.

Wait, you need them done tonight?

* * * *

After helping with the conquest of Thuvan, I spent some time solidifying my rule in Ryunheit. I wanted to give my report to the Demon Lord too, but I couldn't bring myself to ask Master to teleport me when she was still weak. I'd visit the Demon Lord after she'd rested up some. For now, I was making do by sending Kurtz to deliver any news to the castle. He entered my office after finishing his latest report and I turned to him and said, "Kurtz, you have no idea how grateful I am that you're around. If I asked one of my werewolves or canines to act as messenger, I wouldn't be able to explain what I mean by Dragon's Breath."

Over the past few weeks, Kurtz and I had grown rather close, and I casually handed him a meat skewer I'd bought earlier. It was the same one with the delicious sauce that I'd tried some time back.

"I'm partial to the skewers sold by the stall here. I hope you like them as much as I do."

"It's scrumptious."

Dragonkin were carnivorous, so of course they ate meat.

"I imagine this sauce would pair perfectly with locust."

"...Sure."

Though it seemed they still preferred insects above all. He downed a few more chicken skewers, and I treated him to a cup of my prized green tea afterward.

"I'm glad we were assigned a trading city. The variety of food here is wonderful. Would you happen to know what seasoning is used for this, sir?"

"It's a salty seasoning made by fermenting a certain kind of beans."

Nice to know soy sauce has fans, even in another world. Though I guess this

isn't quite soy sauce. Kurtz nodded a few times then said, "I believe my lord might find this seasoning to his liking. Could you tell me where you purchased it? I think I'll purchase some with my earnings."

As I suspected, Kurtz was rather close to the Demon Lord as well. At the very least, he was close enough to know the Demon Lord's tastes. *I better be extra careful not to say anything rude...*

"I am also curious where you were able to grow such a fragrant tea without fermenting the leaves. If possible, I'd like to present this to the Demon Lord as well. Would it be alright if I took a few leaves back with me?"

"I don't mind. I just hope the Demon Lord likes it."

Considering how much trouble I'd gone to find these, I was reluctant to part with them. It wouldn't do to be stingy though. I could spare one box; I had another three hidden away, after all. Kurtz heaved a relaxed sigh and watched the steam swirling above his cup.

"Oh yes, I took the liberty of harvesting soil samples from both Ryunheit and Thuvan. I was thinking of taking them back to Grenschtat on my next visit and having the engineers there run an analysis on them."

"You guys can do that?"

"Some of my comrades have particularly sensitive tongues. Dragonkin have traditionally used taste to analyze the components of soil...it's possible there might be valuable ore veins nearby."

While their approach to research was academic, it appeared their technology still hadn't caught up to what they wanted to do. Hence why they still used methods like this for certain tasks. Afterwards, I handed Kurtz another pile of reports and saw him off as he left with his comrades through the south gate. *Godspeed, Kurtz. I hope the Demon Lord likes soy sauce and green tea. May the love of Japanese food spread far and wide.*

After seeing Kurtz off, I went to check up on Yuhit. While his recovery appeared to be progressing smoothly, the days of exposure and abuse had left him permanently weakened. He could no longer walk without a cane. I tried to spend as much time as I could with him, but his heart had been scarred by the

experience.

“Is it really alright for a sinner such as myself to continue living? These old bones are responsible for the deaths of so many men, and the suffering of so many more...” Yuhit muttered sadly. I pondered his words for a few moments. Even in this world, where magic was real, the dead couldn’t be brought back to life. Master could reanimate the dead soldiers’ corpses if I asked, but they would still be soulless puppets. Not living people.

Theoretically, it was possible to reincarnate someone’s soul into another life using transmigration magic, but as the reincarnated soul had no memories, there was no way to be sure it really did what it was supposed to. Besides, reviving someone without their memories in a different body kind of defeated the purpose of reviving them. No matter what anyone tried, the dead were dead. So in the end, all I could say to Yuhit was, “It’s true that thanks to your actions and mine, four hundred of Thuvan’s soldiers now lay dead.”

Technically I’d just been doing the proper thing as a military commander while he’d committed treason, but now probably wasn’t the best time to mention that.

“I don’t regret my actions, but if you regret yours, then the only way to pay for your crimes is to save as many lives as you killed.”

What I’d told him was an adaptation of the demon army’s motto: Pay for your failures by succeeding as hard as you failed. Yuhit stared at me for a few seconds, then nodded.

“Save as many lives as I killed, huh...”

“If four hundred isn’t enough, then save eight hundred, or even four thousand if that’s what it takes. That won’t erase your sins, but it’s still better than moping around doing nothing.” I rose to my feet and nodded to the bishop. “Hurry up and get better. I need you to lead the people of the Sonnenlicht Order. They’re growing uneasy.”

Without waiting for his reply, I strode out of the room. *I hope that wasn’t too harsh. Well, it’s probably fine either way.*

Yuhit did indeed return to his post after recovering, but his teachings were slightly different now. Before, he'd preached unity through force, but his sermon the night before had been far less totalitarian.

"I was foolish. To think that all humans need to possess the same values and same morals to coexist is the misguided wisdom of man. But the wisdom of God runs much deeper. After all, does he not give light to all, even those who believe in other doctrines? Surely that must mean..."

Apparently he'd begun preaching that coexistence with heretics and demons was the true path to enlightenment. I had no clue what had caused his change of heart, but thanks to him, the Sonnenlicht Order finally stopped causing trouble for the other sects. They started treating everyone they met with kindness, and even the coarse werewolves started to like them.

Soon enough, there was no one left in Ryunheit who wished to oppose the demon army. Both the city's garrison and its religious orders were happy to cooperate with us. The overall popularity of our rule also led to a most unexpected development.

"Sir Veight, do you have a moment? There's something I wish to discuss with you."

One evening, Airia came to visit my office. I finished signing the last of the documents for the day and looked up at her.

"By all means. What did you want to talk about?"

I waved at the chair across from me and she sat down. With a determined gaze, she looked right at me and said, "I was thinking of having Ryunheit secede from the Meraldia Commonwealth."

"You what?"

Stunned, I shot to my feet. I scrutinized her expression carefully, trying to see if this was some kind of joke. *Are you sure you're sane?*

At present, the demon army had total control of Ryunheit. But in the end, we were just an occupying force. Ryunheit was officially a member of the Meraldia Commonwealth. In other words, we were holding Ryunheit hostage, and were

really nothing more than an invading force. Unfortunately, as far as humans were concerned, we were neither a legitimate army nor a legitimate state. And now that we'd conquered all the nearby cities, the only hope Ryunheit had of liberation was from Meraldia's main army. But if Ryunheit seceded from the Commonwealth, Meraldia wouldn't bother to save them. In fact, Ryunheit would make themselves Meraldia's enemy. Every city would turn against them. While I was still trying to formulate a response, Airia explained further.

"Once we've declared our independence, I was hoping we could form a formal alliance with the demon army."

"Wait, hold on a second."

I was glad she was interested in joining our side, but I couldn't help but be worried about what this would mean for her.

"You may be the viceroy and all, but you can't just decide something this important all on your own. Let's calm down and talk this through first."

"Fear not." Airia pulled a bundle of letters out of her pocket. "All of the merchant guilds, all members of the Sonnenlicht Order and Mondstrahl Church, and the city garrison have all formally agreed to my proposal."

"You're kidding."

After my initial shock wore off and I was able to think calmly about Airia's proposal, I realized it made sense. The odds of Meraldia rescuing Ryunheit from the demon army had become exceedingly slim. In which case, switching sides would be advantageous for the city. While I happened to be treating the citizens with respect, if I died in battle there was no guarantee my replacement would be as lenient. But if the city went independent and formed an official alliance with the demon army, Ryunheit's future would be secure. *Still, this might be too bold a move.*

"I'm surprised you're willing to bet everything on us."

Airia smiled and placed the stack of letters on my desk.

"Ryunheit's a city of merchants. Every decision we make, we make after carefully weighing the potential risks and rewards."

“And by your estimation, this reckless plan will bring you the greatest profit?”

Airia smiled awkwardly and said, “You’re the one who convinced us of that, Sir Veight.”

I did?

“After seeing how you governed the city, the people came to believe that the demon army was someone they could trust. Surely if you speak on our behalf, you’ll be able to convince the Demon Lord to let us ally with you?”

I understood where she was coming from, but I still wasn’t convinced. Seeing my hesitation, Airia leaned close to my ear and whispered, “I hope you’ll be able to negotiate favorable terms for us, as we were the first city to join your side.”

Aha, so that’s your plan. She was a crafty one, this viceroy. *In that case, I should respond in my capacity as the vice-commander of the demon army’s third regiment.*

“So you’re throwing your lot in with the demon army then? Understood. I’ll do everything I can to convince the Demon Lord.”

I held out my hand and Airia gripped it in a firm handshake. There was something extremely invigorating about the smile she gave me.

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—Technical Officer Kurtz’s Official Report—

• Sixth Scheduled Report (Classified) •

Author: Special officer Kurtz of the dragonkin engineering squad. Preliminary results are in. Though the investigation is still ongoing, I thought it prudent to file a report.

• On the State of Ryunheit •

Ryunheit’s occupation is progressing extremely well. There is no chaos one

might expect from a new government that was installed by force, and both the city's public safety and economy have suffered no damage. To my surprise, Ryunheit's garrison is assisting Sir Veight in maintaining order. Though they technically claim to be a neutral party, for all intents and purposes, they are cooperating with the demon army. Both me and my squad have attempted to analyze how such a thing is possible, but we have yet to come up with a satisfactory hypothesis.

The citizens hold no ill will toward the demon army either. I suspect the greatest reason for that is Sir Veight elected to respect the laws and customs of the residents.

More research is needed before I can create a conclusive report on the viceroy, Airia, but she appears to be a diligent ruler who takes her duties seriously. Details to follow in future reports.

• Thuvan's Conquest •

As Thuvan's defenses were sturdier than expected, the plan to coat its gates with rotted flesh then set them alight with lightning magic failed. The army's primary force, its kentauros were unsuited to urban warfare, while the undead soldiers that made up the reserves were unfit to charge the gates. That restricted our strategic options greatly. However, Vice-Commander Veight put his backup plan into action and successfully destroyed the city's gates. Thanks to his bravery, Thuvan fell with minimal losses. Unfortunately, his plan used up all of the reserve Dragon's Breath we had in stock. I would humbly like to request a resupply, so that we may resume manufacturing Dragon's Jewels. Furthermore, there were a few issues with Sir Veight's treatment of our classified weapon.

- He packed the extremely volatile powder into a large barrel.

- He performed no prior experiments to test the powder's effects.

- He used the powder in a reckless manner, putting himself, the commander, at risk.

- He made use of the Dragon's Breath without coming up with a plausible

cover-up story beforehand.

I believe most of my complaints arise from the fact that I am essentially a civil officer while Sir Veight is a military one, but regardless, I will insist that he leaves the handling of unstable weapons to the experts in the future. However, I cannot deny that his novel usage of the Dragon's Breath has given me inspiration to develop a new style of weapon.

Moving on, the people of Thuvan are irrationally terrified of Sir Veight, and seem unlikely to resist the demon army's rule. As an experiment, I told three captured soldiers "Vice-Commander Veight would like to have a word with you." All three of them nearly fainted on the spot. It took quite some time to calm them down, and I decided that any further experiments would be too inhumane to perform. As a result of these and related experiments, however, I and multiple other technical officers, were able to confirm the different terms citizens of Thuvan use as nicknames for Veight.

Veight, the Killer of 400 Men. Veight the Butcher. Veight the Destroyer. Veight, Lord of the Undead. Veight the Werewolf General. Veight the Bringer of Dusk. From what I can surmise, that final nickname is related to the fact that Sir Veight used a bishop of the Sonnenlicht order as a mere messenger.

• New Equipment •

Upon first hearing about the Dragon's Jewels, Sir Veight was clearly disappointed. However, he was instantly able to grasp that these weapons were meant to be a signaling tool. Moreover, he was able to make practical use of them in his first battle, and successfully avoided a surprise attack by enemy cavalry. The consensus among the technical officers is that he understands the value of the Dragon's Jewels well.

His sharp insight extends to other tools as well. He was instantly able to grasp that my telescope was a device meant to aid someone in viewing far away objects. Not only is he a perceptive individual, he is flexible enough to apply what he discerns in unorthodox ways.

• Postscript •

Courtesy of Sir Veight, I have procured a number of interesting and delicious food samples. I am sending them together with this report. I pray you find them to your liking.

* * * *

The next time I had an opportunity to give my report personally to the Demon Lord, I brought up Airia's proposal to him.

"Mmm, I see..."

We were in his private parlor, and there was no one else in the room. For what functioned as his office, it was a tiny space. The Demon Lord nodded and said, "A bold proposition, but one that seems both reasonable and profitable. I trust your word, Wight, but what do you think of this viceroy?"

How many times do I have to tell you it's Veight, not Wight? Regardless, now was the time to vouch for Airia.

"In my experience, Ryunheit's viceroy, Airia, has been both rational and wise. She is always sincerely working for the sake of her citizens." None of what I'd said was a lie. I honestly believed she was a capable and wise ruler. "Furthermore, Ryunheit's forces and the forces under my command have a good relationship with each other. I doubt any fatal problems would arise from an alliance between us."

Now that the garrison troops and the Sonnenlicht Order had been pacified, the two groups who might have posed a threat were no longer an issue.

The Demon Lord listened to my case, then nodded solemnly. "This alliance would benefit us greatly. However, it would also greatly influence the future course of my army. I need to consider your proposal carefully."

So he needs more time after all... The Demon Lord flipped through the reports in his hand and asked, "Incidentally, I heard you used all of the Dragon's Breath that I sent you in the battle for Thuvan. Is that true?"

I figured he knew. I straightened my back and hurriedly explained myself.

“The outcome of the battle hinged on my plan’s success, so I used it all to be doubly sure I would succeed.”

Had we not broken through the gates, we definitely would have failed. I didn’t regret my decision to use all the gunpowder there. I’ll admit that I overdid it, but I only know that now with the benefit of hindsight. I expected the Demon Lord to get angry at me, but he just nodded silently.

“Understandable. However, this weapon is still a military secret, and not all of its properties have been explored, so refrain from using such tactics in the future. Are we clear?”

“Yes, sir!”

“In return, I shall adopt your suggestion and ask my engineers to start developing weapons we can use in sieges.”

Oh, now that’ll definitely help.

“I have also heard that the Dragon’s Jewels proved useful in your battle. Now that their combat effectiveness has been proven, you are permitted to continue using them as you see fit.”

“Thank you for your generosity.”

If I could keep using fireworks from now on, it would be possible to plan more sophisticated strategies. That would definitely help in the battles to come.

The Demon Lord rose from his chair and stared out his window. The few plants that were visible through the fog were a vibrant green.

“It’s almost summer. The perfect season for fireworks,” he muttered.

“It is indeed, my lord.”

Pleased at how our earlier conversation had gone, I nodded without thinking. *Wait a second. Something’s wrong here.* The Demon Lord turned around and scrutinized me.

“What *exactly* are fireworks, Veight?”

“Uhh, they’re...”

“The only weapons I provided to you were Dragon’s Jewels. So I ask you

again, what exactly are fireworks?”

“Well...”

It was then that I realized. The Demon Lord had switched to speaking Japanese.

“Looks like you understand Japanese, huh, Veight?”

Not only was he speaking it fluently, he no longer seemed to have any trouble pronouncing my name. *This doesn’t make any sense. Actually no wait, it does.* Both me and the Demon Lord were former Japanese.

“Could it be that you’re also...”

I chose my words carefully, but the Demon Lord answered casually in Japanese.

“Correct. Like yourself, I’m someone who was reincarnated.”

Unable to control myself, I shouted, “You what!?”

The Demon Lord offered me a chair and continued in Japanese, “Here, take a seat and calm down. I’ll explain everything from the beginning.”

Too shaken to argue, I slumped into my chair. The Demon Lord started by prefacing with, “I’m not sure if the Japan I lived in and the Japan you lived in were from the same age, or even the same timeline, but...”

He then went on to explain that when he’d been reincarnated, the dragonkin clans were bickering amongst themselves. The cause of their divisions had been the humans. In order to mine the rich ore veins in the mountains, the humans had driven off the dragonkin clans living there by force. The displaced clans had been forced to migrate to mountains inhabited by other tribes, which had sparked conflict between the newcomers and the old residents.

Worried about the direction the race was headed in, the Demon Lord had used might to unite all the clans. Once he’d unified them into a cohesive force, he’d led them on a series of successful campaigns, and drove the humans out of the mountains. Then, in order to protect the habitats of demons all over, he formed the demon army and started recruiting from every race.

There had, in the past, been multiple demon heroes who’d earned the title of

Demon Lord, but Friedensrichter was the first among them to lead an army composed of all demonkind. Thanks to the efficient, modernized army he'd organized, he was able to win battle after battle against the humans. By utilizing tactics from his own past life, he was able to transform the demon army into an invincible force. After all, the world in his memories was far more advanced than this one.

Damn, that sounds like a lot of fun. I wish I'd been able to do that...

"I never imagined there would be others who were reincarnated into this world. But then, I was so focused on my next battle that I never had time to consider the possibility. However, that changed when you appeared before me."

At first, the Demon Lord had thought I was just one of his more talented subjects. However, he'd noticed my distaste when he'd slipped up and accidentally pronounced my name as Wight, which had caught his attention. That alone, however, hadn't meant much. After all, everyone got angry when people mispronounced their names. And so, the Demon Lord had paid no further heed to it. He had, however, practiced hard to get my name's pronunciation right.

"You're surprisingly diligent about this stuff, Demon Lord."

"You were risking your life for me, so I felt bad about not at least getting your name right..."

It was only when I'd tried making gunpowder myself that he'd started to suspect I might not be from this world.

"Dragon's Breath...a.k.a. gunpowder. When you tried creating some yourself, I thought there might be a possibility."

In fairness to him, it was a staple for anyone who got reincarnated into another world and ended up becoming a soldier to try crafting gunpowder as soon as possible. It was at that point that the Demon Lord had purposely started calling me 'Wight' to gauge my reactions. However, it still hadn't been enough to convince him. Especially since a disciple of the Great Sage Gomoviroa might well have been able to invent gunpowder all on their own.

“At any rate, the reason I was so obsessed with the idea that there might be other reincarnated people here wasn’t that I was getting nostalgic for my old life. I just wanted to recruit more people who had the same wealth of knowledge and shared the same perspectives on life that I did. Had you not governed Ryunheit the way you had, I probably would have lost interest in you.”

While I had been on the Demon Lord’s mind for a while, he couldn’t give me any special treatment just because of a hunch, so he’d remained silent on the matter.

“However, you continued to succeed using your unorthodox style of ruling. Of particular note to me was how you’d captured Thuvan, and the fact that you’d won over Ryunheit’s soldiers.”

Though I hadn’t realized it, apparently it was around that point in time that my fame had started to spread. The Demon Lord then took out a familiar tea tin, along with a fragrant jar, and put them on his desk. They were the green leaves and soy sauce substitute I’d sent him.

“When officer Kurtz sent me these green tea leaves and this jar of soy sauce, I knew this wasn’t just a coincidence anymore.”

“Wait, did you send him to me in an attempt to investigate my true identity, my lord?”

“No. My only intention was to have him assist you. Though I did also wish for him and the men under him to learn from your governing style.”

That statement proved to me that Kurtz was someone the Demon Lord trusted. And as the Demon Lord had hoped, Kurtz sent back accurate reports on my actions and behavior.

“There is one thing that I do not understand, though. How is it that you never even suspected that I might also have been reincarnated?”

“How was I supposed to have even guessed?”

The Demon Lord replied with a straight face, “Shouldn’t it have been obvious after hearing my name?”

“By name...you mean Friedensrichter?”

“Correct. It’s a German word that means ‘bringer of peace.’ I gave that name to myself as a reminder to never let my power get to my head.”

If you wanted me to guess that, you should have picked an English word.

“Most dragonkin names remind me of German words. So when I was crowned Demon Lord, I had no choice but to pick something similar as my new name.”

Apparently it was because I hadn’t reacted at all to his name that the Demon Lord had had such a hard time figuring out if I’d been reincarnated or not. *How the hell would I guess something as obscure as that!?*

“With all due respect, my lord...”

“Speak.”

“This is all so sudden and my mind’s still reeling from the shock, so...”

The Demon Lord didn’t get angry. Instead, he looked at me apologetically and said, “Hold, I understand your confusion, but you have to consider my position here.”

“I understand your position better than you think, my lord. But still, couldn’t you have sent out a call for all reincarnators in the demon army to show up before you or something more straightforward like that?”

The Demon Lord coughed and hastily said, “Now wait just a second. This is still partially your fault for not knowing German. Naming myself Friedensrichter was the greatest compromise I could make, considering my situation.”

Really?

“It would become problematic if word spread that I had been reincarnated, and that I was looking for others who were too. I have no doubt that pretenders claiming to come from a different world than ours would have tried to curry favor by saying they’d been reincarnated. I had to proceed cautiously in order to prevent anyone from abusing my authority.”

I see. I hadn’t realized being a leader required planning every move so carefully. Though I understood his reasoning now, I still hadn’t sorted out my thoughts. And I was still a little confused. My confusion must have shown on my

face, since the Demon Lord bowed his head and said, “My apologies for being so roundabout. I realize I handled this matter awkwardly... No, the truth is, I was simply afraid. Afraid of knowing for sure what you were.”

“Oh, uh, don’t worry too much about it. I may not be as experienced as you, but I get why you did it.”

It was surreal to see the Demon Lord, who always looked so imposing, giving me such a meek apology. So much so that I felt kind of bad. I much preferred his usual intimidating self.

“Now then, I think it’s time I talk about the real reason I called you here. As I am a demon, I wish to protect my people from the humans. But as a former human, I also cannot bring myself to hate them. My goal is to create a country where humans and demons can live in harmony.” The Demon Lord stood up and walked over to my side. “I have no interest in who or what you were in your past life. I’m not particularly inclined to share my own past life either. But I believe you share these conflicting feelings of mine. So, will you fight together with me and help grant this impossible dream of mine?”

I didn’t even need to think about my answer. I stood up and bowed to one knee.

“Right now, I am a werewolf, a proud member of the demon race. If it’s to prevent the amount of demon and human blood spilt in this world, then I will follow you wherever your path may lead.”

“Thank you for remaining loyal, Veight.” The Demon Lord placed a heavy hand on my shoulder. “Now that I’ve confirmed you’ve been reincarnated like me, I know I can trust you. I have no issue with welcoming Viceroy Airia and Ryunheit into our alliance. I’ll sort out the details later, after holding a meeting with the other commanders.”

Perfect. I’m sure Airia’ll be happy to hear this too.

“I’ll be expecting great things from you in the future. Work hard for the sake of the demon army.”

“Yes, sir! I’m still not sure if I’ve gotten over your sudden confession, but I’ll do my best!”

“You sure are hung up on that...”

The Demon Lord smiled and shook his head. Heartened by his response, I smiled back.

“Well, no matter. I suppose I deserve a little grudge for that. Shall we eat dinner together? I need to talk to someone who understands my troubles.”

“It would be my pleasure.”

After dinner, we continued talking late into the night. It seemed the Demon Lord had had his fair share of troubles in the beginning too. He had wanted to improve the food shortages within the dragonkin clans by revolutionizing agriculture. However, dragonkin were carnivores that preferred eating insects, so even though he’d introduced staple grains and crop rotation, it didn’t do any good.

“With no other choices left, I was forced to take up beekeeping and beetle cultivation.”

“You started breeding...beetles?”

An image of the Demon Lord wearing a straw hat and digging through the mountains looking for insects flashed through my mind.

“Dragonkin have always been hunter-gatherers, so the idea of domesticating their food source was a novel idea to them.”

“Getting everything up and running must have been tough, huh?”

The Demon Lord nodded and closed his eyes.

“I’d only read the basics of agriculture and animal husbandry in my old world, and I had no practical experience with either... Finding species that were good for breeding was extremely difficult as well. It took me and my engineers many sleepless nights to come up with an efficient system too.”

Even though he could have left everything to his men, he suffered with them. He sure is dedicated.

“Thanks to my efforts though, all the bugs that used to be just delicacies became widely available to all dragonkin. Moreover, all the insects were high in

protein, so they made a good staple food. Most dragonkin now are bigger and beefier than they were decades ago." The Demon Lord sounded a little proud as he said that. "The next species on my list to domesticate is grasshoppers. If it goes well, I'm sure Baltze will be happy."

Sounds like he's having a lot of fun doing this. The Demon Lord had brought a bunch of other technology to the dragonkin clans, but as expected, it had been tough. And, like agriculture, not all of them had stuck. After all, dragonkin were biologically different from humans. Even when it came to using swords, they didn't wield them in quite the same way. The skeletal structure of their shoulders and hands were completely different.

"I realized I couldn't just transplant human culture and technology to the demons as is. So I refined my approach."

He started teaching them more fundamental technologies and concepts, and then watched as they adapted those ideas to their needs. *So kind of like giving them the start of a skill tree and seeing where they specced all their points.* I had no idea if the Demon Lord had been a gamer in his previous life or not, but if he had I had no doubt he'd mained strategy games.

His biggest concern for the army had been how impossible it was to standardize things. For example, giant armor was too big for any other race to wear, and the amount of food a canine needed in a day to survive wasn't nearly enough for anyone else. Furthermore, every race ate different things.

His ideal had been to create an army that surpassed racial boundaries, but at present, he'd been forced to compartmentalize his units by race. The more I listened, the more I realized the Demon Lord was someone who really liked looking after people. And he had a diligent personality to boot. There wasn't a selfish bone in his body, and he had no interest in amassing fame or power. His only wish was to create a world where demons could live peacefully.

Thank god he ended up our Demon Lord. I felt like this ridiculously straightforward guy was someone worth devoting myself to. *I promise I'll keep working hard as your vice-commander.*

A few days after that meeting, Airia walked into Ryunheit's square wearing a

formal gown. She turned to the people gathered there and proclaimed in a loud voice, “From this moment onward, Ryunheit shall leave the Meraldian Commonwealth, and form an alliance with the demon army!”

Her declaration was met with resounding applause. Everyone was smiling, from the residents of the city, to its soldiers, to the werewolves, canines, and dragonkin that occupied it, and even to the vampires and kentauros who’d come to witness this historic event.

“In celebration of Ryunheit’s newfound independence, I have prepared a feast for you all! Everyone, eat and drink and sing to your heart’s content!”

The tail end of Airia’s speech was drowned out by a chorus of cheers. The Demon Lord, who I’d come to respect a lot more after our conversation the other day, had granted her the title of Demon Ambassador. As the name suggested, she was meant to serve as a bridge between humans and demons. While Airia was technically a civilian and not a soldier, the Demon Lord had bestowed upon her a rank equivalent to that of a regiment commander.

Wait, doesn’t that technically mean she’s higher-ranked than me? I idly sipped my drink and watched as Commander Airia walked over to me.

“Congratulations, Lady Airia.”

“Thank you, Sir Veight.”

She smiled and raised her glass in a toast. I rose mine in return and the two of us gulped down our wine. Until now, she and all the citizens of Ryunheit had been the demons’ hostages. But from this point on, they were humanity’s enemy. On the off-chance that the demon army was defeated, they would be executed to the last man. The sight of Thuvan’s execution grounds passed through my mind. If I failed, she’d be the one strung up there. Of course, Airia understood that full well, too.

“From now on, our fates are interlinked, I suppose.”

“That they are. Do you regret your choice?”

She shook her head.

“Not at all. In fact, I’m happy.”

She's definitely a weird one. Her grin grew even wider and she said, "More importantly Sir Veight, I'm technically your superior from now on, aren't I?"

"Hmph, I guess so..."

She was an honorary commander now. Meanwhile, I was still stuck at vice-commander. Though I had sort of been promoted myself. I was no longer a vice-commander in the third regiment, but in the first. My direct boss was the Demon Lord.



Of course, that didn't change the fact that I was just a vice-commander still. I was fine with that, though.

"You're the best person to lead the humans under our rule, so it made sense that you got promoted. But the position of vice-commander suits an ordinary guy like me. Seeking out too much fame will just lead to ruin."

"Sir Veight...was that meant to be a joke?"

"Not at all. I sincerely believe you're a far more capable leader than me."

For some reason, Airia responded to that with a sigh.

"You should think more highly of yourself. You're one of the Demon Lord's most trusted generals, Sir Veight."

Is that really true, though? I mean I know I've been made the Demon Lord's personal aide, but I don't think that necessarily makes me someone that special in the army. Since the command structure in the army was still vague, even I wasn't sure just how much authority I had.

Regardless, from now on my job was to cooperate with Airia and transform this border trading city of Ryunheit into a frontline base that welcomed both humans and demons through its gates. To be honest, I wasn't even sure where to start, but I did know the demon army's battles were only going to get harsher from here on out. After all, we'd just spit in Meraldia's face by capturing one of their cities and then converting it to our side. Looking up, I saw the demon army's flag flying proudly from the roof of Airia's manor.

"I'll be counting on your support, Sir Veight."

"You got it. Looking forward to working with you, Lady Airia."

"You better work hard, for Ryunheit's sake."

"Just leave it all to me."

Wait a second, since when did I become Airia's gofer? I looked up dubiously, but she was just giving me the same innocent smile she always did.

Veight's Younger Days

I mentioned before that I don't remember much about my past life, but the truth is, I don't remember much about what happened right after I was reincarnated either. My guess is that my infant brain didn't have the capacity to properly process thoughts. The earliest memory I have is a fuzzy recollection of my father's funeral.

During my childhood, I lived in a secluded village comprised entirely of werewolves. It was a small village, situated deep within the woods. What I'm about to tell you is a story of what happened there when I was 10 years old.

* * * *

"Ooooi, Veight! Come on, let's go on a wildeboar hunt!"

The Garney brothers had come to invite me with them today too. Garbert, the older brother, was two years my elder, while Nibert, the younger, was the same age as me. Both of them had fiery red hair, a rarity among werewolves. While most werewolves were hunters that used stealth and surprise to their advantage, red-haired werewolves had monstrous strength and preferred to take their prey head-on. They had the pride to match their strength, and that made them reckless.

Wildeboars were a breed of particularly aggressive and dangerous boar that lived near the village. They picked a fight with any creature they thought they could beat. No human could survive the force of a wildeboar's charge. Hence why the last thing I wanted to do was go hunting for one.

"It'll be fine, we'll be coming with you. Don't tell me you're scared."

Of course I'm scared. While wildeboars were vicious, they were no match for a werewolf. They were smart enough to know that, too. If a werewolf was already in their transformed state, no wildeboar would dare approach. Normally, the people from our village hunted them by remaining in human form to lure them out, then transforming at the very last second. The thrill of the

wait and the rush that came from overpowering your foe after trapping it was the main source of entertainment for the village's more immature kids. As I was already an adult—mentally anyway—I saw no appeal to hunting.

"If you want to catch a wildeboar, just use a trap. Didn't you two get blown away because you waited too long to transform last time?"

The Garney brothers sneered at my response.

"Hah, you really are a weakling, Veight!"

"There's no way a wildeboar's charge could ever kill us!"

Big words, considering the two of you were stuck in bed for two days after that incident.

"Either way, I'm not going. I need to help out with the fieldwork anyway."

It was just me and my mother at home. While everyone in the village pitched in to help each other and no one went hungry, my mother still had it tough raising me on her own. She was my one and only mother, so it was natural that I wanted to help ease her burden. Unlike these two brats, I didn't have time to be goofing off.

"Tch. Let's just go by ourselves, bro."

"Yeah, if we keep hanging out with this loser we'll turn chicken too."

By all means, do whatever you want. My mom in this world was called Vanessa. Naturally, she was a werewolf too. From my perspective at least, she was an extremely reliable single mom. And according to her, she was only 27 years old. If that was true, it would mean she'd had me at 17. Whenever I brought that up with her, she'd always pinch my cheeks and change the subject.

I picked up the basket at my feet and walked through the village. It was a tiny, dilapidated village made up of little more than a smattering of wooden huts. Barely 100 people lived within it. Thanks to the werewolves' natural strength we weren't doing too terribly, but it was still a declining village. Eventually I found my mother digging up potatoes at the communal farm on the outskirts of the village.

"Why hello there, Veight. You're not going out to play with the other kids?"

“Nope. I thought I’d help you with the harvest.”

“That’s my boy. If your dad was still alive, he’d be so proud of you.”

My father had died when I was still an infant. Supposedly he’d perished protecting the village from a monster. Werewolves were technically a type of monster too, but we and the other sentient monsters called ourselves ‘demons’ to differentiate us from the more savage races. It was a mark of pride to us that we could develop cultures, societies, and cities.

Most monsters weren’t able to create such a complex society. They were just savage, mindless beasts. As communicating with them was impossible, we had no choice but to fight them off wherever we found them. However, humans saw no difference between us and regular monsters. They attacked us on sight, and so we were forced to live in remote villages far from civilization, much like the one I lived in now. Idle thoughts like these crossed my mind as I helped my mother dig out potatoes.

I walked along a narrow furrow and carefully dug up another potato with my hoe. This world’s potatoes weren’t too different from the sweet potatoes back on earth. *Never thought that field trip in elementary school where we went out to a farm and dug up potatoes would come in handy here.*

“Mom, what are we gonna do with these potatoes?”

“The elder said this winter will be a long one, so all of these are going to be stored in the granary. It’s a shame, but we won’t be able to eat them yet.”

Looks like we’re not eating any baked potatoes this year. Sweets were hard to come by in the village, so I’d been looking forward to enjoying the sweet potatoes fresh. *Ah well, come winter I’ll be eating so many I’ll get sick of them.*

“You know, if you let them sit for a few months, they get even sweeter.” Mom flashed me a grin. My mind was clearly an open book to her. I scratched my head, embarrassed that she’d seen right through my gluttonous thoughts. Then, as if she’d just thought of something, my mother asked, “By the way, did any of the kids head into the forest today?”

“The Garney brothers did. They said they were going wildeboar hunting.”

My mother's expression grew grim.

"That's not good. Could you find them and tell them to come back?"

"I don't mind...but you know they won't listen to me, right?"

The Garney brothers were technically my cousins, but they both thought I was a coward. However, my mother just smiled gently and said, "Tell them the elder ordered them back. They'll listen then. There have been reports of humans sneaking around the woods recently."

That wasn't good. There was nothing more terrifying for a demon than a human. We would be in a whole heap of trouble if any of them discovered this village. Since we were much stronger than humans, we'd easily be able to kill a few strays who wandered close. But then the comrades of the people we killed would come looking for their missing friends. And if we killed them, they'd just send even more people. There'd be no end to it.

I dumped the potato I'd just dug out into my basket and brushed off my pants.

"I'll go bring them back."

"Be careful out there."

Now that I think about it though, I used to be a human in my past life. Which made it rather strange that I was scared of humans now that I'd been reborn into a werewolf. Though I was just 10 years old, in my wolf form, I was pretty strong. There was no way a human, who couldn't even beat a wildeboar, would stand a chance against me. Werewolves were overwhelmingly powerful when it came to one-on-one combat, but no demon race had fought against a human army and won. Even the legendary Demon Lords of the past hadn't been able to defeat the humans. To make matters worse, the humans had been steadily expanding their sphere of influence. Even this village wouldn't be safe forever. It was up to us to keep it hidden for as long as possible.

My thoughts were interrupted as a vaguely human scent entered my nostrils. I heard footsteps nearby, and I hurriedly threw myself into a nearby thicket. I peered out through a tiny gap in the leaves. A little girl entered my field of view. From the looks of it, she was the same age as me. She wore a pointed hat on

her head and carried a long staff in her hands. *Is she a witch?* A forest full of wildeboars wasn't the kind of place a normal human girl would be able to survive very long in. She was either a highly proficient mage, or another demon. There was no guarantee she was an ally even if she was another race of demon, and if she was a human she was most definitely a foe. Either way, I needed to get out without getting seen and alert the Garney brothers. Before I could make a move though, the thicket behind me started rustling. Something was closing in at great speed.

"Huh?"

A second later, I was sent flying. The force of the blow knocked me out for a few seconds. When I came to, I was lying face-up on the path winding through the forest.

My entire body ached. Fortunately. even in our human forms, werewolves were tough. Everything hurt, but I hadn't taken any serious injuries. *Looks like I'll be alright... Or not.* I sat up, and saw myself face to face with a wildeboar. It was on the smaller side, but even small wildeboars were the size of a small car.

"Uwaaaah!?"

I hurriedly transformed into my wolf form, but that was the wrong move to make. Intimidated, the wildeboar did an about-face and ran off as fast as it could. However, the young girl I'd spotted earlier was now in its path. Without even bothering to consider who she might be or what the consequences of that were, I yelled out, "Watch out! Run!"

I ran after the wildeboar, but even in my werewolf form, my stunted child's legs weren't fast enough to catch up to it. The girl turned around and grumbled, "What's all this ruckus?"

Upon seeing the wildeboar, she touched the tip of her staff. A faint pillar of light sprouted from it and solidified into the shape of a sickle. The girl swung the sickle of light down at the wildeboar. The moment its tip reached the beast, it fell to the ground and skidded a few meters through the dirt. *Well, that was anticlimactic.* The girl shook her staff a few times, and the blade of light vanished into mist.

"Mmm. Deploying the spirit blade delays the spell's synchronization more

than I thought. Perhaps I should alter the final stanza...”

She patted the tip of her staff while mumbling to herself. It appeared she thought nothing of the wildeboar she’d just ended. The girl sidestepped past the collapsed boar and trotted over to me.

“Are you alright, werewolf boy?”

“Y-Yeah...I’m fine.”

It felt a little condescending to be treated like a kid by someone who looked no older than me, but I was too intimidated by her impressive display of magic to do anything but nod meekly. As far as I could tell, there weren’t any wounds on the wildeboar’s body. On the surface, it looked like there was nothing wrong with it. Whoever this girl was, she was dangerous. She noticed my terrified gaze, and then realized what her actions must have looked like to an outsider.

“Ah, my apologies for that. Should I drain the blood from its corpse for you? Werewolves eat these creatures, don’t they?”

“I mean we do, but...”

I’m more curious about who you are. Without waiting for my reply, the girl walked back to the wildeboar and touched its hide.

“I’ll use a draining spell to suck the blood out now.”

Oh shit. She’s definitely one of those dangerous wizards. Anyone who knows spells to suck out people’s blood can’t be normal.

“There was a time in the past when draining a person’s blood was considered a valid medical treatment. Originally this spell was designed to aid in that treatment, but it’s just as effective at killing people by desiccating them and draining the blood from slaughtered livestock.”

The girl removed her hands from the wildeboar’s hide, lecturing me on a rather terrifying topic all the while. *Where the heck did that blood go?* I was afraid to ask, but I had a feeling I knew the answer anyway. The girl’s face was flushed, so it wasn’t hard to guess. Still trembling in fear, I started when I heard another noise from the thicket behind me.

“Seriously, you need to stop transforming so early!”

“I thought you’d be able to catch it, bro!”

The Garney brothers burst out of the foliage. *So that wildeboar had been their prey after all.* They spotted me, and then the girl and the dead boar beside her. Had it been just me and the wildeboar, they probably would have accused me of stealing their prey, but the presence of an unknown girl complicated things. Neither of them were known for their intelligence, and this was more than they could process.

They looked from me to her, then back to me. Unable to make any sense of the situation, they then stared at each other. Finally, Garbert opened his mouth and said, “Hey, Veight...”

“Yeah?”

“Wanna help us carry the wildeboar back?”

Why do I have to help?

“I see, so your name is Veight. Mine happens to be Gomoviroa. Well met.”

The girl in the pointed hat who was apparently called Gomoviroa smiled at me. I wasn’t sure what I should do with this girl, but just telling her to go back was probably not the best of options. I watched the Garney brothers try to drag their prize back to the village out of the corner of my eye, then turned to Gomoviroa.

“Ms. Gomoviroa, why are you here?”

“Mmm... Just call me Movi.”

“Does it really matter what I call you? Just tell me what you’re doing here.”

Gomoviroa frowned and replied, “I came here to meet you werewolves.”

“Us?”

“Indeed. I am currently researching the ecologies of different demon species. I’m here to investigate what kind of environment the werewolves live in.”

Investigate, huh? That certainly sounded suspicious. She could use magic, wanted to research the world, and was far older than she appeared. Just like me. *Could she be another reincarnator?* Seeing my suspicious gaze, Gomoviroa

straightened her back and looked me in the eye.

“I am no mere human. The aging of my body stopped centuries ago...I think? At any rate, I have lived a long time.”

“How old are you now?”

“I stopped counting long ago, boy. Besides, did no one teach you that it’s rude to ask a single woman her age? Regardless, I’m much older than you.”

Gomoviroa pulled her hat low, covering her expression. I couldn’t hide my surprise. This was a real eternal loli, in the flesh. I’d seen a lot of new things since being reincarnated, but this was a first.

Seeing as Gomoviroa was no normal human, I agreed to guide her to our hidden village. There was no way I’d be able to overpower her or kill her in order to keep her silent, so the best thing to do was just agree to her request. I could have tried to run, but considering the Garney brothers were still loitering around, she would have just found them instead. While the two of them were strong in a fight, they were worthless at anything that required stealth or speed.

“You are a surprisingly accepting boy, you know that?”

“What do you mean?”

My tone was guarded, but Gomoviroa just smiled.

“In most cases, hidden villages are hidden because their inhabitants do not wish for outsiders to find them, correct?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Yet you agreed to guide me regardless.”

“I wouldn’t be able to hide its location from you anyway, so I thought it’d be better to bring you to the elder and let him decide what to do...”

“You’re wise, for one so young.”

More like I’m older than I look, just like you.

As I'd feared, there was a huge uproar when I brought Gomoviroa to the village. However, Gomoviroa just said a few words to the village elder, and the commotion died down almost immediately.

"She says she's a friend of the dragonkin clans..."

"The dragonkin outnumber us. Making them our enemy would cause problems, so let's do as she asks."

"At the very least, we should hear what she has to say first."

The adults were trying to talk in hushed tones, but I could hear everything they said. While I was interested in hearing more, at present I was still just a child.

"Veight, could you bring me a knife? I need to carve up this wildeboar!"

"C-Coming!"

I hastened to my mother's side.

Wildeboars were just a subspecies of boar, and so their meat didn't taste too different from pork. Since they spent most of their days running around searching for prey, their muscles were lean and stripped of excess fat—which made them delicious. Large wildeboars were smoked or pickled for future consumption, but since the one we'd brought today was small, we decided to eat it all in one go. Werewolves needed a lot more food than most races. Around the time I finished helping make dinner, Gomoviroa exited the elder's hut. It appeared she'd finished talking to him.

"Mmmm, I suppose in this situation it would be impossible..." she muttered to herself.

I shouldered a piece of freshly grilled meat and jogged over to her.

"Did you finish your investigation...Miss?"

I'd been more casual with her at first, but now that I knew she was older than me, it was only right that I be more polite. Besides, she seemed to be someone important. Gomoviroa nodded and smiled sadly at me.

"The more I hear about the werewolves' plight, the more I pity you. If only

something could be done to improve your situation.”

Plight, huh? It was true that the current state of werewolves in this world was a far cry from the depictions I’d seen in stories. We were every bit as strong as in the legends, but we were also living in secret, trying to hide from humans.

“When I was as old as I look, werewolves were the scourge of mankind. They would sneak into human villages and start hunting the inhabitants one by one. Even if the villagers knew there was a werewolf in their midst, they had no way of knowing who it was.”

Come to think of it, there’d been a game with that exact premise in my old world.

“Does that mean werewolves lived together with humans back then?”

“Indeed. However, it seems werewolves eventually decided to separate themselves from human society and live in seclusion. While the primary reason was that humans had grown more crafty and developed stronger weapons with time, there was one other reason for the werewolves’ exodus.”

What else could there have been? I tilted my head in confusion, and Gomoviroa grinned at me.

“While humans and werewolves may be of different races, they both have feelings. Many werewolves found they could not bring themselves to eat the people they’d lived together with for so long. You truly are a kind people. Even you tried to save me though you didn’t know who I was, did you not?”

“Uhh, well...”

I could hardly tell her that was because I used to be human too, so I just smiled awkwardly and shrugged. Gomoviroa tapped my shoulder with her staff in response and said, “Well, enough of that. Today has been a long day, and I am rather tuckered out.”

“Oh, we just finished making dinner if you want to join us. It’s wildeboar stew.”

“Now that sounds like quite the meal.”

That evening, everyone in the village showed up for an impromptu festival. It was ostensibly in honor of the guest who'd arrived. We didn't have much else to do for fun in the village, so people really went all out.

"Oi, Garbert! No snatching food before the start! Naughty boys like you deserve a spanking!"

"Oww, that's really hot, Fahn! Stop, Owwww!"

Fahn, who was holding a pot of stew, chased the Garney brothers away from the food. She was normally really kind, but when she got angry she was a terror. Personally, I was a fan of celebrations like this where everyone got to cut loose a little. Especially since werewolves were all really kind to their own. The best thing about parties like these, though, was the food.

While werewolves were constantly hunting for prey, we rarely caught enough to let everyone eat their fill. I needed to eat a full kilogram of meat before I was satiated. And thanks to how much stew we'd made, I'd be able to eat to my stomach's content.

The party was held at the village's central hall, which was really just a shack that was a bit larger than the others. Cauldrons of stew lined the main table, with platters of skewered meat interposed between them. Since reincarnating, my biggest issue with this world has been food. Back in Japan, I'd been able to get fried chicken and fresh-baked croquettes from a convenience store whenever I wanted, but here a decent meal was hard to come by.

Once the festivities were in full swing, the adults brought out their precious wine. Us kids were stuck with juice, of course. The elder, who was sitting next to Gomoviroa, held up his porcelain mug and said, "Let us thank our ancestors for blessing us with this fateful encounter. Eat well, my brethren, so that this day may remain forever etched in your memory. A toast to our guest!"

"Cheers!"

I raised my wooden mug towards my friends Monza and Jerrick, then got to work on devouring the tower of meat in front of me. In seconds, my mouth was packed to the brim with lightly salted grilled meat.

Wait. This tastes kind of weird. Since Gomoviroa had drained it of blood, the

meat didn't reek or anything, but at the same time, there was no juiciness to it. It tasted like chicken breast that had been left in the oven too long. From the looks of it, Monza, Jerrick, and the Garney brothers were all thinking the same thing.

"Hey, doesn't this taste weird to you?" Monza muttered.

Jerrick nodded in response.

"It tastes really dry. Did the cook grill it for too long?"

"Fahn's the one who cooked it. There's no way she messed up."

I was rather fond of Fahn, so naturally I came to her defense right away. Gomoviroa poked at her food for a bit, then grinned and looked up at me.

"It appears I was a bit overzealous when draining the wildeboar's blood. You see, my spell doesn't differentiate between blood and any other liquids inside a creature."

Ahh, so that's why it's so dry. My mother smiled gently at me.

"Don't worry, Fahn and I realized that as well when we tasted it earlier. But if you put the meat in the stew, it'll taste perfectly fine. You just need to let it soak for a little while."

That explained why they'd spent so much extra time making stew. Thank god my mother was a genius chef. The mother I'd had in my past life had... No, better not to think about it. Regardless, I was glad I'd been reincarnated here.

After the party was over, Gomoviroa mentioned that she'd be staying the night. Since our house had extra room, we decided to let her sleep with us. Like every other building in the village, our house was made of logs. If you wanted to be fancy, you could call it a log cabin. While the cabin only had a single bedroom, there was a loft above the storage closet. Said loft was my 'room,' so I did have some semblance of privacy. My mom slept on the old bed downstairs.

Our house was pretty run-down, but then most villagers' houses were. Some of the larger families all slept together under one blanket in just one room,

even. Our house at least had a few other makeshift spaces.

“Feel free to use my bed, Miss Gomoviroa.”

Gomoviroa smiled and shook her head.

“Oh, I couldn’t. Besides, I have my own bed right here.”

She pulled out a handkerchief and waved her staff. The handkerchief floated into the air and expanded before my eyes. In seconds, it was as large as a bedsheet. It reminded me of the floating carpets I’d seen in cartoons. *Though I guess in this case it’s a floating bed, not a carpet.*

“Oh my...” my mother whispered, awed.

Gomoviroa’s grin grew wider, and she said, “Most nights I sleep floating like this. However my magic cannot stave off the elements, so I’m grateful you’re providing me a roof to sleep under.”

She hopped onto her floating bed and took off her pointed hat. With a snap of her fingers, the sheet rose higher, until it was level with the loft. She really was an impressive mage. I’d never seen anyone do the kinds of things she did.

As I settled into my bed, I realized the way I was positioned meant Gomoviroa was right in front of my face. She was lying on her stomach, idly kicking her legs through the air. It was honestly kind of cute. Transfixed, I continued to stare until she finally noticed and floated her sheet closer to me. She docked it against one of the rafters and asked, “Trouble sleeping?”

“It’s just, I’d never seen magic before, and...”

Gomoviroa smiled a little self-consciously and said, “There aren’t any mages among the werewolf clans, after all. In truth, my speciality is necromancy. I’m still in the process of refining flight magic like this.”

“Does that mean I could do things like that too, if I practiced?”

“Fufu, perhaps.” Gomoviroa chose her next words carefully. “Magic is much more difficult than people believe. In order to cast a spell that has any practical purpose, one must understand its fundamentals.”

“What do you mean, fundamentals?”

“For example...take this flotation spell here. Its core comes from the spell used to walk on water.”

I couldn’t even begin to guess how floating and walking on water were related.

“And the spell to walk on water is comprised of a combination of other spells; the spell to manipulate weight, the spell to keep something level, and a few others. Only after mastering all of those spells can one cast a spell like this.”

Her explanation was starting to make sense now. You saw similar systems in games pretty often. Like how if you learned the spells Fire Pillar and Tornado, you could combine them to create Fire Tornado. After spending a few minutes digesting that information, I asked, “By manipulating your weight to be lighter, and fixing yourself in place by using magic that keeps you level, you can walk on water even though its surface is uneven, right? So if you cast the same spell but made yourself even lighter than air, you could make yourself float, right?”

I thought it was just simple reasoning, but my deduction apparently shocked Gomoviroa. She jolted upright and exclaimed, “How did you—!? You have sharp wits, boy...”

“Huh? Uhh, thanks?”

“Wind and water are more similar than they appear. Thus, spells to manipulate water are also effective at manipulating the wind... However, few understand that instinctively like you do.”

“I-I see...”

I was at a loss for how to respond. To be honest, I hadn’t expected her to be this impressed. Gomoviroa’s interest was piqued now though, and she asked me another question.

“Let’s try this next. The spell to make an enemy’s weapons and armor rust requires you to first learn the spell to set things alight. Why is that?”

We learned about that back in middle school. If I recalled correctly, it had something to do with oxidation. Though I had no idea how to explain that in a way that didn’t seem suspicious. After a little consideration I said, “If you burn a needle or a nail, it becomes dull and brittle. When something rusts it also

becomes dull and brittle, so I guess fire and rust must be related somehow?”

“Indeed. Well reasoned, boy.”

Gomoviroa looked impressed, but honestly, this was getting a little awkward. It’s not like I’d made that observation on my own or anything, I’d just happened to already know. Gomoviroa nodded to herself a few times, then sighed.

“It would be a waste for someone of your talents to languish here. However, werewolves are hunters by nature. I imagine a hunter such as yourself has no interest in the mysteries of magic...”

Now hold on just a second! I would like nothing more than to be taught magic, actually. My physical strength was average for a werewolf, but I felt like if I learned magic I’d be able to grow much stronger than I was now. And if I grew stronger, I’d be more respected too. At this rate, I was doomed to forever be the laughingstock of the Garney brothers.

Besides, if I learned how to use magic, I’d be able to hide our village better from humans, and we’d have an easier time hunting for game and farming vegetables. I straightened my posture and joined my hands together in a pleading gesture.

“I want to become a mage like you!”

Surprised, Gomoviroa cut short her musings and looked up at me.

“You wish to become a magician? Why would a werewolf turn to magic?”

“I’m...not really that strong. But I want to be!”

Upon hearing that, Gomoviroa’s expression grew stern and she asked, “For what purpose?”

“I want to protect everyone in the village. Also... I kinda want the other kids to respect me more.”

In truth, the latter was more of a driving force than the former, but I was too embarrassed to say that. Gomoviroa was a little taken aback, but then she chuckled and said, “You’re one honest kid... Very well, I suppose we can at least find out whether or not you have the aptitude to use magic.”

“Really!? Thank you so much!”

“But know that if you lack the talent, you will have no choice but to... Are you even listening to me?”

And so, I became the Great Sage Gomoviroa’s disciple. From that day onward, Gomoviroa would visit our village regularly. Every visit, she would give me a lesson, then assign me with homework to complete by the next time she came.

“First, let us have you master the basic foundations of magic to see what class of spells you’re proficient in.”

“I’ll do my best, Teacher!”

She put a finger on her chin and looked pensively at me.

“Teacher, huh... I know all my other disciples call me that, but could you not find a more grandiose name to call me?”

The heck’s that supposed to mean? I guess there is one thing I’ve always wanted to call someone.

“Okay, Master Gomoviroa!”

“Mmm, I like the sound of that. You have good naming sense, boy,” she said and patted my head.

Gomoviroa’s training was much harsher than I’d expected. While I possessed naturally large mana reserves, Gomoviroa struggled to find styles of magic I had any affinity for. First, she tried to see if I could use necromancy like her.

“The fundamentals of necromancy stem from speaking with the spirits of the departed, and leading them to salvation. It is only those who understand and care for the dead who are granted permission to use their mortal shells. It is a magic that must never be misused.”

“Yes, Master!”

As most mages were mortal, they tended to pick up on the concepts of necromancy with relative ease. Unfortunately, I had no aptitude for it whatsoever. I managed to learn enough to control undead creatures other people had summoned for me, but I couldn’t raise them myself.

“It’s rare to find someone so unsuited to necromancy... In a way, it’s a talent unto itself.”

Even Master was impressed by how little talent I had for necromancy. *Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I was reincarnated.*

Next, Gomoviroa tested my potential in phantasmal magic. As the spells in this category all required little mana to use, it was easy to see whether or not one had an affinity for it. Unfortunately, it appeared I wasn’t suited for phantasms either.

“I see you have little artistic talent.”

“I like looking at pictures, but I’m not very good at drawing them.”

“‘Not very good’ is an understatement, my boy. Try absolutely terrible. Is...that meant to be an apple?”

Master pointed to the tiny illusion floating in front of me.

“It’s supposed to be a wolf, Master.”

“A wolf, you say...”

I know I’m not very good, but at least don’t mistake it for an apple!

After that, we tried destruction magic.

“In order to create a fireball, one must combine the spell to ignite a spark, the spell to maintain something at a constantly high temperature, and the spell to throw mana.”

“That sounds like a lot of effort.”

“Because it is. Even masters of destruction magic need ten seconds to summon a fireball. Nor are these fireballs all that powerful... At your level, the best you’d be able to create is something strong enough to singe a log.”

“Sounds like it would be faster to just transform and beat my enemy to a pulp.”

“It would indeed. Let’s just move on to the next category.”

Next on the list was transportation magic.

“By the way, boy, are you good at arithmetic?”

“Nope.”

“In order to teleport just yourself to a place you can see, you need to solve equations on this level in your head. Does this make any sense to you?”

The moment I saw the formula Gomoviroa was drawing, I abandoned all hope of ever learning transportation magic.

“Just so you know, in order to teleport somewhere further than what you can see, you need to manage twice as many formulas. The greater the distance, the more complicated they get.”

“I give up...”

Transportation magic required solving for the destination coordinates all in your head, which was something so difficult even Master still struggled with it.

“Also, for long-distance travel, you need to also factor in a large elevation difference. If you’re not careful, you’ll find yourself meeting a grisly fate.”

“What’ll happen to you?”

Gomoviroa closed her eyes and sighed.

“The first time I used a teleportation spell, I went so far up that it looked like night even though it was noon. Worse, the air was too thin to breathe, and it was so cold I almost froze.”

In other words, if you didn’t account for the curvature of the planet when teleporting far away, you’d find yourself in space.

“I’m amazed you made it back alive, Master.”

Gomoviroa trembled and whispered, “The world...”

“Hm?”

“The world was so blue.”

“I see...”

Yeah, I’d have been terrified too.

Spirit magic came next.

“This is one we’ll have to skip over, I’m afraid... I can’t teach it to you.”

“Why’s that, Master?”

“The hearts of others are an eternal mystery to me...”

Things like telepathy, hypnosis, and brainwashing all sounded really interesting, but as Gomoviroa had no talent for them I’d have to find another teacher if I wanted to learn. After telling me all that, she took off her pointed hat and floated into the air. She looked oddly forlorn.

“Veight.”

“Yes, Master?”

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful if there was a spell out there that gave you friends?”

“But I already have friends...”

We tried plenty of other categories after that, but for one reason or another, none of them really clicked with me. One month had passed since I’d become Gomoviroa’s apprentice. She floated unsteadily in the air, lost deep in thought.

“Mmmm, I never thought finding magic that suits you would be so difficult.”

Though she was a little shaky, she’d improved with flotation magic enough to the point where she could make herself float.

“Master, you’ve gotten a lot better at floating now.”

“Well, though I may be your teacher, I am still learning myself. Incidentally, the spell to make oneself float is a subset of strengthening magic.”

Since it was called strengthening magic, I thought it would be more suited to combat, but according to Master’s explanation, it was something closer to the buff magic you saw in RPGs.

“By condensing mana inside your body, you can strengthen different parts of yourself. That’s how strengthening magic works. However you can strengthen yourself simply by transforming into your wolf form, so it’s likely not as useful for you.”

While she might think strengthening magic was unnecessary for werewolves, I was still interested in learning it.

“But if I knew how to use it I could fly in the sky or walk on water like you. That sounds like a lot of fun to me. Plus, it’d probably come in handy.”

“However, it will do nothing to shore up your weak points. If anything, it’ll only improve the areas you’re already proficient in.”

As strengthening magic was focused on yourself, it wasn’t very useful at long ranges, which was where werewolves struggled. When a werewolf transformed, their hands and claws became a lot larger, meaning they had a hard time using bows or javelins.

“Though humans are weak individually, they can utilize cavalry and castle walls to maintain their distance from a werewolf. Furthermore, if they shoot at you from a distance, you’ll have no way to fight back.”

As there were far more humans than there were werewolves, if we ever got stuck in a battle like that, we’d be obliterated. Humans weren’t our only problem either. There were other demons out there who released poison spores or spread poison mist, meaning you couldn’t get close. And against enemies who breathed fire, werewolves had no choice but to run. Regardless, that was why Gomoviroa was pushing me to try other magic instead, but honestly, I thought strengthening magic could be plenty useful too.

“Master, could I block arrows and protect myself from poison and fire with strengthening magic?”

“Of course you *could*, but... Do you plan on strengthening yourself to withstand those kinds of attacks and then charging headfirst at your enemy?”

“I mean if I could get close, my fangs and nails would do the job just fine.”

Gomoviroa lapsed back into thought.

“Hmmm. It’s true that a werewolf’s transformation is similar to strengthening magic, and it does seem like something you would be suited for, but...”

Now I really wanted to try it.

“While the spells themselves may be simple to construct, do not forget that it

is your own body that is the medium here. Failure might result in damage to your flesh."

"I understand, Master."

And so, I started learning strengthening magic. This was how Gomoviroa started my first lesson: "The simplest and most important thing when it comes to strengthening magic is knowing how to make yourself heavier."

"Why heavier?"

"I believe a practical demonstration would be the easiest way to show you. Here, lift me up."

While Gomoviroa may have been far older than me, she still looked like a pretty little girl.

"Come now, there's nothing to be embarrassed about. A child like you shouldn't be worrying about such things yet."

"But I mean... Umm, could I just give you a piggyback instead?"

Gomoviroa's expression grew stern, and she shook her head.

"Absolutely not. If something happens, I may end up breaking your back by accident. If you're holding me in your hands, no matter how heavy I get, you can just drop me. Now stop complaining and hold me up."

Even if it was for safety reasons, I still felt awkward holding up Gomoviroia. Also, she seemed strangely insistent.

"If you insist... Up we go."

Master was small enough that even in my human form I was strong enough to lift her. Unlike werewolves, who were all built rather sturdily, Gomoviroa was thinner than a twig. Also, she smelled really nice. And for some reason, she seemed rather happy when I lifted her up.

"Yes, splendid. I'll begin now, so once you feel I'm too heavy, feel free to drop me."

"O-Okay."

A second later, Master's weight increased rapidly.

"Whoa!?"

She weighed as much as an adult now. A child like me didn't have the strength to keep holding her up. However, dropping a girl because she was heavy was one of the rudest things a guy could do. Before I'd been reincarnated as a werewolf, I'd been a man. Not just any man, but a true gentleman. And now was the time to prove I still was.

"Nnnnnnnnngh!"

"This really isn't the time to be trying to show your strength off, boy."

As she said that, Master waved her staff. A second later, her weight returned to normal. Throughout the whole thing, her appearance hadn't changed at all. However, her weight had definitely increased to that of an adult's.

"That is how the spell to increase one's weight works. On its own, it's rather useless. But it incorporates the fundamentals of strengthening magic, so it's important for beginners to practice. Much like a martial arts form."

She pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket and scrawled something onto it with her pen before handing it to me.

"This outlines the basic procedures of how to use the spell, and how you're going to use it to train. Make sure you don't slack off on your practice."

"Yes, Master!"

After that, Gomoviroa vanished for quite some time. It appeared she was still in the middle of her investigation and still had other regions she needed to inspect. There was no telling when she would have time to come back. So for the time being, I continued practicing the routine she'd told me.

"First, relax your muscles and take a deep breath."

In order to sharpen one's focus, it was necessary to first relax the body.

"Spread your legs shoulder-width apart, and swing your arms back and forth."

I got into the proper position and started swinging my arms like I used to do

before going swimming in school. Though it was the same routine every time, I made sure to double-check that I was doing everything just as Master had written down. All of these preliminary exercises were so that I didn't accidentally put in too much strength.

"Then finally...smile, and tense your muscles a little!"

Smiling naturally caused me to calm down some more. However, it was important not to relax too much, which was why the routine ended with tensing yourself again. *Alright, preparations complete.* It was finally time to start chanting the spell. It wasn't the kind of fancy-sounding incantations I'd made up back when I was in middle school. It was a real, proper incantation. Honestly, that made it even more awesome. Without further ado, I sang, "Iete! Kaahn! Viirii!"

For a chant, it was pretty short. Even the shortest chants I'd come up with had taken up a full three lines on my notebook. That being said, this spell was apparently so short because the incantation had been refined down to its most efficient form. Longer chants were both harder to remember, and harder to say in the heat of combat. And so, mages were constantly researching ways to abbreviate them to only the necessary sounds. Also, it seemed that once you got used to chanting a spell, you could shorten it even further. For example, the weight increasing spell sounded something more like "Itkanvir" when said by people who were practiced with it. Eventually, you'd get so used to a spell that you could chant it in your native language, and then eventually just cast it without a chant at all.

"So did you get heavier?"

Surprised by the sudden voice behind me, I leapt into the air.

"Whoa!?"

Turning around, I saw it was Monza who'd interrupted me. Her family had been hunters for generations, and they were the ones who procured most of the village's meat, which explained why she was so good at sneaking up on people. She'd grown up surrounded by experts at stealth and tracking. Not only that, she never let her own guard down.

"Looks like you didn't, or you wouldn't have been able to jump so high..."

I hung my head sadly in response to Monza's words. In truth, I'd yet to see my practice bear any significant results. If I'd had a scale, I'd be able to tell if my magic was having any effect at all, but as it was, all I knew for sure was that I wasn't getting heavy enough that I could feel it. More importantly, though, there was something I needed to make sure of.

"Hey, Monza."

"Yeah?"

"Did you hear me chanting?"

Monza grinned wickedly.

"I heard everything you said before that too."

"Gah."

"You looked like you were concentrating really hard, so I didn't want to bother you. Guess I should have figured you'd be embarrassed about it."

Her unique way of showing consideration did nothing but rip my pride to shreds. Though I supposed it was my fault for being so embarrassed about it. This wasn't like in my old life where I'd thought an esoteric chant would magically whisk me to the second dimension. This was a tried and tested training method all mages used.

At any rate, it was better to stop thinking about my past life before I reopened old wounds. I sighed to myself and said, "Apparently once you get good at it you can make yourself so heavy you can't even move."

As I said that, Monza lithely leapt onto a nearby tree branch. Even though she was in her human form, she moved as silently as a ninja.

"Hey, what's so good about being so heavy you can't move? What's it let you do?"

"Nothing, really..."

"Ehh, that sounds so boring."

Monza was never one to mince words.

"It's just a spell to help you get better at using magic, it's not my fault it

doesn’t do anything. Unless I master this spell, I can’t learn any of the others.”

“Hey, can you shoot lightning bolts or fly in the sky yet?”

“I wish.”

Now that Monza was starting to lose interest in the topic, I was able to regain a semblance of composure, and with it, a sinking sense of defeat. I’d failed this time too. I leaned against the trunk of the tree Monza was in, and read over Gomoviroa’s note again.

—Movi’s Special Instructions!—

★ How to Master Magic With These Easy Steps! ★

First and foremost, concentrate on the flow of your mana! The key to using strengthening magic is understanding how to take mana from the outside world and concentrate it into your body! If you find yourself unable to visualize the flow of mana, that’s fine. Just imagine it happening anyway! If you keep your noggin working on it, you’ll be able to see it eventually!

She had probably written it in this strange, childish style to make it easier to understand, but it honestly just creeped me out. There was just too much of a difference between her writing style, and the way she talked. It reminded me of the people who were super quiet in real life, but got really talkative in online chats. Monza, who’d been peeking over my shoulder, murmured, “Mages are weird.”

“I think she’s the only one who’s this weird.”

I hope so, anyway.

“I know it says to imagine it, but I don’t get how I’m supposed to do that...”

I had already tried to visualize myself growing heavier in various different ways. For example, pretending like my body had turned to steel, imagining that the mana was water, weighing me down, even trying to pretend that I was carrying a giant barrel on my back. None of them had worked.

Monza hung upside-down from her tree branch and yawned.

“Does it not work the way you’re imagining it now?”

“Yeah, apparently each person imagines mana in different ways.”

Apparently Master was able to make herself heavier by thinking depressing thoughts. She was definitely a genius alright, just not one to be envied. *Maybe if I get depressed enough, I’ll be able to finally make myself heavier.* I sighed again, and Monza’s ears twitched.

“There’s a commotion going on over there. I think someone’s hurt.”

As always, her hearing was unbelievably sharp. Naturally, this world had no ambulances. Worse, our village didn’t have any doctors. The nearest one was in a human settlement. Because of that, injuries that would have been minor in my old world had the potential to be fatal here. Werewolves were pretty sturdy so they didn’t die easily, but common infectious diseases could still kill them pretty quickly.

“Let’s go. They might need our help.”

“Yeah.”

I slid my notebook back into my pocket and chased after Monza. As I drew closer to the source of the sound, I was surprised to find that it was coming from the Garney brothers’ house.

“Bro, it hurts...”

“Stay with me, Nibert! I’m right here! Don’t you die on me, ya hear!”

Garbert, the older brother, was pressing a bloody T-shirt against a pale-faced Nibert. It wasn’t doing much to stop the bleeding. All of the other adults were scurrying about in an attempt to help.

“Boil some hot water! We need to wash the wound!”

“Hang in there, Nib! I brought some herbs that’ll stop the bleeding!”

Vodd, who normally worked at the pace of a snail, and Mary, who was always smiling kindly were both aghast. When I tried to get closer to see how bad it was, my mom shot out a hand to hold me back.

“Don’t come over here! It’s dangerous, so wait inside the house!”

“What do you mean, dangerous? What did this to him?”

Few animals were powerful enough to harm a werewolf, even if they were a child. Whatever did this must have been a creature that possessed mana. In other words, a monster. My mom turned to me and said in a low voice, “A Golden Brute wildeboar. Listen up you two, don’t come out of the house no matter what happens.”

“Oh no...”

Werewolves’ greatest enemies were the Golden Brutes. Occasionally, animals with golden fur would appear inside the forest. While no one knew where they came from, everyone knew they were stronger than normal animals. However, strength alone wouldn’t be enough to overpower a werewolf. These Golden Brutes had one other characteristic that made them dangerous. For whatever reason, werewolves couldn’t maintain their wolf form near them. Those with weaker wills just passed out upon seeing one. Monza and I exchanged worried glances. Just then, Garbert walked over and slumped down on the stone steps beside us. He cradled his head and sobbed, “Nibert...if only I’d been more careful...”

He was normally so rowdy, but right now he just looked ragged. Werewolves valued family more than most races. To Garbert, his brother’s life was more important than his own. The least I could do before going back home was comfort him a little.

“What happened?”

“Veight... I...”

According to Garbert, the two of them had gone wildeboar hunting like usual. When they spotted a large beast in a faraway thicket, they chased after it. But when they got closer, they discovered they’d been chasing down a Golden Brute. At that point, they were too close to run away. It targeted Nibert first, and since he’d been forced back into his human form, the Golden Brute’s charge sent him flying. He’d been hurt so bad that he could barely move, and another few attacks would have seen him killed. The only reason Nibert had been able to escape was because Garbert had acted as a decoy and drawn the

Golden Brute's attention.

"If it'd been just one of us there, we definitely would have died."

"Yeah... It's because you're always together that you're so strong."

On their own, each of the Garney brothers could only display half of their full potential. Even now, Garbert was completely deflated. I patted his back reassuringly.

"Just stay by Nibert's side. I'm sure the adults will figure out how to deal with the Golden Brute."

"Yeah, okay..."

Garbert nodded and returned to nursing his younger brother. He seemed like a completely different person. On the way back home, I thought back on what I'd seen. There were a lot of werewolves who had lost their lives to monsters. We were strong, but not immortal. Unless I found a way to do something about the monster attacks, we'd just keep on losing more and more people.

By the next morning, Nibert's condition had stabilized. Thanks to Garbert's speedy treatment of his wounds, his life had been saved. However, quite a few of Nibert's bones had been broken, and it would be a few months before he fully recovered. While it was great that Nibert was going to make it, it didn't change the fact that a dangerous Golden Brute was wandering around the forest near the village. The adults had left in a group to hunt it together, but since they would have to fight it in their human forms, they knew that a few of them probably wouldn't be coming back.

"I'll be going, then. Make sure you keep the door shut tight, and don't go out until I come back."

All I could do was watch as my mother left for a hunt she might not return from. My father had died when I was still a baby, so my mother was the only family I had left. If I lost her too, I'd be alone in this new world. But as I was now, I didn't even have the strength to protect her.

"Stay safe..." I said forlornly.

She gently patted my head and replied, “Don’t worry, I’ll have everyone else with me. More importantly, keep a lookout to make sure no one suspicious comes into the village.”

She turned around and disappeared into the forest together with all the other adults.

After my mom left, I continued practicing magic for a while. I only stopped when I was interrupted by a knock at my door.

“It’s me, Veight. Please open up.”

“Jerrick?”

I opened the door, and saw the blacksmith’s son looking nervously up at me.

“What’s wrong?”

“Is it okay if I come in? It’s dangerous outside.”

Dangerous how? Before I could ask, Jerrick added, “It’s coming toward the village.”

He held up a large steel bear trap. It had been smashed into multiple pieces. What really caught my attention though was the golden hairs stuck to the trap’s twisted teeth. By “it” Jerrick meant the Golden Brute. If the Golden Brute had circled back around to the village, we were in big trouble. The only people left here were kids.

“Where did you set that trap up?”

“West of the farm, near the huge fallen tree. When I went to look around the village, I found it like this.”

Jerrick’s bear traps were tough enough that even werewolves had trouble ripping them off. They were meant to ward off wild beasts, not trap prey, so it made sense that he built them sturdier than most.

However, the Golden Brute had ripped it off, most likely just using the strength of its snout and legs. That took more strength than any werewolf had. Moreover, there was practically no blood on the ruined trap. Despite the considerable force the trap must have closed with, it hadn’t done much damage

to the wildeboar.

“That’s one insane monster...”

“You said it.”

I’d helped Jerrick out with his blacksmithing chores a few times, and he trusted me.

“What do we do, Veight? Do we send someone to call the adults back?”

“No, it’s too dangerous for any of us to go into the forest. That monster chose to avoid fighting with the hunting party because it knew it wouldn’t stand a chance against so many of us.”

The term Golden Brute made me think it would have been stupid, but it appeared it was much more cunning than a normal beast. Upon closer inspection, I noticed the trap had been cleverly shattered too. It had probably used leverage to its advantage to break off the trap without much effort. Meaning it at least had as much intelligence as a child.

“What should we do, then?”

I plucked a golden hair from the remnants of the trap and held it up. It glowed with a sinister golden light. *Wait. Is it just me, or is the gold on it rubbing off?*

I rubbed the hair, and a few motes of golden dust floated into the sky.

“What the heck?”

I feel like I remember this from somewhere. As I sifted through my memories, Jerrick asked impatiently, “Veight, do you think we’ll be safe if we just hide inside our houses?”

“No way, you saw what it did to Nibert. It’d blow right through wooden houses like these.”

None of the buildings in this village were all that sturdy. A few charges from even a normal wildeboar would be enough to break them down. I quickly weighed my options, then asked Jerrick, “How many people are left in the village?”

“About thirty? They’re all kids like us, though.”

Because of how dangerous Golden Brutes were, the adults had decided to take everyone with them to hunt this one down. Even Fahn, who was barely a few years older than us, had joined the expedition force. Among those left behind, me and Jerrick were probably the strongest. Which meant it was up to us to handle things.

“I know that expression, Veight. You’re not really thinking of fighting it, are you?”

Jerrick looked me in the eyes, and I nodded.

“Can you get some more bear traps for me?”

“I figured you’d ask that.” He pointed outside my window, and I saw he’d brought a wagon of them with him. “I’ve got a bunch of bear traps and a crossbow in there. I brought a spear and an axe too, but they probably won’t be any help.”

“I knew I could count on you.”

To be honest, I had no idea how to use a weapon. Still, I’d be more useful armed than not. I decided to take Jerrick’s spear with me.

“Alright, go around to the other kids and tell them to meet at the Garney house.”

“Why there?”

Jerrick gave me a confused look.

“The reason the Golden Brute probably came here was because it was tracking the scent of Nibert’s blood. It laid low last night because it knew it had no chance with all the adults around. But now that they’re gone, it’ll go for the Garney brothers again.”

For a brute, it was a pretty crafty and persistent hunter. Then again, only a brute would be this cruel.

“Hurry, We don’t have much time to prepare.”

“G-Gotcha.” Jerrick nodded and muttered quietly to himself, “Thank god you’re on our side...”

The kids left in the village were all in their early teens or younger. Garbert was the oldest among us, but since he was still looking after his brother, he wouldn't be much help in combat. In fact, since he was likely also one of the Golden Brute's targets, it was up to us to protect him.

"To be honest, it kind of stings that we have to protect those two bullies."

Jerrick smiled, making it clear he was joking. A while back, the Garney brothers had made fun of the sword he'd smithed himself. I'd jumped in to put a stop to their teasing, and Jerrick and I had been good friends ever since.

"I put all the traps where you asked me to, Veight. And like you asked, I didn't put any markers nearby. Make sure you don't accidentally step on one."

"I won't, don't worry. I'll tell the others not to get close to that area either."

The Garney house was surrounded by a number of other houses. I'd had all the other kids hide in the closest ones.

"This way we're all within sight of each other. If anything happens, everyone else can come help. Stick close to me, and whatever you do, don't let yourself be isolated."

For some reason, Jerrick looked happy as he nodded.

"You got it."

Just then, Monza sauntered over.

"I saw something sparkly in the forest to the north. It's coming this way."

"Perfect, everything's going according to plan."

I'd left Nibert's blood-soaked shirt near the village's northern entrance. My guess was the Golden Brute would be lured in by the smell. With that, we'd at least have an idea of what direction it'd come from. Seeing my confident smile, Monza cocked her head and asked, "Aren't you scared, Veight? We're up against a monster."

"Hm? I guess I am a little scared. But it's just a monster."

"It's not *just* a monster..."

I had a good grasp on what I was up against now. While I still wasn't certain, if my prediction was correct, the Golden Brute wasn't anything to be afraid of. Everyone seemed to think that Golden Brutes were creatures beyond the realm of mortal understanding, like gods or spirits, but I doubted that was the case. This Golden Brute was just another living creature, like anything else. And anything that lived could be killed.

"Don't worry, Monza. Even if we lose, we won't die."

If my plan failed, I had an escape route into the forest prepared for everyone. Once we ran into the woods, we'd hopefully be able to meet up with the adults and make it back safely.

"If we mess up and don't kill it, I'll make sure to slow it down long enough to let everyone escape still. We'll use that time to run to where all the adults are."

I was a coward by nature, so I'd made sure to think up a backup plan first and foremost. However, that seemed to confuse Monza even more.

"In that case, why don't we just run away now?"

"Because unless we stop its movements, it'll just chase us down. Besides..."

"Besides what?"

"The Garney brothers might be idiots, but they're still technically my cousins. I won't be satisfied until I teach that monster a lesson about what happens when you mess with my family."

Monza burst out laughing, "Ahaha, you're a funny one, Veight! Alright, let's give this plan of yours a shot. I'll follow your orders, so just tell me what to do."

"Thanks. If you could keep a lookout for me, that'd be great. If it looks like it's too dangerous to stay, just run."

"You got it, boss."

She gave me a salute and went back to her lookout duties. Meanwhile, I went around to the side of the Garney house and climbed up the big fruit tree they had growing there. Directly underneath the branch I was sitting on was the house's roof. From here I'd be safe even if the Golden Brute broke down the house, and I had a good view of my surroundings. Plus, this way I could hit the

brute from above. Jerrick was sitting in another branch with his crossbow at the ready. I'd told him to go hide with the others, but he'd refused to leave my side, so here he was.

"Hey Veight, are we really doing this?"

"Yeah, don't worry. With my magic, it'll be a piece of cake."

I was planning on bringing it down with my weight-increasing spell. As long as you kept on accumulating mana, you apparently could make yourself as heavy as you wanted. Of course if you made yourself too heavy you'd be crushed under your own weight, but if I timed things right, I'd be able to strike a huge blow against the Golden Brute.

"I need to learn how to use this spell properly or we're toast..."

Unless I found a way to truly imagine myself becoming heavier, I'd never be able to use this spell. *How to imagine myself being heavier, huh?* I thought back to my middle school science classes. We'd been taught that a person's weight changed depending on their location. For example, someone who weighs 60 kilograms on earth would only weigh a sixth of that on the moon. I didn't know exactly how weight here compared to weight on earth, but it probably wasn't too different. *Man, thinking about all those middle school science experiments sure takes me back. I remember in one of them we tied arrows to things to show how gravity...* As I reminisced, I suddenly felt something flash in the back of my mind.

"Wait, could this be..."

Just then, I heard Monza howl. "Enemy, near."

It appeared the Golden Brute was on its way. I looked up and saw a giant golden wildeboar warily shuffle through the village entrance. Even from this distance, I could tell it was massive. Probably twice the size of a minivan. Honestly, it looked less like a boar and more like an elephant.

It sniffed at the torn scraps of Nibert's shirt I'd scattered around, and slowly made its way over to where we were hiding. All of the kids should have heard Monza's howl. Once the Golden Brute made it to the Garney house, they were all supposed to run. The only ones staying behind would be me, Jerrick, and the

Garney brothers.

If I was honest with myself, I'd prefer to be running away with everyone else. But unless I weakened the brute here, it'd just catch up to us and hunt us down. We'd be defenseless in the forest, and more than a few of us would definitely die. I absolutely could not allow that to happen.

I wrapped a strip of cloth around my face. It hung loosely, and the extra fabric fluttered in the breeze. Jerrick looked over and asked, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yeah. Don't worry, I'll be fine."

There was nothing to be afraid of. I'd already died once before, after all. The shimmering wildeboar finally spotted the Garney house. Once it had pinpointed its prey, it broke into a trot. It continued gaining speed as it headed this way, until it was in a headlong rush.

"I knew it, it's different from regular wildeboars," Jerrick muttered.

I nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, it's a lot bolder."

Normal wildeboars charged anything they thought they could kill, but they were extremely cautious until they were certain they were stronger than their quarry. They spent a lot of time sniffing out their potential enemies. While this boar might have been a little different, it was still a boar. Meaning its greatest strength lay in its charge.

Here it comes. I gripped my spear tight to make sure I didn't drop it, and clung to my tree branch. Jerrick tied himself to the tree with a rope, and wound his crossbow. The Golden Brute smashed into the wall with the force of a truck. The whole building shook, as if a localized earthquake had just occurred. Even the tree we were perched on swayed back and forth. At the same time, there was a series of metallic snaps from Jerricks' bear traps. I looked down and saw that three of them had latched onto the Golden Brute's legs. While it might have been able to remove one easily, three would be harder to handle. *Actually, make that four.* The brute thrashed about wildly, but even for something with its might, it would be some time before it untangled itself.

Now was the perfect time to strike. However before I could do anything, particles of fine golden dust surrounded the wildeboar, making the area around it blurry. My guess was those golden specks were spores of some kind. The reason this boar was golden was because it was infested with thousands of these mold-like spores. Its hair was still brown, not golden. In other words, it was just a normal wildeboar. When it rubbed against something, the spores came off and flew through the air. The spores probably infected their host and altered its behavior patterns. If my conjecture was correct, the beast itself should be no different from a normal wildeboar. Meaning its weak point was the snout.

I tightened the cloth around my face to make sure I didn't breathe in any spores. Their mere presence meant I couldn't transform, but I wanted to avoid inhaling them and falling unconscious. I focused my mind and imagined an arrow pointing downward. I'd gotten the idea from one of the old physics experiments I'd done in middle school. I was different from everyone else in this world. I'd experienced different things, and lived a different life. Which meant if I wanted to use magic, I had to draw inspiration from a different place. For me, imagining a downward force tugging at my body was the best mental image to make myself heavier. I sucked in the invisible mana around me, and shaped it into an arrow extending down. Then I slowly chanted, "Iete! Kaahn! Viirii!"

Once I finished my incantation, I felt my body grow noticeably heavier. As if invisible sandbags were being piled on top of me one after another.

"Whoa."

I could feel the magic weighing me down, and I hurriedly braced myself. I needed to make sure I didn't fall in the wrong direction, or I'd land in a sea of bear traps and most likely die. I crawled along my branch, trying to position myself directly above the wildeboar's head. I didn't look very graceful, but then again, I lacked Monza's grace. Finally, I made it to my destination. The wildeboar was still busy trying to gnaw off Jerrick's bear traps. This was going to be my only shot. I stretched the imaginary arrow in my mind as far down as it would go. It went into the ground and still I kept stretching it. *I'll stab right through you with this arrow!* A second later, the branch snapped under my

increased weight.

“Huh!?”

“Veight!?”

Jerrick’s voice faded into the distance as I dropped like a rock. I felt a violent impact, and a cloud of golden spores rose up around me. Before I could process anything else, I fainted.

Thinking back on it now, my life had been a pretty boring one. It wasn’t like I’d had it hard or anything. It had just been really normal. And ended really fast. I wasn’t talking about this life, by the way. I was referring to my old one. Comparing the two, I’d say my life as a werewolf had been more fulfilling. I had friends, and everyone in the village looked out for each other. Since we were still demons, it was might that decided what was right, but even then, the people here didn’t torment the weak. We were too busy surviving to fight amongst ourselves. So overall, I would say this life was much better than my old one. *Yep, definitely much better. Which is why I’d prefer not to die just yet.*

“Veight! Veight!”

My world was shaking.

“Veight, get a hold of yourself!”

“Get up, Veight! You’re still alive, right!?”

Pretty sure I am. At least I don’t think I’ve been reincarnated again. My name’s still Veight. And those voices definitely sound like Jerrick and Monza’s.

“Snap out of it already, Veight!”

That’s definitely Garbert’s voice.

I opened my eyes and saw Monza’s lithe form in front of me. Apparently she always wore tight-fitting clothes in order to mask her scent from prey. At any rate, those clothes suited her. *Yep, doesn’t look like I was reincarnated.* My consciousness was finally coming into focus. I waved to Monza and said, “Yeah, don’t worry. I’m up. And I think I’m fine.”

Monza, Jerrick, and Garbert all crowded in close to me.

“By the way, shouldn’t you guys be running? The Golden Brute’s not...”

I trailed off as I realized I was sitting on top of the aforementioned Golden Brute. Or rather, its corpse. My spear was stuck deep into its spine, with the haft broken off. *Looks like I stabbed it on the way down.* However, that wasn’t what had killed the monster. From the looks of it, my fall had broken its neck. There were a lot less golden spores around its head, and its neck was twisted at an impossible angle. On top of that, my knees were covered in gold dust. Putting two and two together, I figured I’d kneed it so hard it died. *But just how heavy had I made myself that just kneeing it was enough to break its neck? I’m surprised my body managed to withstand the force.*

“I guess werewolves are pretty sturdy even in their human form,” I muttered as I looked down at my knees.

Everyone stared at me in amazement.



“Did you hear that?”

“Does anything faze this guy?”

Monza and Garbert exchanged dumbfounded looks. On the other hand, Jerrick smiled proudly.

“I knew you could do it, Veight. You’re one crazy guy.”

Motes of gold dust rained down around us, giving the scene a somewhat surreal feel. However, neither the spores nor the wildeboar’s fur were especially mystical. Even as we watched, their glow began to fade. It appeared the spores couldn’t survive without their host. *Still, we should probably disinfect the area with alcohol and vinegar later, just in case.* Spores were terrifying things. We sat there for a while longer, until we heard the adults returning.

“Veiiiiiiiiiiiiiight!”

A black-furred werewolf, my mom, was leading the pack back. From the looks of it, Fahn was right behind her.

“Veight, what the heck did you do!?”

Judging from their tones, I was about to get a big scolding later. Well, I’d had it pretty tough here myself, and, I was covered in golden spores.

“Before you get mad at me, can I at least take a bath first?” I grumbled. Monza, Jerrick, and Garbert all laughed.

Master came over later to collect the Golden Brute I’d killed.

“I see, so you were able to deduce the true identity of this monster as well.” She held up a bottle of golden spores. They’d lost their previous luster and were a dull brown. “These spores are saturated with mana. I’m certain there must be some effective way to use these for magic. It’s always exciting, finding new things to research.”

“Since they paralyze people and stop werewolves from transforming, you’d probably be able to turn them into some kind of medicine.”

“An astute observation. All poisons can be turned into medicine.” Gomoviroa

nodded in approval and pocketed the bottle. “By the way, I hear you took down this Golden Brute with the magic I taught you.”

Uh oh, am I about to get another lecture? I slouched a little and took a few steps back.

“Umm, that was an emergency situation, so I had no choice. Besides, it worked, so it’s no big deal right? I’ve already gotten enough lectures from my mom and Fahn.”

“You blithering idiot! How could you even think of challenging that beast with magic meant for training!?” Gomoviroa smacked my head over and over. Despite her nonexistent physical strength, it still hurt a little. “Recklessness and courage aren’t the same thing! I may be a necromancer, but even I cannot revive the dead! If you do something this rash again, I won’t be your teacher anymore, do you understand!?”

“I understand. I promise I won’t do it again.”

“Do you really understand? Truly?”

“I do! I promise not to use this spell for fighting ever again!”

And so, my first battle as a magician ended in my overwhelming victory.

* * * *

—Veight’s Assessment—

I, Gomoviroa, took on a disciple by the name of Veight. Recorded below are the results of his aptitude testing.

He has shown varying levels of affinity for a variety of fields, but strengthening magic appears to be where his aptitude is the strongest. By his own report, the first time he succeeded in casting a strengthening spell, he did so with spectacular results. Moreover, he has shown that he possesses the natural intuition needed to apply the magic he acquires in practical combat situations. He is, at the very least, the first person I have ever heard of who used the basic weight increasing spell in a battle.

However, since he did no prior experimentation or had any grounding in the theory behind the spell, his usage of it was extremely dangerous. While Veight has exceptional potential, his reckless personality leads me to believe that I must be careful with his training. This may lead him to believe that he lacks talent, or that I do not value his abilities. I will take his training slowly, regardless. I would much rather keep my precious disciple safe than teach him more than he is ready to use. Besides, he is far too interesting a wizard for this world to lose. His potential is limitless, and it would be a waste for him to perish before he's old enough to realize it. I give my thanks to the great wheel of fate that brought the two of us together. I earnestly pray that his path in life leads him to knowledge and truth.

※Postscript

Considering his innate recklessness, I have decided to keep a closer eye on him. I have no doubt he will attempt something beyond his abilities again before long...

Afterword

Hello everyone, Hyougetsu here. I'm starting to think I'm one of those overpowered isekai protagonists that masters whatever skill they have right after they get reincarnated. I started uploading this web novel onto Narou in late July, and not even a month later I got an offer for it to be published. It was honestly pretty surprising.

I'd been hoping this work would get published eventually, but even I didn't think it would get picked up so soon. When I first got the offer, I thought someone was playing a prank on me. However, I recognized the name Earth Star Novels, so I decided to humor them with a reply. And seeing as you're reading this afterword right now, clearly it wasn't a prank. But for me at least, it still doesn't feel real. I keep expecting someone to pop through my door and tell me I've been punk'd!

Leaving that aside for now, let's talk about the novel itself. I ended up not editing very much of the web version for the published version, which was a bit of a shame, but I did at least get to add in an extra chapter. I decided to make it about Veight's past since I'd gotten a lot of requests for that on Narou. What do you think guys, was it to your satisfaction?

By the way, I structured the start of the web novel the way I did because I wanted to make sure it wasn't paced too quickly. I wanted it to be the kind of thing you could read a chapter of in your spare time during lunch or something. Basically, I want to write the kind of story you can pick up pretty much whenever. I don't know about everyone else, but I always get tired reading really long paragraphs on my phone, so I made sure to keep the sentences short and snappy. It's also why I had the story start up in the middle, where Veight's already risen a good amount through the demon army's ranks. Of course, there's a lot to tell about his life before he became vice-commander as well, and I'd love it if I could keep writing these extra chapters about his past exploits.

Anyway, my biggest edits for the published novel were making the sentences and paragraphs beefier. After all, novels are the kinds of things you can read leisurely at home, and there are pictures to break things up if it gets too dense. I've got my editor-in-chief Itagaki-sama and my editor Saitou-sama to thank for helping me format everything better. I'd almost completely neglected the visual elements of a book, and their advice was extremely helpful in deciding how to structure things. I'd also like to thank my readers for giving me all that feedback on Narou. There's nothing that makes authors happier than knowing people love their work.

Incidentally, my editor Saitou-sama is super reliable and extremely patient. Every time I went to him for advice, he'd sit me down and walk me through everything. Not only that, he was able to get the book through the publishing process surprisingly fast, and he always replied to my emails right away. Though, he also sometimes sends garbled walls of text that are hard to decipher, or puts little jokes in the subject line to mess with me. He's a pretty interesting guy, so much so that I kind of want to put in a character based on him in the story. Regardless, it's all thanks to him that I was able to put out a quality publication in such a short time. Thank you so very much, Saitou-sama. I'll be relying on you for everything from here on out as well. When I think back to how much help it took to get this book published, I'm really grateful that it made it out the door at all.

Also, I'd like to thank my wonderful illustrator, Nishi(E)da-sama for his lively and impactful drawings. At first, I'd only had a very vague idea of what Veight was supposed to look like in his human form, but when I saw Nishi(E)da's rough sketches I realized that must have been how I'd wanted him to look all along. All of Nishi(E)da's other character sketches were amazing too. Me and Saitou-sama both agreed that Airia looked really cool, and that Jerrick looked really sexy. Thank you so much for bringing my book to life. I can say with confidence that his illustrations have influenced the way I'm writing my characters in the web novel, too.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my readers on Narou for supporting this series. Without you, it might have been buried forever. I look at each and every one of your comments, and treasure them all. I'll continue updating the Narou version

as well, where hopefully you can read the story in more bite-sized chunks (Though doing daily uploads now might be a bit tough.) I plan on exploring more of Veight's past and the setting at large in the published novels, so I hope fans of the web novel check out this version too! There you go, there's my shameless self-plug. Buy my books! They have Nishi(E)da-sama's awesome art in them!

May we meet again in the second volume!



Editor's note: These aren't final designs for any of the characters



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Der Werwolf: The Annals of Veight Volume 1

by Hyougetsu

Translated by Ningen Edited by Meiru

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Original Japanese edition published in 2015 by Earth Star Entertainment This English edition is published by arrangement with Earth Star Entertainment, Tokyo English translation © 2018 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: September 2018