Now I'm a DEMON LORD! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My DUNGEON

Author: Ryuyu

Illustrator: Daburyu

12




Author: Ryuyu
Illustrator: Daburyu
Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My DUNGEON
12

CONTENTS

Prologue — Strengthening Bonds, Bit by Bit

Chapter 1 — Though the Dead Remain Silent, the Living Nevertheless Hear Their Voices

Side Story 1 — A Ruler's Anguish

Chapter 2 — A Month of Strengthening

Chapter 3 — A Name to Pass Down

Side Story 2 — The Dungeon Around That Time

Chapter 4 — The God of Iron

Epilogue — Going Home

Special Story — Safe House

Afterword

Prologue: Strengthening Bonds, Bit by Bit

After the end of the Great Corpse Dragon War, which the surrounding countries and races had gotten tangled up in, all kinds of things were finally sorted out. But that didn't mean *everything* was settled, and I still had a job to do for the Demon King soon, but you could say the situation related to that war was mostly done and dusted.

The only thing that mattered to me was my family. My official marriage ceremony with Lew. The slight change in my relationship with Leila. And Lefi's pregnancy. Slowly but surely, my relationships were moving forward.

I thought of myself as a hopeless man. A selfish, hypocritical, decidedly immature man you'd be hard-pressed to call an adult. But I was way past the point in my life to complain. As long as the people who loved me were by my side, hopeless as I was, I would do everything in my power as a man to live. *Time to get this show on the road, then.*

◇◇◇

The day after the Demon King, his subordinate Runougil, and I had enjoyed a night of drinking.

"What, you have had enough already? Even though you were so needy yesterday? Should you wish for it, I am more than amenable to pampering you further, hm?"

"Sh-Shut it. I was just plastered, okay?"

Lefi cackled at me while I turned away out of embarrassment.

I didn't really remember much, but I had a vague recollection of hugging her because I'd wanted to feel her warmth and telling her a few things that made me wanna crawl into a hole and die. Drinking as heavily as I had last night was pretty out of the ordinary for me, so of course my memories were a hazy mess thanks to the drunkenness. Lefi, on the other hand, probably remembered everything I'd said and done. I would've bet good money on it. *Ugh! Damn you, past me! Exposing your system vulnerabilities like that!*

"Here, shall I hold your hand? If memory serves, last night,

you spouted something or other about ascending to the heavens when we held hands.”

“I-I have no notion of what you might be referring to. Perhaps you misheard? I simply cannot recall uttering such—”

“I see, I see. Then I shall sequester the sight of you yesterday in my heart. ‘The nape of your neck…tastes so good. So sweet, so soft.’ You murmured sweet nothings like that to me while nibbling on the aforementioned part of my body. I found you quite adorable, you know.”

I abruptly stiffened up.

“Ah, yes, what else was it you said? ‘Your lips look tasty too, all soft and plump.’ And with those words, you brought your face close to mine—”

“Gaaaaahhh!!! Stoooooop!!!”

I ran away.

◇◇◇

“Argh… That damn Lefi… She remembers everything I said and did clear as day!”

It felt like the more time passed, the more of my weaknesses she had in a vise grip. My bad temper wasn’t because she’d been exaggerating but because she *hadn’t* been, since I had vague memories of doing and saying the stuff she’d mentioned. I remembered seeing her face up close in my drunken stupor, and I’d automatically— *Gaaah! Nooo!*

“Grr?”

I heard a voice from next to me as I writhed in agony over my humiliation. The questioning rumble was asking me, “Um, are you all right?” It was my pet Rir, whose real name was Fluffrir.

Right now, I was in the Demonic Forest. I’d left the meadow area and come out here to check on my pets after my trip.

“Hrgh… Ahem. Don’t worry about me. Just dealing with some stuff. Anyway, you guys doing good? Thanks for looking after things while we were gone, by the way.”

At my words, my pet army bowed their heads one by one, starting with Rir, then followed by Orochi, Yata, Byaku, and Seimi. I praised them a bit more before giving them the souvenirs I’d bought in the ovine village. It was a special kind of feed that monsters liked and that monster masters known as “tamers” apparently used. Naturally, the stuff had cost a boatload.

My pets didn't seem too keen on it at first, but it didn't take them long to show me their delight. Then, they all chomped down on the food. All except Rir, who walked over to stand next to me, leaving his souvenir for later.

"What's up? Why don't you dig in too?"

"Grr."

His answer to my question was "Well, my apologies, but I wanted your advice on something."

"Yeah? *You* want *my* advice? Don't hear that every day, huh?"

Another rumble from him, this time saying, "I'm sorry to bother you" as a preface to his explanation. Turned out that he wanted to ask me a personal favor concerning the monsters under his command—the clever ones who feared Rir's power and had decided to become his subordinates in order to make it through the struggle for survival.

I'd known about them for a while now. They saw all my pets, especially Rir, the leader, as their masters. However, *I* was *Rir's* master. And his pack had grown even more, meaning a lot more monsters didn't know who I was. In short, they thought Rir sat alone at the top.

Personally, I didn't care what his followers did as long as they left me alone. But Rir himself wasn't a fan of this state of affairs. As my subordinate and a defender of the dungeon, he wanted to make sure his own subordinates knew both of those things. To sum it all up, his favor involved me showing my face to them.

"Man, you're as earnest as ever, huh?"

"Grr." That and a bow of his head was his response.

Hmm... I mulled things over in silence for a while.

"Hey, Rir. I want you to know that you're important to me. I think of you as my partner."

He was my pet. But he was also a precious friend. A companion with whom I'd escaped the jaws of death countless times—one I knew would always have my back. Though there might've been an element of master and servant in our relationship, we still protected each other and believed in each other as we fought to the bitter end together. He was important to me in a different way from Lefi and the others.

"I know we have the whole master-servant thing between us, but you can live how you want, dude. That includes going wherever you want and leading your subordinates however you want. I won't butt in if you want to live your life more

independently.”

I wanted to be on a more equal footing with him. Since he was my friend, if he wanted to live his life unrestrained by anything, then that was what I wanted too. Of course, I’d be in a pickle *and* super freaking sad if he decided to leave us, but more than that, I didn’t want to quash his potential.

If Rir had been born in another time or place, he could’ve ruled the world. That was how powerful he was. A monster with such overwhelming potential that even Lefi had struggled to fight against his kind. As someone under my command, he was bound to the Demonic Forest, so he didn’t have a lot of opportunities to venture into the world outside. Otherwise, his name would’ve spread far and wide by now.

“Grr.”

The first thing he growled softly at me was “Thank you for your consideration.” Then, he shook his head and continued rumbling deep in his throat. He would never leave this place, he said. That it was just as important to him as it was to me. That he thought of it as home, which was exactly why he didn’t want to leave and why he wanted to live here with us. He told me all this with a sincere expression while gazing intently at me.

Strangely enough, I detected a hint of anger in his face too. Like he was saying, “How dare you underestimate my resolve.”

“Huh. Gotcha. And my bad for saying something stupid.”

He smiled suddenly then, as if saying, “Not at all. Your words made me happy,” and rubbed his head fondly against mine. In return, I buried my hands in his luxuriously silky fur and patted the heck outta him. A few minutes later, I jumped onto his back.

“Okay! Take me to your followers! Time to introduce myself!”

◇ ◇ ◇

Rir took me to a clearing deep in the Demonic Forest, where his followers had gathered.

“Uhhh, is this all of them?”

“Grr.”

My pet nodded affirmatively from under me as I rode on his back.

Now this *is a monster army.* They stretched as far as the eye could see. Or at least, that was how it felt. Waaay back, Rir had brought his troops to meet us in the meadow area, but the

number of monsters back then didn't even begin to compare to the number that were here.

Five hundred… No, more? I wasn't surprised to see that the largest population of his followers consisted of wolf-type monsters just like him. Although they were really fluffy in their own right, unfortunately, none of them held a candle to Rir's fur. His fluff truly was a special fluff. Nothing like it in the whole world.

The next most common monsters were snake- and bird-type monsters, which probably had to do with Orochi's and Yata's influence. Conversely, because of Byaku's and Seimi's unique races, I couldn't spot a single monster similar to either of them among Rir's army. The remainder was made up of a variety of monsters that didn't seem to have anything in common with my pets, from ones I had seen before to others I never had, making the place look like a monster fair.

The best description for the sight was that it was like the Hyakki Yagyo, the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons. If I took all of them with me, it'd probably be a piece of cake to take down an entire country or two. Actually, on second thought, I could probably accomplish that with just me and my pets.

In any case, the monster army that had gathered here in advance had sat down docilely, practically genuflecting in their own way, when they'd spotted Rir and the other four. It was a bizarre scene. Seeing them like this, I realized once again how much smarter the wildlife in this world was than it'd been in my old one. Creatures who normally couldn't coexist sat there obediently under the command of one leader without trying to kill each other or run away. So maybe it was less that this world's wildlife in general was smarter and more that the monsters of the Demonic Forest were unique. *Since their bodies are fundamentally larger, their brains might be too.*

"Raaawr!"

His attitude majestic, my pet howled in front of the monsters. They responded by bowing their heads. When he saw that, Rir's pointed gaze said, "Right. The floor is yours."

Uhhh, am I really supposed to talk to them? I'm not very good at public speaking, though… More importantly, Rir, buddy, look at you, acting like a true king without me knowing. Seriously, man, you really would be perfect as the protagonist of an epic tale.

After I smiled ruefully at my pet's growth, I faced the

monsters and spoke.

"I'm Yuki. I'm not your master, but I *am* theirs. Basically, that indirectly makes me your master too."

From underneath me, Rir rumbled a translation to them. When he did, a few of the monsters stood up and growled in protest. My pets reacted quickly in the next instant by smacking them around a few times using their magics and forcing the insurgents to sit back down on the ground. They didn't look dead, just unconscious.

Yeah, this is like one of those typical sports team hierarchies. But, well, I understood the backlash. Rir always treated me with respect and made me look good, but the truth was that in terms of combat ability, we were pretty much even. No, he might've actually been better than me, considering he spent his days in the Demonic Forest. So if someone like me suddenly appeared in front of them and started spouting off that I was their *true* master, of course they wouldn't just accept it. They were probably thinking, "Who the hell is this guy?"

Regardless, even if they didn't accept me, the rest of the monsters listened attentively out of fear of my pets.

"Um... I know it isn't and won't be easy to just take my words at face value. That's why you don't have to do what I tell you, but in exchange, obey Rir. Follow him and live your lives however you want. As long as you don't come after me or my family, I'll keep quiet."

Their gazes bored into me. Despite Rir translating for me, I had to wonder if I'd been able to convey my feelings properly and if they'd picked up on that.

"And if you *do* come after us, I'll kill you. You at least realize that I'm strong enough to do that, right? But if you obey, I'll protect you instead. You chose to follow Rir and the others out of admiration for them, so live your lives like they tell you to. I won't do anything bad to you. As for you guys, make sure you protect them too, okay?"

I still rode on Rir's back. At my last words, the other four pets bowed their heads in unison at me. When the monster army saw how they treated me as someone who outranked them, despite their lingering confusion, they also bowed their heads at me.

◇ ◇ ◇

After Rir's monster army dispersed.

"Grr."

He apparently hadn't been a fan of my little speech back there, telling me, "I wish you had pressured them a bit more..." which was unsettling coming from him. I patted his fluffy back while replying.

"Sorry, sorry. But honestly, I'm *you* guys' master. I don't plan on being theirs too."

That was where I drew the line. I really only wanted to protect my pet army corps. I wasn't interested in taking on any more responsibilities. I rubbed his ears and then, looking into his eyes, continued speaking.

"You guys are the only ones who matter to me. All the ones under you? I frankly don't think anything of them one way or another. I won't say I don't care, but I can't find it in me to be all that concerned about whether they live or die. That's why I'm gonna repeat what I said earlier: you guys gotta protect them. And I'll protect you five."

Rir was quiet for a while, then he sighed quietly in resignation.

"Grrrf."

"Yup, that's just how I am. Thanks in advance for helping me out even though I know I keep dumping stuff on you all the time. Besides, you guys are the only ones I can count on like this."

My dungeon's ultimate weapon was Lefi. I could depend on Nell too since she was the hero. But I'd decided a long time ago that I didn't want to rely on them like that. And as a man, I'd follow through on that promise to myself, do or die.

"Oh yeah, which reminds me. Switching topics now, I'm heading to Nell's country soon, and I want you to come with me, Rir. This time, you won't just be seeing me off either. I want you to team up with me."

Rir nodded in understanding.

With the monarchs encouraging more interaction between the races, I no longer needed to disguise myself to enter Nell's human nation. Still, the Demon King had told me it'd be best to take Rir along. Why? Because I looked *too* human.

He had suggested I have Rir on hand as a symbol to convey my power and inspire fright and awe in humans. It made sense given that they weren't particularly sensitive to magic. Considering that we of the other races had started becoming

friendlier with them, it wasn't good to intimidate them, but we also couldn't let them underestimate us. Plus, in a way, I was now an emperor in the eyes of the world.

While giving Rir the general outline of our schedule for the upcoming trip, I heard footsteps approaching us.

"Oh, hey, Leila. Pretty unusual for you to come out all the way here."

They turned out to be Leila's.

"Yes, well... Lew said, and I quote, 'I'll take care of the chores today, so go take a break, Leila! Oh, right, didn't my lord head out alone? Why don't you enjoy the fresh air too?'"

"Ahhh..."

I was sure she'd been grinning like a Cheshire cat the whole time she'd said all that too. It was easy to imagine.

"Dang, your impression of Lew is spot-on."

"In light of all the time we've spent together, it's only natural I would learn her unique speech patterns."

"I guess it's easy to do a pretty good imitation if the inflection is the same, even if your voices aren't the same."

"Tee hee, indeed. Although Shii can reproduce another's voice exactly, not just their inflection."

"Yo, for real. Her vocal impressions are *shockingly* good."

In Shii's case, she leveraged her slime body itself to create vocal cords. So with her, it wasn't even a matter of whether or not the voice was similar. She could literally produce a person's exact voice.

Chuckling, I continued.

"Anyway, since she's here, how about we all take a walk together, Rir?"

"Grr."

Rir took the hint right away and dropped his backside to the ground. When he did, I jumped up onto his back. *Thanks for being such a pal, Rir. No matter how much technology advances in this world, I'm gonna ride on your back forever. That won't change even if they invent cars someday.*

"All right, give me your hand, Leila."

"Then I must thank you both for taking me along."

Leila smiled a bit bashfully in response. I took her hand and hoisted her up in front of me. Setting aside the matter of my wives, I rarely had the chance to get in such close contact with Leila, so honestly, I was kinda nervous. Probably 'cause it was

just the two of us. It felt like, I dunno, a novelty.

She must've been thinking the same thing because her pale, translucent skin flushed brightly as she spoke.

"I... This is a bit embarrassing, hm? After all, the two of us hardly ever get the chance to be alone, Master Yuki."

"Yeah, it's a nice change of pace... Um, I'll try harder to make sure we get more alone time from now on."

"Tee hee, thank you very much. Now then...here I go!"

"Wha—"

Leila let her body relax against mine, then grabbed my arms and wrapped them around her waist, making me hug her from behind.

"Um, M-Miss Leila?"

"Let's see. Your heartbeat is one and a half times faster than usual. You're breathing harder too."

"W-Well, yeah. There's not a man in this world whose heart *wouldn't* race if a woman like you did this to him."

The experience was different from when I hugged my wives or anyone from the little-girl gang. Leila's figure was out of this freaking world, by which I meant that she had the, uh, *fullest assets* of all the women in my family. But that was all I was willing to say out loud.

"Oh my. What a lovely compliment. I'm glad to have been born a woman, then. And I'll make certain to polish my femininity even more for your sake, hm?"

Leila twisted her head around and gazed up at me with a bewitching smile.

Unthinkingly, I sucked in a breath. She had rendered me speechless. Her warmth. I could feel her breaths too, thanks to her body being pressed so close to mine. We swayed to the rhythm of Rir's relaxed tread as he lumbered through the Demonic Forest.

"Would you like to know something interesting, Master Yuki?"

"S-Sure?"

"With us glued together like this, it feels as if flames will burst from my face from embarrassment."

"Welp, ya reap what ya sow."

Her face was completely scarlet now. *Proof of her trying her best in her own way, huh?* Seeing her like this was like a balm for my soul.



Later, back in the living room, also known as the real throne room.

“Heh heh heh.”

“Would you care to explain what’s so amusing, Lew?”

Leila posed the question calmly to her colleague, who didn’t even bother hiding her glee as she peered into her face.

“Why, nothing at all. I was just thinking that you look reeeally happy for some reason.”

“I’m the same as usual, you know.”

“I see, I see. So, you had a *very* good time out and about, huh? Gosh, it does the heart good to see a friend so happy. It truly does. Don’t you think so too?”

“Don’t push your luck, Lew.”

“Awww, look at you. You’re so adorable when you’re embarrassed.”

Leila stubbornly refused to look at Lew, who wouldn’t stop teasing her.

◇ ◇ ◇

The Kingdom of Alisia. The human nation Nell swore her allegiance to, and one that Yuki, too, had a deep connection with.

“Tch.”

Its king, Reyd Glorio Alisia, unconsciously clicked his tongue as he pored over documents that detailed the unexpectedly rapid spread of the ideology of “human supremacy” touted by fools, as well as those same fools’ movements. The ideology stated that humans stood above all other races of mankind, thereby promoting the mindset that the so-called inferior races should be ostracized and that cooperation with them was absurd.

He had expected this to occur first among the humans, but he’d never anticipated it happening so quickly. In preparation for such a problem arising, Reyd had taken several measures beforehand, yet the number of people influenced by this idea was greater than imagined. Based on the reports, it was more often those who had no connections with other races.

“Fear driven by prejudice, eh?”

Those who had actually interacted with other races seemed to be doing well, while the ones who hadn’t were likely afraid that

their country would be taken over because of their own preconceived notions. Human life spans were shorter and weaker than the other races. Consequently, they feared stronger races with longer life spans.

The masterminds operating behind the scenes were well aware of this. While they limited themselves to quietly stirring up trouble, their actions had borne fruit. Yes, indeed, they worked in the shadows. Reyd already knew from his investigation that there was nothing natural about this trend.

What a nuisance at such a busy time of the year.

The ideology *had* to be eradicated. Otherwise, it would surely bring disaster to his country. Even as annoyance at enemies who insisted on doing such unnecessary things prickled at him, he firmed his resolve to ensure their failure. Just then, a knock sounded on the door of his office.

"Enter."

"Begging your pardon, Your Majesty. The hero would like an audience with you. She's currently waiting in the parlor. Shall I show her in?"

"Hmm? Is that so? I shall head there straightaway."

Reyd exhaled deeply to clear his head, then strode briskly to the room where she waited. The girl stood up from the sofa as soon as she saw him and genuflected.

"Your Majesty, thank you very much for taking the time to see me."

"'Tis a trifle. Think nothing of it. Nell, you are one of the few friends I can let my guard down around. While formalities must be followed in public, you are free to act as you normally would when we are in private like this."

"Tee hee, I appreciate it. This might sound rude, but I consider you one of my closest friends too, Your Majesty."

At his urging, Nell's speech became more casual as she spoke with a smile.

"Rude? Bah, if that were considered rude, then I'd be alone forever. Now, sit, sit."

They both sat down on the sofa. Then, Reyd turned to her and prompted her.

"So, tell me, what brings you here today?"

"My husband reached out to me, and I wanted to update you on what he said."

"Hmm? Lord Yuki?"

Whenever he came here, it was often for an important matter. Of course, the matters were never his fault, and he always helped settle them, for which Reyd was eternally grateful. But now, he found himself worried that something had happened to the young man, so he mentally steeled himself for the worst as the girl began to talk.

"Yes. Apparently, he made some sort of deal with His Majesty the Demon King and has agreed to assist as a representative of the demon race in the task force against the human supremacists. So he told me he's coming here the day after tomorrow."

"Ahhh, what a relief. I would be much obliged. He's ever the dependable lad."

He knows too, eh?

Thanks to his working relationship with the girl in front of him, Reyd had heard from her about Yuki's trip to the demon world, during which he'd likely met with the Demon King again. Reyd was well aware that the young man possessed not only extraordinary fighting ability but also exceptional investigative skills—especially when this girl was involved. In such cases, he would go into a frenzy and give it his all. A threat to this country posed a threat to the girl, so if anything happened, Yuki would always come lend his aid.

Which means Jayma was right.

Jayma, the former minister of military affairs, had previously caused a huge uproar that divided the country. Despite all the trouble he'd been responsible for, the old man was still living out the rest of his life in luxury. And clearly, his intuition about Yuki's nature had been correct. Though he was loath to admit it, Reyd wasn't terribly surprised. It was only natural that the other man's judgment was so keen considering how long he'd protected their country.

"Then we had best prepare to welcome him and share information. Can I leave the task in your hands?"

"Yes, of course! Carlotta also told me to concentrate on my work here."

The young hero answered him with a smile as lovely as a flower. It was obvious she was happy to get to see her husband.

He'd known how well they got on, but seeing the proof was an entirely different matter. Her delight made him smile too before he broached another subject.

“Oh, that reminds me. Now is the perfect opportunity to discuss something with you. Carlotta and I actually came to a decision on this some time ago.”

“What is it?”

“Your work as the hero.”

“I… I see.”

Reyd continued even as the girl’s expression grew nervous.

“The demons, our worst adversaries, are no longer such. The same can be said of the other races. We’re steadily making progress in our relationships with the powerful elves, dwarves, and therianthropes. Though confusion yet remains at the moment, I believe things will be much different in a decade’s time. The other monarchs and I discussed this and have decided to meet again to ensure the immutable and all-embracing nature of our bonds in ten years. Once we reach that point, we should be able to reduce the size of our military to an extent.”

“Wh-What about the monsters?”

“Those we indeed must continue to hunt. However, if we can forge a strong military agreement, we can help one another even if a powerful monster appears.”

The wisps of a dream began to take shape. The beginning of a new, yet-unseen era.

“Of course, ’tis still merely a dream. The problem of race remains our greatest hurdle, and we’ll have to establish new laws as well. But we’re now able to take the first step.”

Light blazed powerfully in the girl’s eyes as she stared at him. She must have been thinking of the future.

“Now then, I’m told you were aboard one of those airships?”

“Yes, it was a fantastic vessel.”

“Well, I have a mind to import them on a large scale and operate them domestically. This will make it easier for you to come to the royal capital, ergo, you will have more time to spend in the dungeon.”

What a revolutionary invention. A trip that once took several days by carriage could now be done in a day or half a day. The distance between peoples around the world would surely shorten henceforth, which was likely to facilitate the exchange of ideas among different races.

Demon Lord Yuki lived in the Demonic Forest, located on the other side of the frontier town of Alfiro. This girl always traveled here from there, so the sooner they could establish an airship

route, the sooner she would be able to come and go more easily than before.

“Additionally, once the issue with the human supremacists is resolved, I’m considering reducing your workload and shifting it solely to monster hunts. Just like today, I wish for you to act as a liaison between him and us.”

In doing so, the girl’s burden would be lightened, and she would have more time to return home. And were the day to come when his country’s power alone would not be enough, Reyd would be able to ask for help from Demon Lord Yuki.

“Regrettably, it will be a while yet before I’m able to completely dismiss you from your position as the hero…but I would like you to try your best until then. What say you?”

“I understand. Truly, thank you for your consideration. I’ll continue to work my hardest and do what I can for this nation.”

With that, she bowed deeply.

Chapter 1: Though the Dead Remain Silent, the Living Nevertheless Hear Their Voices

Darkness. Silence. A deserted corridor where I couldn't even see what was ahead. The only thing I could feel was a dull ache in my head.

"...Huh?"

I stood in an unfamiliar place. My mind was still kinda muddled as I looked around. *Am I...underground?*

A path stretched out in front of and behind me. The walls were made of stone, and wooden columns set apart at fixed intervals supported the ceiling. It was cool in here, but not cold enough to sting. Dim too. The only light came from torches placed here and there, which made it hard to even see my feet.

The only sounds I could hear were my breathing and the torch flames flickering. Otherwise, it was deathly quiet in here. *Why am I standing somewhere like this?*

I was alone. Completely alone. I couldn't even sense a hint of another living thing.

My memory was blank. I didn't know why I was here. Something inexplicable had clearly happened—was still happening. The instinct I'd polished since coming to this world was sounding alarm bells in response to this abnormal situation. A shiver skated down my spine at my current horror-movie circumstances.

Calm down. Think. Don't stop thinking.

First, I needed to get a handle on the situation. I pressed a hand to my aching head and thought. For now, I didn't detect any hostile auras. It seemed I really was the only one in the immediate vicinity.

I opened Inventory, only to discover that En wasn't there. Since I didn't have a choice, I took out Goumetsu, the mace I'd used during my conquest of the phantom ship dungeon. It was my go-to weapon whenever En wasn't on hand.

At the same time, I took out two Evil Eyes and deployed them, sending one forward along the path and one backward to do

some scouting. All I had to do now was wait for Maps to fill in.

My memory is shot. Is there anything I do *remember? Sort through your memories, man. Let's see... Oh yeah. I decided to head to the Kingdom of Alisia to help with the fight against the human supremacists.*

◇ ◇ ◇

"All right, peeps, I'm off. Dunno when I'll be back, but if it takes longer than two weeks, I'll pop in for a bit before heading out again. If anything happens, hit me up on the usual Comm Orb: Revamped."

"Indeed. Do your job well and assist Nell to the best of your abilities. Since you are taking Rir with you also, I shall be in charge of defense here."

"Awesome, thanks. Just don't overdo it, okay? I've got a mission for you too, kiddos. Play a ton, eat a ton, sleep a ton, and be good girls, okay?"

"Okaaay!" Iluna and Shii said in unison.

"Okay..." En followed a beat later.

I ruffled the heads of each member of the little-girl gang one by one. Then, after saying my goodbyes to Lew and Leila too, I left the real throne room and stepped into the Demonic Forest. Outside, Rir and the other pets were waiting for me.

"Business as usual for you four as the dungeon's protectors while I'm gone. If anything happens, rely on Lefi. Rir, let's go."

The pets saw us off with their heads bowed, and Rir and I departed for the Kingdom of Alisia.

As usual, we'd go to the frontier city of Alfiro through the connecting door, and from there, I'd ride on Rir for the rest of the way, racing through the plains. We always avoided the main roads. Regardless of how well things were going between the different races, I didn't think it'd be a good idea for people to see Rir running at breakneck speed. In fact, chances were high that they'd freak out, so we always chose paths off the beaten track.

Having said that, seeing as Rir spent his days living in the Demonic Forest, roads normally considered bad were no sweat for him. Meaning there was very little adverse impact on my pet's running. His speed increased every time he leveled up, and he was now basically as fast as a sports car. Basically, he could blow through a carriage journey of several days in just one.

But to no one's surprise, running at such insane speed for any length of time would tire him out considerably. Same went for me riding on top of him, so I'd asked him to keep his speed at two-thirds his fastest. Especially on account of the air being a lethal weapon above a certain speed. Whether I was flying or on Rir's back, I couldn't keep my eyes open, and flying bugs left scratches. Because of that, I'd gotten into the habit of using wind magic to keep the wind out.

Currently, I was level 212. Rir was 205. His level actually used to be higher than mine, but defeating the Dark King Corpse Dragon had put me a smidge above him. But that was just how the difference in our levels went. We'd change leads all the time, so to speak, though ultimately, we stayed close. I had a feeling this was how it would always be. I wanted the both of us to reach Lefi's heights someday.

According to my wife, after crossing the 500 mark, she'd needed to hunt several hundred monsters just to level up a single time. *Uh, so how many more do we need to take down?* Yeah, I had no clue. But! I'd do my best. Wasn't like I had any other choice.

"I know it's a little late to be realizing this, but I feel like the strength of the monsters in the western area is inflated. If even a fenrir like you isn't a match for them, then their settings seriously need to be reconfigured."

"Grr?"

"Oh, right. 'Inflated' means 'too high.' Compared to other areas, the monsters there are a little too strong. No, I lied. They're *way* too strong. *Weirdly* strong. Not counting the strays the two of us can hunt down."

Strays were monsters living on the outer edges of the western area. Despite being stronger than the ones in the southern and eastern areas, they weren't strong enough to actually *live* in the western area, so they wandered around its boundaries. Ergo, I called them "strays."

"Grr..."

"Nah, don't even worry about it. I know you're doing your best. Still, doesn't change the fact that we're not strong enough. Never mind that what I *really* wanna do is shut myself away in the dungeon and spend my days having fun with everyone. Le sigh..."

"Grar."

“You’re right. For the sake of a peaceful life, I need enough power to crush enemies with a single blow, like flicking a gnat. Oh yeah, I just remembered something I’ve been dying to ask you. You got a mate or something?”

“Grr.”

“Wait, for real? Huh… Hmm, hmm, hmm. Well, that’s a good thing, ain’t it? Just lemme know if you ever need help with anything, okay? I’m willing to do whatever it takes for you.”

My pet and I chatted about all sorts of things on our journey. Around dusk, the city gates of Arsil, Alisia’s capital, finally came into view. At this point, I couldn’t conceal our identities, and I felt the fearful gazes of the humans traveling to and fro on the main road. The guards at the gate shuffled outside, their expressions tense and attitudes cautious. Though humans were insensitive to power, Rir seemed strong based on his appearance alone.

We obviously weren’t here to start a fight or anything, so we approached the gate slowly, doing our best not to come across as intimidating. One of the guardsmen stepped forward. From the looks of him, he was probably high up on the ladder. He questioned me with nervous sweat pouring down his face.

“Begging your pardon. I can see that you’re not human. Please state your business.”

“I’m Demon Lo—I mean, I’m Yuki, a demon. I’m here to help the king of Alisia. I’d appreciate it if you’d verify that with your superiors.”

I was here this time as a pinch hitter for the demons, so I’d corrected myself in the nick of time as far as revealing my identity went.

“I see… Give me a mo—”

“Mr. Yuki!”

A familiar voice cut the guard off. It belonged to my wife, Nell.

“Nell! You here to pick us up?”

“I am, tee hee. I had a feeling you’d have a tough time even gaining entry. Mr. Guard, I’ll take it from here, so leave it to me. Thank you.”

“U-Understood, Lady Hero!”

The guard saluted her, then let me and Rir pass through the gate, albeit while still keeping an uneasy eye on us. *Yup, no doubt about it. My wife is totes a VIP in the royal capital of Alisia. I expected no less of you, Lady Hero.*

I grabbed her hand and hoisted her onto Rir’s back. Once she

was settled in, he started trotting toward the castle.

“Thanks, Mr. Yuki. You didn’t bring En with you?”

“Nah. I left her at home for now. Besides, I have Rir with me, and we should be able to handle pretty much anything that comes our way. Although we might have a hard time if another contender on the Dark King Corpse Dragon’s level shows up. Lucky for us, things like that don’t appear at the drop of a hat. If they did, we’d be screwed six ways to Sunday.”

“Aha ha ha, fair point… Well, I doubt we’ll need much force this time. The enemy is good at using underhanded tactics, so the impressive Mr. Rir might be more effective.”

Oho, how interesting. Maybe that’s another reason the Demon King asked me to bring Rir along.

“Mmm, let me change the topic to…Rir’s fur. Gosh, it always feels so heavenly to touch.”

“Grr.”

In response to Nell, who ruffled his fur energetically, my pet’s growl seemed to say, “Much obliged.” While laughing at the sight of her blissed out in his fluffiness, I questioned her.

“So, how are things here? Are the different races getting along well enough?”

“Overall, yes. I’d say sixty percent hope and forty percent worry as everyone looks with interest to this new era. Which is precisely why it would be quite problematic for negative sentiments to spread in this delicate time.”

“You’re talking about the human supremacists, right? How active are they?”

“Their activities are insignificant, relatively speaking. They lurk in the shadows and whisper such fears in people’s minds. After that, all they have to do is wait for the unease to breed on its own.”

The serious expression on my wife’s face didn’t belong to Nell but to the hero. I always thought she looked super cool at times like this.

“Leave it to me. I’ll use a demon lord’s secret tools to expose the doofuses in one fell swoop!”

“Tee hee. Don’t disappoint me, then.”

Giggling, she twisted around to look at me and continued.

“Oh, I wanted to ask you something as well. Any developments with Leila?”

“Um, y-yeah. A tiny one. We went on a walk together, just the

two of us. Hung out and stuff, y'know?"

"I'm happy to hear that. She's much more responsible than all of us, but when it comes to the social aspect of life, she's a comparatively late bloomer. All that to say, *you* have to take the lead with her, Mr. Yuki. Is that understood?"

"Y-Yes, ma'am. I'll do my best. It's just... Well, not only is she beautiful, she's also really mature. Unlike during my time with you guys, I get kinda nervous when I'm alone with her."

That wasn't the case when we cooked together or did chores or anything like that. But the second things started to feel...*intimate*, nerves crept in. 'Cause Leila's whole vibe screamed "woman"...

"Oh my gosh, that's so mean. Are you saying you don't feel anything when you're with us?"

Nell's exaggerated pout said that she was messing with me, so I responded with a playful shrug.

"Weeell, all I feel when I'm with you guys is safe."

"Heh. Is that right? If you say so."

And with that, she twined her fingers with mine.

◇ ◇ ◇

I was starting to remember. I hadn't taken En with me because I didn't need that much power against humans, so I'd just hopped on Rir's back and headed for the Kingdom of Alisia. I'd met Nell in Arsil, the royal capital, and the three of us had gone to the castle to greet the king. I'd also met his daughter, Ilyr, again. It'd been a while since our last meeting. Once work had ended, the king, Ilyr, Nell, and I had eaten dinner together. After that... After that, I couldn't remember anything.

The thread snapped there. Which meant something had happened after that. The most likely possibility I could come up with was that I'd gotten hit with some kind of magic that interfered with my psyche. The massive amount of magical energy in my body made it difficult for others to mess with me, so any kind of attack magic like that should've just bounced right off. But considering that my memory was completely blank after dinner, I had to have been attacked by a magic that'd broken through my natural barrier. That pointed to my enemy possessing powerful magical abilities.

Then why was I dumped in a place like this? Another mystery to

solve…

"Shit… Well, this sure sucks."

I needed to have my guard way up in these circumstances. I couldn't even decide on a course of action because there just wasn't enough information for me to go off of. *Actually, maybe not…*

What mattered to me was my family, so the first thing I had to do right now was link up with Nell and Rir. Once I could reassure myself of their safety, everything else would be easy enough to handle.

Plus, if worse came to worst, I had my dungeon return device. *Right, I can just go home the second I want to.* I planned on continuing my investigation of the vicinity regardless because there was a chance Nell and Rir were nearby, but now that I knew I could escape whenever I wanted to, the threat level had dropped dramatically.

"Haah…"

Having a clear goal helped me calm down a little. The wheels in my mind spun while I waited in this spot for the information acquired by my Evil Eyes. One of them hit a dead end, which was where Maps stopped. A small room was situated in that direction. The path continued beyond it before coming to a stop.

After thinking for a bit, I started walking toward it. If not for the keen night vision that came with my demon lord body, I would've had a tough time walking down the dark hallway. After about five minutes, I reached the small room indicated on the Maps display.

It looked like a parlor with simple furniture, but the inside was, to put it mildly, a freaking mess. The furnishings were broken and scattered everywhere. Only the huge lantern hanging from the ceiling was unscathed. I saw bloodstains here and there, along with the tragic sight of four corpses in an awfully grisly state.

Humans. From their builds, they might've been soldiers. They all looked jacked.

Who did this? Could it have been…me?

Parts of the floor had been smashed, probably during the fight. When I placed my foot in one of the prints left behind, it matched perfectly. That was when I realized I was in a relatively well-lit place, because I finally noticed the blood covering my hands. It'd long since dried and lost its warmth, hence I hadn't

noticed it until now.

The traces of battle told me that I'd killed them with my bare hands. And like a beast, to boot.

"Dude, what the hell did I do?"

All I could do was pray that these humans had undoubtedly been my enemies and not innocent bystanders. The putrid smell of death permeating the room made me wanna hurl my guts out, but I needed every bit of information possible, so I sucked it up and searched the bodies. While they didn't seem to have any sort of identification on them, I learned they were definitely the kind of people who made a living through combat. They had calluses on their palms from sword-wielding and well-used weapons. In terms of age, they were probably older than forty. Maybe retired military, considering their age and experience?

I searched through the rest of the room, but I stopped when I couldn't find any more information beyond that. The next thing I did was go down the path leading out of the small room. It wasn't very long, though. Only took me a minute to hit the dead end. *Is this a jail?*

There were several thick iron cages placed in a row. The bars on one of them were twisted outward, like something inside had forcibly driven its way outside. Was it possible that *I* was the one who'd been imprisoned here?

I took a look around inside. From the looks of the place, I hadn't been inside long. I saw no traces of the bed or toilet having been used, and there were only a few footsteps in the thin layer of dust covering the floor.

I think I know what happened here. For whatever reason, I'd been held captive in this jail cell and later escaped. A battle had taken place in the small room I'd been in earlier. There, I'd annihilated the enemy. And then, I'd come to in the middle of my trek down the path.

I'd seen what I needed to, so I headed back along the same path while my thoughts churned. After hitting me with some sort of mind control magic, the enemy had captured me. *Said enemy must be…the human supremacists.* That was the only thing I could think of.

But what was their goal?

"Maybe it was to make a demon go berserk and kill the friendly vibe?"

The thought had popped into my head immediately. And

unexpectedly, it might've been the right answer. At the moment, reforms were happening everywhere, meaning the geopolitical situation was unstable. So what would happen if I got brainwashed and started slaughtering humans?

Revolt, of course. If other races still couldn't be trusted, chances were high that movements promoting segregation would break out. That'd be a huge cause for celebration for the human supremacists.

Son of a bitch. This might be really, really *bad.* The forced massacre might even spark another war, the fact that my allies and I had gone to so much trouble to stop the first one be damned.

How did I regain consciousness, then? Just like I thought, it must've been because I had the sort of constitution that was naturally resistant to magic that messed with others. Even if the agent had been poison and not magic, my body must've neutralized it on its own. My demon lord body was strong enough to bounce back from something like that.

Those people I'd killed. Had my unconscious mind instinctively known that they were enemies? With my memory gone, I couldn't figure out exactly what'd gone down, but I was pretty sure my guess wasn't completely off the mark. In any case, the enemy had clearly stolen my will and gotten me wrapped up in some nasty scheme of theirs.

Those assholes are gonna pay for underestimating me.

Countless lives had been lost in the conflict between races. It was clear that resentment still lingered from all those years of strife. Killing each other for so long and then suddenly being told "We're allies from today on" would definitely result in a lot of people being dissatisfied and unable to accept the new reality.

Even then, this method was unforgivable. Intolerable.

First, I needed to make sure Nell was all right. After her, Rir. *And once I know they are, you fuckers better be ready for me.*

◇ ◇ ◇

Nell's mind went blank upon hearing the news.

"We managed to escape thanks to Lord Rir. However...the enemy spirited Lord Yuki away to their camp."

As the words of the Demon King's subordinate, a squadron captain among the demons, penetrated her brain, a numbness

spread through her limbs, starting from her fingertips. She swayed on her feet as if she'd suffered a blow to the stomach. The color leached from her skin.

Nell had just been informed that her husband, whom she'd seen off not three days ago, had been captured by the enemy. He and a team of demon soldiers had departed for the region suspected of hosting a great many human supremacists. Originally, she was supposed to accompany them as well, but an urgent errand had come in, so they'd decided that she would join them later.

It had happened on the group's second night. The dinner served at the inn she'd recommended to them had contained poison. Just as the toxin had immobilized its victims, several villains had entered the room. Her husband, the only one still able to move, had intercepted the enemy and relayed an order to Rir, who'd been waiting outside the inn. "Rir, get the demons out of here!" And the fenrir had obeyed.

"Why... Why didn't he instruct Rir to kill them? I mean, Rir was fine..."

"I believe he feared worsening relations between humans and demons. Killing them would have led to rumors spreading about 'demons controlling monsters to slaughter our people.'"

She had no rebuttal for that. Humans were capable of such a thing. Undoubtedly. Because they were weaker than the other races, they sometimes used such tactics as weapons.

According to the Demon King's subordinate, Rir had caught them in his mouth and tossed them on his back. The last thing they'd seen was her husband being collared by something and taken away.

"Grr..."

Despondent, which was unusual for him, Rir hung his head low and said, "Forgive me." Nell hugged him tightly in response.

Her husband was always like this. Despite his proclamations of "I'm selfish" and "I don't care about anyone except my family," whenever danger descended, he was the first to act to protect others, even if his connection to them was thin. While she loved that part of him, it also made her worry.

Calm down, darn it, she thought with a deep exhale. She couldn't panic. Not now.

First, the poison that had been used was designed to rob the victim of movement rather than kill them, as evidenced by

everyone being alive and back to normal. That being the case, the enemy's objective wasn't to kill demons but to capture one and use them in some sort of strategy.

So her husband was likely still alive. And being held captive somewhere. Meaning her only option now was to rescue him. However, the enemy was very obviously thoroughly prepared, considering they were in possession of a method capable of incapacitating even a demon lord.

Therefore, she should also assume they had a solid information network, which would indicate that they knew about the hero's deep bond with him. It stood to reason, then, that the enemy must have already anticipated her moving to rescue him.

To counter their assumption, she should call for support. Fortunately, she had her own family to rely on.

"Understood. At any rate, I'm glad you're all okay. And let me also apologize. Our mistake placed you in danger."

Disaster had struck in the inn she and her people had arranged. The failure was such that any more missteps could cause a diplomatic incident. As it was, they would have to offer a formal apology to the Demon King later.

"No, it was our fault for being careless even though we knew we were in enemy territory. Frankly, we were spineless cowards who failed in our duty. *We* are the ones who are sorry for putting your family in danger, Lady Hero. Please, use our power as well to rescue him."

"I... Thank you. I will most certainly need your aid when I make my move. You should rest in the meantime."

After they explained the situation to her, Nell opened the pouch enchanted with storage magic she always carried on her and took out something Yuki had given her some time ago—the Communication Orb: Revamped. She poured her mana into it right away and activated it. A few seconds later, she heard a voice communicating with her through its pair.

"This is Lefi. To whom am I speaking? Yuki? Or Nell?"

"Lefi, it's me. I need your help."

◇ ◇ ◇

For a moment, space warped. The walls of the dungeon, which was located in its own dimension, screeched, and cracks scored the mugs on the table. The pressure, powerful enough to

shake the very air, radiated from Lefi. She had just accepted Nell's call.

Worried at the sight of her, Lew rushed over and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"L-Lefi? What's wrong? What happened?"

"L-Lady Lefifi, are you okay? Do you hurt somewhere?"

"Hmm, hmm. Not good, not good. I heal you! Pain, pain, fly 'way!"

"Yes... Shii's very good at that."

The little girls, who'd also been in the living room, rushed to her side as well.

"I am fine. Forgive me, I was simply a bit surprised."

Their concern allowed Lefi to regain a measure of composure. Tamping down the burgeoning rage, she smiled reassuringly at them. Despite their fear of dragonkind, the world's strongest race, despite sensing the Supreme Dragon's wrath, all they did was accept her with worried expressions. She was endlessly grateful for them.

"I felt something tremendous... Whatever happened?"

Leila was the last to arrive, walking out of the kitchen. When she did, Lefi spoke to them all.

"Forgive me for worrying you. It seems that imbecile has well and truly done it now. I have no choice but to help clean up his mess. En. I am sorry to ask this of you, but will you come with me? He is plainly useless without you as his weapon."

"Yes... We'll save Master."

"Yukiki's in trouble?"

"Evidently, he has bungled things a bit. But fear not, for Rir and Nell are also there. We shall work together to rescue him. Lew, Leila, you are in charge for the time being. Should anything happen, contact me right away."

Though the two understood that something bad had happened to him, they didn't press for details. Lefi had said she would save him. They would believe in her.

"Okay! You got it!"

"Leave it to us."

Lefi and En immediately started preparing for their expedition.

◇ ◇ ◇

As I made my way down the dark, narrow path, the Evil Eye up ahead reached the exit. When I looked at the images it sent back, I discovered that this was a hidden passageway constructed in the sewer system. That sure explained why I'd been smelling something vaguely foul in the air for a while now.

Let's see. Is anybody on watch— Ohhh yeah. Two. Armed. There were four stationed along the path itself, and those two were by the exit, meaning whoever had planted them took security very seriously.

I silenced my footsteps, got close but not close enough to be detected, and then slipped into an offensive stance. I couldn't let them get away, so I needed to settle things with a quick attack. But I also wanted information, which meant killing them was out of the question.

In a situation like this, the most convenient method was magic. So I went with my usual magical trick: two water dragons. Except these models were the restraint type instead of the high-speed-current type.

"Go."

They soundlessly raced through the air, and a few moments later, I heard muffled shouts come from up ahead.

"Sup, ya stupid dipshits? Thanks for showing me such *great* hospitality. No, really."

When I walked through the path's exit, I found men imprisoned by my water dragons. Only their heads were free. Shock flashed across their faces at the sight of me, followed quickly by frustration they didn't bother hiding as they glared at me.

"Y-You bastard! The Collar should have taken your will away!"

"I suppose this means he killed everyone inside."

Collar? The first man's angry words made me realize that I was, in fact, wearing something like a choker. *When the hell did they even put it on me?* I tore it off using both hands and Analyzed it.

Collar of Servitude: Steals and controls the target's will. Currently ineffective. Quality: S.

Well, well. So this was the true nature of the thing that'd stolen my will, huh? Its quality was national treasure level. Made sense

that something that well-made was powerful enough to bind even a demon lord.

Ohhh, that's riiight. I remember now. Let's see, I'm pretty sure I was…heading toward the town suspected of being used as the base of operations by the human supremacists, and my demon allies had been traveling with me. And then, uhhh…our dinner was poisoned?

My memory was still fuzzy. But they'd probably put the choker on me right after that and captured me. As much as I hated to admit it, I kinda had to give them props for this handy little ace in the hole. For their sakes and mine, though, I really hoped they'd put more thought into using it in the future instead of just whipping it out like that.

"You suppose right. Had me quaking in my boots just *thinking* about the freaky shit y'all might've done to me, dontcha know. So I'd appreciate some answers before I accidentally drown you if my fear makes me lose control."

"Monster."

"Bah. How aggravating to feel the disparity between races now of all times."

Each of the two men insulted me in their own way. I sensed no trace of tension whatsoever in their words. They were totally relaxed even though I was threatening them with a serious dose of interrogation. Did they still have a trick up their sleeve? Or were they just that disciplined?

"Let me make a few things perfectly clear. Number one, don't even bother trying to resist. You'll just be wasting your energy. Also, no matter what you try, it'll be impossible to kill me now. Being in danger puts a man on red alert, ya feel? But if you think I'm lying, go ahead and fight back. Hell, give it your best shot. I don't care. I'll just kill you guys. If you really think I won't just 'cause you're useful information sources, come at me and find out just how wrong you are."

I poured more of my magic into my water dragons and increased the pressure inside the watery jails caging their bodies. Despite being squeezed like they were trapped in a vise, the men smirked at me, even as agony contorted their faces.

"Ngh… Ha ha ha! Don't you sound confident, demon! But you don't understand us."

"Unlike you scum, we humans are weak. And that is exactly why we fight like the weak. So it should be a spectacle indeed to witness how the strong like you handle our tactics."

“That’s some pretty big talk, huh?”

Their cackling only made me more wary. But that was a good thing, because the next instant, they both spat something at me at the same time. Clearly, they’d been hiding concealed weapons of some kind in their mouths. My body reacted immediately and leaped back automatically, but I realized almost right away that dodging was a bad move on my part. I’d been standing with one of the men on either side of me. In other words, now, they were facing each other directly.

“Gah!”

“Hrgh!”

With me out of the way, each man’s attack hit the other. When something that looked like a needle pierced each of their foreheads, their eyes rolled up into their heads and they convulsed a few times. I hurriedly took out a Super Potion and rushed toward them, but I was too late.

“Shit! Instant death, huh?”

The spasms ended in a few seconds, and they went completely motionless. I knew checking their HP would only confirm what I already knew—a total loss. It was obvious that the needles had been coated in some kind of fast-acting poison.

When I dispelled the magic of my water dragons, their corpses thudded onto the ground alongside the water splashing down. *They got me.* I hadn’t been their target. They’d been aiming for each other. I hadn’t seen that coming, that was for sure. My body had moved instinctively to dodge because I’d assumed they were gonna attack me.

“Son of a bitch. These guys are a bigger pain in the ass than I thought.”

My words came out as an unintentional groan.

They were prepared to kill their own comrades. That told me their resolve was anything but half-hearted. *But still, hatred of other races?* Something that cliché wasn’t enough to motivate the human supremacists. A different reason *did* come to mind, though.

“Revenge, huh?”

Their willingness to gamble their own lives meant the existence of death drove them. These people had lost relatives or others close to them. Through war or something else.

The people sacrificed in all the strife so far were still very much alive to them, at least in their hearts and minds. And this

was why they couldn't stop. They would never forget, and they would never let go either, because they were bound by the chains of the dead.

Even if the dead remained silent, these people could still hear their voices. This was simply an extension of war. If we didn't do something about this now, there was no future, and the ideal world we imagined would be even harder to reach.

But how exactly were we supposed to solve this problem? Killing them would only cause their resentment to grow, not stop.

"Hmm... Maybe this isn't something for me to think about."

For now, all I could say was that these assholes had attacked us, the king's allies. Therefore, under the laws of this country, they were criminals who needed to be brought to justice. In fact, it wasn't my job to worry about this in the first place. King Reyd and the Demon King could figure it out. Since I wasn't particularly smart, it would be better for everyone involved to let those two deal with it. I'd only stepped into this mess because they were the ones who'd decided things would work out, so they could damn well manage this headache on their own.

Besides, my original reason for even taking part in all this was to make the outside world safe enough for Iluna and the others to study in. If the plan failed, I'd feel bad for my kiddos, but they'd just have to stay home until the situation improved. Because life was priceless.

Then again, I *did* have contacts in Leila's village deep in the demon world now, so having them study under the ovine race seemed like a good idea. It was pretty far from the dungeon, which meant they'd probably have to live in a dorm. The village was a great place to live, though, and would provide an excellent learning environment for them.

It went without saying that I was incredibly worried about the whole prospect. But if I didn't want them to leave, I was better off just shutting them away in a glass cage. Plus, if they were ever in danger, they could use the dungeon return device to teleport home.

"Ugh. Decisions, decisions... But I know what I have to do."

If these people insisted on getting in my way, I'd just have to send them to the afterlife and let them make friends with the dead.

◇◇◇

Lefi, carrying En on her shoulder, arrived in the royal capital of Arsil less than an hour after Nell contacted her. That was how short the flight was when the Supreme Dragon unleashed all her power. Despite the late hour, lights still burned in the castle as everyone ran to and fro in their attempts to deal with the latest incident. She landed in the castle grounds.

“Wh-Who are you?!”

“A girl? But…”

Her sudden appearance roused a menacing frenzy in the guards on watch, but she ignored them all and strode briskly into the castle itself. Having heard the commotion, Nell immediately took Rir along to meet her. The usually considerate hero had completely forgotten to inform the guards of Lefi’s arrival. And in her agitation, she paid them no heed now either.

“Lefi! Oh, thank you for coming. I felt like I’d fail to rescue him on my own…”

“Think nothing of it. This is an emergency, after all. Now, tell me everything you know.”

Nell did exactly that, her expression grave.

“Mr. Yuki was captured last night. His last known location is east of here, a five-hour journey by coach—you and Rir can probably make it there in an hour. Based on the intel we gathered, while the likelihood of him being killed is low, the possibility of his freedom being curtailed is high. Though we don’t know how they would go about restraining a demon lord like him…”

“Hmm… He is strong in comparison to mankind, but that does not mean he is invincible. Therefore, anything is possible should he drop his guard. As always, I cannot decide if he is terrible at seeing things through to the end or simply lazy.”

“And…that’s why you all support him, right?”

The two of them heard En’s remark through telepathy.

“Well put. For he is far from perfect. Naturally, then, it falls to us to aid him.”

“Yup, I couldn’t agree more.”

Lefi and Nell steeled their resolve even more upon hearing En’s words.

“Nell, I am making my move at once. Considering the lateness of the hour, are you all right?”

“Contrary to appearances, I *am* basically a soldier, so I can go two days without sleep just fine. However, anything beyond that will affect my performance negatively, meaning I’ll have to be careful. Of course, I realize right away whenever I’m not at my best.”

“Fear not, for I do not intend for this to drag on that long. I will end it by morning. And what of you, En? Will you be all right as well, despite the late hour?”

“Yup… I’m fine! I can do this. Women have guts.”

“Gah ha! Yes, it is exactly as you say. The times he reveals himself to be the feckless imbecile he is, it is up to us to demonstrate our pluck and show the world the power of woman. The same goes for you, Rir. Your expression tells me you are vexed at your inability to protect Yuki, yes? Then turn aside your sense of worthlessness and prove your mettle now.”

“Grr.”

Rir nodded quietly, his eyes glittering with a powerful determination.

Lefi grinned boldly at the sight of them all.

“Right, then, you lot. It is time we teach the fools who challenged us where precisely they stand.”

For the first time in roughly a century, the Calamity known as the Supreme Dragon’s deeds would be recorded in the pages of history.



◇◇◇

Only a short time was left until sunrise.

“Is it that town?”

“It should be. Right, Veda?”

“Yes. The very place where we were attacked and Lord Yuki was captured. Lady Lefi, I believe you can see the inn we stayed at. It’s a fine building sporting two steeples.”

Captain Veda, the leader of the demon unit, answered Nell’s question. Though still not fully recovered from the effects of the poison, he had stubbornly insisted on accompanying the two of them. It hadn’t sat well with him to leave everything in others’ hands. He was also the only member of the demon entourage to go with them.

“Lefi, can you sense Mr. Yuki?”

Once Lefi knew a person, she could sense their presence no matter how many kilometers away or if they were actively trying to erase it. Nell had asked her question knowing this fact. Unfortunately, Lefi shook her head grimly.

“I…cannot sense him in the town.”

Then either he had been spirited away already, or he was long dead.

“Haah…”

She took a deep breath to restore a measure of calm to her seething mind before surveying her surroundings. *There is no one outside the settlement.* Which meant it wouldn’t be a problem if she were a tad…flamboyant, so to speak, with her actions.

“You lot, wait over there.”

“Huh? No, I’ll go with—”

“You have your standing in this country to consider, do you not? Leave this in my hands. Do not fret, for I have grown quite used to being the villain from my time at home.”

Both Lefi and Nell knew how tense the other’s nerves had them. Even so, Lefi smiled intrepidly, and her mettle reassured Nell, who nodded with gratitude in her heart.

“Mm… All right, I understand. I’m counting on you.”

“If-If I may be so bold, I request that you handle it as peaceably as possible, my lady.”

Despite being attacked by humans, the demon captain suddenly felt sorry for them, so he couldn’t help intervening on

their behalf.

For the town of Aleyrah, that day began with screams and bellows.

The first to notice were the guards on the morning shift. Stifling yawns, they arrived at their posts to switch with the guards on the night shift—and then it happened. The next instant, the area around the town went up in a blaze. The surrounding fields were alight, and the flames licked all the way up to the sky.

Kaboom! The sound of something exploding. The fierce roar of fire as it consumed air.

It was as bright as day outside even though night was still pressing down on the world. People woke up and flew out of their beds one after another as they sensed something amiss. And after freezing for a moment in shock at the sight of the hellish flames, they rushed about, trying to stop the damage from spreading to the town itself.

“Wh-What the…”

“Never mind! Just move! Before the whole town burns down!”

“W-Wait, look! For whatever reason, the fire hasn’t spread beyond that point!”

“What are you even say— Wh-What’s the meaning of this?! Is that magic?!”

Strangely enough, the fire surrounded the town without actually encroaching on it. Though the area several kilometers around burned, with both flames and smoke rising in a snakelike manner, the town itself remained completely untouched by the blaze. The conflagration was so controlled that it seemed to have a will of its own, and the astute had their doubts. Then, the voice came.

“I have little patience.”

It spoke directly into each of the townspeople’s heads, utterly undimmed by the chaos.

“Tell me, where is my husband, who has been taken from me?”

Baffled, most of the people turned to whoever was next to them and discussed the question. However, a few who had an inkling flinched in reaction.

“He is a demon. If you know who I am referring to, then you also know what has happened to him. Answer me, lest I burn

every inch of this place to ash.”

That was when the townsfolk finally noticed her. A young girl with wings flying above them. An unmatched beauty illuminated by fire. First, one looked up. Then another, before all of them stared at the sky and took note of her existence.

But no one attacked her. It was obvious to them that she was the source of this strange phenomenon. Yet in their awe of her almost divine beauty, they simply froze. Because they understood that *they* were the ones being judged.

“You have no answer, then? I glimpsed a few of you who reacted to my question as if you knew the answer. Perhaps my eyes deceived me? Unfortunate. Know that you chose this path, humans, and regret it.”

“W-Wait!”

At that moment, a man came running into the central plaza and shouted at the girl flying in the air. The girl—Lefi—spared him a brief glance before slowly descending nearby. The man was the mayor of Aleyrah.

“P-Please calm down. Your anger is plain, but—”

“Choose your next words carefully. I am in no mood for pointless conversation. What you say here will decide this town’s future.”

An aura of menace radiated from the Supreme Dragon. Her intent was clear in her gaze.

“Nh... I-I understand. Th-The capital! They took him to the royal capital of Arsil!”

Panicked, the mayor answered her. When he did, a man nearby yelled at him.

“Y-You traitor!”

“Shut up! As if I ever wanted our town embroiled in this nonsense! Nobody even told me of your idiotic plot to kidnap a bloody demon!”

“A little too late to be playing the innocent—”

“Silence,” Lefi snapped, her eyes cold.

The two men froze on the spot as if suddenly paralyzed. Sweat streamed down their faces. They couldn’t so much as blink, having been immobilized down to their very fingertips.

It wasn’t just the arguing pair, however. Everyone watching the exchange from a distance was hit by the waves of the Supreme Dragon’s overpowering aura and sank hard to the ground. Despite humans being insensitive to power compared to

the other races, by this point, all of them knew.

They knew that the young girl who had descended on their town was overwhelmingly above them. That they had interfered with something, some*one* they had no business interfering with. That they faced a conqueror of absurd, illogical, unopposable, absolute power.

“Humans, I care not for your petty squabbles. Your town—your entire country—has yet to be incinerated as a result of my whim and my whim alone. You there. You seem to know more about this situation than that man. What was it again? Ah yes, the ‘human supremacists.’ Will you reveal all? Or will I turn this place to naught but embers? Decide.”

With a flick of her hand, the paralysis dissipated. She was careful not to kill her opponent or render him unconscious. But feeling the pressure the Supreme Dragon directed at him, the human supremacist no longer had any will to resist. He answered her with tears streaming down his pale face.

“We… We took him into Arsil’s underground sewer system.”

“Why did you capture him?”

“W-Well…”

“Speak faster. Do you truly think I will not hold fast to my word? That I would prioritize the lives of strangers over those of my family?”

“W-We were going to force him to attack the city during the concert of solace! Now that things have calmed down after the war, an attack by demons would have been the perfect way to incite more hatred against the other races. That was our goal.”

“I see…”

An effective tactic to destroy the friendly mood between the races.

I cannot believe I left the capital just as they brought him there. Even as her irritation flared at the truth, she knew impatience would get her nowhere. So Lefi controlled her anger and pressed him further.

“When does this concert start?”

“I-In three hours. Heh… Heh heh heh! You’ll never make it even if you leave now! Unleash your wrath! Your hatred! Do what you will, you damn demon!”

“The fact that you see me as a demon reveals the extent of your paltry abilities.”

“What?”

Lefi was unfazed by the man's show of false bravado. Ignoring the confusion he'd slipped into, she smacked him with her tail and sent him flying. He crashed into a wall, then slid to the ground, unmoving.

She didn't spare him a single glance, instead turning her attention to the mayor. Expression strained, the man dropped to his knees and pressed his forehead to the ground. He spoke despite his mouth refusing to obey his mind.

"I-I'm the one at fault here, so if you're going to kill anyone, please kill me. The town of Aleyrah is innocent! I showed the supremacists I was willing to cooperate, which is how this town ended up as fodder and your husband ended up captured! P-Please forgive the townspeople!"

"..."

When Lefi clapped her hands together, the fire surrounding the town immediately vanished. The brightness akin to daylight disappeared, and darkness returned. The brutal heat, felt despite the distance, also steadily diminished.

"I shall do nothing. It is for your king to pass judgment on your crimes. Should you wish to run away, do as you please. That is, if you intend to frame my husband and avoid accountability for your actions, eh?"

"I-I-I'll accept my punishment. I will. S-S-So please..."

"Hmph."

She cut off the pressure from her aura and flew away from the town.

"Nell! We only just missed him! Yuki is in the capital!"

Nell, Rir, and the demon squad captain had been waiting for Lefi outside the town. She called out the news to her friend without stopping, intent on continuing her flight back the way they'd come. Alarmed, they followed after her at once.

"Apologies, but I am going on ahead! There is no time to spare!"

"Got it! Rir, go!"

"Grr!"

"Veda, you're still recovering, so please don't push yourself to keep pace with us!"

"That in itself is asking the impossible, you know! If I don't exert myself now, I'll regret it for the rest of my life!"

So they raced back to Arsil.

◇◇◇

A short time before Yuki regained consciousness.

“Lefi… Ngggh…”

When they heard the groan from behind them, a hint of fear spread inside the man and woman driving the luxurious coach designed to transport very important people. Nevertheless, they continued their conversation.

“What did I tell you? He should be dead to the world, yet here he is, moaning and groaning,” the man griped.

“Despite forcing a drug down his throat that would immobilize even a War-level monster *and* the Collar of Servitude. Should we make him take more of the drug now while we can?” the woman inquired.

“As much as I want to agree, we need him to work once morning comes. If he can’t because of the drug, our plan will fall apart.”

“I know that. But at this rate, I’m afraid he’ll go on a rampage.”

The young man behind them in the carriage had both his hands and feet bound, along with the aforementioned collar around his neck. He thrashed his head to and fro like he was fighting something. His gaze never left the man and woman as he glared relentlessly at them.

When someone placed a Collar of Servitude on a target, it forced the victim into absolute obedience toward that person. The man had already commanded the youth not to move earlier. Even so, he was still violently resisting. They were painfully aware of the fact that the young man wasn’t human, so they had devised their plan accordingly to ensure complete control of his movements. But this was the result.

“Hmm… On second thought, pour another vial of the anesthetic down this throat,” the man said.

“Will do,” the woman replied.

They stopped the coach briefly to do just that before resuming their journey. Some time later, they finally arrived at the entrance to their destination: an underground sewer system. Six men waited for them there.

“Right on time. How’s the demon doing?”

“He’s inside. Huh… Six guards for him? Feeling extra cautious, I take it?”

The man who answered that question wore a grim

expression.

“He isn’t your run-of-the-mill demon. This man intervened during the Kingdom of Alisia’s crisis and took care of it with his might alone. Considering I used to be on the military register, I know that truth better than anyone. Frankly speaking, if something happens, six won’t be enough. Hell, an entire corps won’t be enough.”

“Well, we forced him to take more of the drug not long ago, so even the simple act of wiggling his fingers will prove difficult for him,” the woman remarked.

“I hope you’re right.”

The man and woman handed over the demon youth before hiding the carriage nearby and leaving swiftly. Then, the six men carried him deep inside the underground sewer system. After tossing the young man, who couldn’t even stand up on his own, into the prison that had been set up ahead of time, each of the guards returned to his post. Two went to the entrance of a hidden passageway, and the other four to the guardroom near the jail.

“That man… He was muttering a woman’s name, wasn’t he? His lips were trembling from the effort.”

“Don’t tell me you feel guilty? They’re the enemy. We’ve been killing each other for a long time. Years, decades, centuries.”

Two of the men in the guardroom conversed, and the remaining two joined in.

“I know how you feel, though. What we’re doing isn’t good or right. I’m sure history will treat us as fools. Still, our bodies acted, and here we are now. But even without all that, he’s been allowed to run too rampant in this country.”

“Agreed. One way or another, it’s imperative that we remove his influence from this country. We’re relying overmuch on him —”

That was when they heard the sound of something being crushed coming from the direction of the prison. With their conversation abruptly cut off, the four immediately reached for their weapons.

“Oy, I’ll go take a loo—”

The man was unable to finish his sentence. In the blink of an eye, *it* charged into the room and plunged a hand through his chest, killing him instantly. It was the young man who should have been in the cell.

When another of the guards realized who it was, he quickly brandished his sword, but he was too late. The youth closed the gap between them in a single bound and unleashed a high kick to his head, pulverizing it like a pomegranate. Dead.

The men assigned as his guards were retired from military service. Back in their days of active duty, they had been elite, trained soldiers. Unfortunately for them, they were only human. As such, they could do nothing in the face of the young man's attacks, especially because he couldn't control his power in light of his lack of reason.

"H-He's a monster!"

"Calm down! If you panic, you'll die!"

Of the two men still remaining, one of them stepped forward and held up his round shield, bracing himself defensively while the other moved into position behind him, ready to counterattack with his sword. This was the two-man formation they had learned in the military. Their movements demonstrated their former status as the best of the best. But it all meant nothing to the young man.

"Graaaaar!!!"

An explosive punch accompanied that beastly bellow. It shattered the steel round shield easily, the momentum driving his fist straight through the man's midsection. The youth swung his arm, still inside the man, and attacked the last man standing.

"Ngh—"

He tried to dodge by moving backward, but the cramped room made it difficult to create distance between them. His back slammed into the wall instead. In the next moment, a palm and five fingers filled the man's vision as he found his skull grabbed...

◇ ◇ ◇

I used the faint footsteps and body odor mixed into the sewer water along with my hazy memory of the path they'd brought me down to make my way out of the underground sewer. When I saw the parked carriage nearby, all of my memories came rushing back to me.

"Oh yeah. This is what they used to transport me to the capital of Arsil."

Despite having been robbed of my will, my instincts had sensed danger, and my body had thankfully resisted with all its

might. But the fact that I could still remember things clearly was proof that I hadn't been totally knocked out and that somewhere deep inside, I'd been able to analyze the situation to some extent. Which explained why I'd been able to destroy the prison and eliminate the guards who'd been my biggest threat.

My headache hadn't fully gone away, probably as a side effect of whatever they'd drugged me with, but it was slowly getting better. Thanks to my resistance this whole time, my demon lord body must have overcome the Collar of Servitude's capacity for control and destroyed it, allowing me to come to my senses. All hail a demon lord's body. I could always rely on it. For the umpteenth time, I was so glad I'd been reborn as a demon lord.

"Oookay, so the question now is...where exactly am I?"

I looked around. Though I'd realized that this was the capital of Arsil when I'd exited the underground sewer system, it seemed like a part of the city I hadn't been to. The Maps function showing me only disconnected bits and pieces attested to that.

I desperately searched through my memories from during my captivity. If I wasn't mistaken, after we'd entered the city, the carriage had stopped once at an estate. I remembered being transferred to a different vehicle then. From a carriage used for long journeys to the one in front of me, which was decorated all lavishly and obviously meant to be used by nobles.

Remember. We hadn't traveled very long, so the estate shouldn't have been all that far from this sewer system. And I was pretty sure there was a reason they'd switched me to a fancy coach. For example...'cause we'd gone through the nobles' quarter.

"..."

After thinking things through for a bit, I activated my Stealth ability, generated my wings, and flew up. I knew Nell and the others weren't involved this time because I'd already combed through my memories, so if I headed straight for the castle, I'd probably be able to get home safely. But that wasn't the option I went with.

I flew around, surveying my surroundings, and— *Aha*. The nobles' quarter, adjacent to the part of the city I was currently in. And one of the mansions looked familiar to me, even though I didn't have conclusive evidence it was the same one. It wasn't small, but it was definitely much more snug compared to the ones around it. The place didn't stand out much either. I was

almost positive that was where they'd transferred me from one carriage to the other.

I flew around my target and unleashed an Evil Eye as part of my reconnaissance. *Jackpot.* Several lookouts. Their expressions and movements told me how tense they were. Maybe they were on edge because the enemy had gone forward with whatever operation they'd had planned after capturing me.

There were a bunch of them inside too, but overall, none of them were particularly strong. All of them had the stats of ordinary humans—barely a third of the stats the soldiers assigned to monitor me had had. *So does this mean there are only civilians here?*

"Eh, doesn't matter."

I descended, quickly knocked out the two guards outside, then slipped inside.

Sheesh. I'm always sneaking around whenever I'm in this city. How many times had I infiltrated someone's house without permission like this? Why was I always forced to act like some thief in the night?

The guards inside were on high alert too, their aura conveying their readiness for combat. Too bad for them they were just ordinary people. While continuing my investigation of the estate, I incapacitated them without exerting too much effort. And then, I finally arrived at *the* room.

The door made a creaking sound when I pushed it open. Inside, I found a bedroom containing only a wardrobe and bed.

"I take it the plan failed?"

A quiet voice. Belonging to a lone old woman. She looked like a normal old woman, one you could find anywhere. She sat up in the bed, watching me. Her eyes were gentle. Age-wise, my guess was that she was over seventy. But her spine was ramrod straight, and her undaunted attitude made a much stronger impact on me than her age. I could sense what a strong-willed woman she was.

In this world, her life span was pretty long for a human.

I don't have any definite proof. Not a single shred. It amounted to nothing more than conjecture on my part. But I came to a realization at this point. This old woman was the mastermind behind everything.

Nell had said so. That up until now, the human supremacists hadn't been acting on a grand scale. Instead, they had only been

spreading their philosophy quietly in the background.

Living a long life meant experiencing all sorts of things. That was exactly why this old woman could put up such a fierce fight. Without rushing, she had taken her sweet time to sow and spread the seeds of fear.

"The fact that you're here means my dear friends are all dead, doesn't it? Although I suppose from your perspective, that is a suitable punishment..."

"Yeah. I killed everyone guarding me in the prison. But I only knocked out the ones at this estate. They're still alive. 'Cause they really did seem like regular people to me, ya know?" My expression remained grim as I questioned her. "Time for you to answer me honestly. Who are you trying to avenge? For what purpose?"

"My, my. Hasty, aren't we? All right, as an apology for the trouble I've caused, I'll tell you. For my husband, my son, and my grandchild. Against this nation. Thus do I seek vengeance."

This country, not demonkind. Her revenge was against the Kingdom of Alisia. I'd just assumed she had a grudge against people of other races like me, so I couldn't quite hide my surprise when I replied to her.

"Then...are the three of them dead?"

"Yes. They were all soldiers. My husband was deployed in the war against demons on the border, my son went with his unit to fight the therianthropes, and as for my grandchild, he participated in the rebellion that occurred in the capital a year and a half ago. All three of them, dead. No, what was the technical term? Ah, yes. 'Missing in action.' Their bodies were never found, so perhaps they're still alive, hm?"

But the fact that she'd pretty much given up on their survival meant they were almost certainly dead. While I didn't know about the circumstances for her husband and son, the rebellion that her grandson had been in must've been the one Nell had asked for my help with the first time I'd visited the royal capital of Arsil. Demons had been involved behind the scenes on that occasion too since their machinations had caused it.

So that's the reason for her resentment, huh? A decent one, considering three generations of her family had died as a result.

"I hate to say this, but death is just a part of the job for soldiers. If you're not prepared for that, you're being naive. So don't you think it's irrational to take revenge against a country in

that case?”

“Of course I understand that. All three of them chose the military life for themselves, so of course I must respect their decisions despite my sadness. Of course I accept the possibility of death in battle. However, the problem is…that this country *wasted* their deaths.”

I said nothing.

“The recent Great War presented them the opportunity to work together with the races we’d been in conflict with for many long years. In particular, our interactions with demonkind have increased. Then why didn’t they choose such a path from the beginning?!”

Hatred festered in her gentle eyes. I glimpsed a deep rage in her face distorted by loathing.

“Peace? Now? What a joke! In other words, this country could have avoided all the senseless fighting if the leaders had felt so. My beloved family died for no reason whatsoever! There was no meaning or value in their deaths! Nothing was accomplished through their sacrifice!”

Even if I told this old woman that their deaths were exactly why things had turned out this way, she probably would’ve just laughed derisively at me. Then again, the reality was that their deaths didn’t mean much in the end. Considering how long humans and the other races had been at odds with each other, they’d died because they’d been embroiled in wars conducted out of force of habit. I knew this kind of thing happened a lot in this world. As for her grandson’s death, we’d quashed the insurrection before it could really escalate, so if he’d died in the middle of it, honestly, it probably didn’t mean much either.

“If they lacked the desire to fight, then they never should have fought in the first place. Those who aided me in my cause feel the same as I do. This country wasted the deaths of our loved ones. Therefore, we decided it must face comparable retribution, or else we won’t be able to hold our heads up when we meet those who have passed on again… Please allow me to extend my deepest apologies for involving you in our scheme.”

Because of this old woman, I’d found my life in serious danger *and* was almost forced to take part in an unsavory operation. She was an enemy who was clearly beyond redemption. But talking to her face-to-face like this, I just couldn’t work up the desire to kill her.

Oh. I know why. She was just a normal person. Incredibly normal, just like everyone else. And that was precisely why she felt so much anger at the deaths of her family members—why she was determined to get her revenge no matter how unreasonable others considered her. Anyone could become like her. The only thing that separated this old woman from the rest of the ordinary masses was her ability to turn her anger into action.

I had a feeling that anything I said now would fall on deaf ears. After all, this wasn't some storybook tale. Even if someone, their expression seemingly all-knowing, tried to convince another with the words "That's not right. The dead wouldn't want that," there was no way the other person would just conveniently change their mind. And on the slim chance they did, they never would've caused a problem like this in the first place.

Because we were all people. No matter how much reason tried to stop us, no matter how much others tried to stop us, we couldn't resist the intense emotions burning within us. We'd push forward even if we knew it would lead to our destruction.

"If you wish to kill me, kill me. You have the right to. However, should you do so, the news will spread that a demon murdered an innocent citizen. Conversely, if you let me live, as the leader of the human supremacist movement, I'll continue to spread hatred for the other races. Everywhere, no matter how I am treated."

"Well, you sure are putting me in a pickle, lady."

"Yes, for I'm a detestable woman. I feel sorry for you, being all tangled up with such a selfish old woman. In any case, your connection to this country is deep, yes? Then as long as you remain bound to it, I'll bind you to me as well."

The old woman smiled, her voice as quiet as ever. Her beef wasn't with me. She was just doing what she had to do. All she had left was her powerful force of will.

I remained silent for a while before answering her.

"I won't kill you. This country's law will be the one to judge you. Good luck living what's left of your life in a jail cell."

"Is that so? Then it is what it is. In the end, I'm simply a senile bag of old bones nearing death. Do as you please."

I sighed at her resolute expression.

"I understand what you're saying. So let me say this out of the kindness of my heart: you might wanna be more careful about who you involve in your little schemes, old lady."

“Are you implying you’ll run amok in this country as retaliation?”

“Nah, not me. My family.”

“Hmm?” She looked confused. “What do you me—”

Kaboom. The entire ceiling blasted away, and fresh, morning air rushed into her bedroom. And the early light of dawn illuminated a figure.

“So this is where you were, Yuki.”

The voice I loved so much that I could listen to it forever came down to me from above.



“Good grief. I see you have mired yourself in a troublesome matter yet again. As for any visible injuries… None. The flow of your magic is normal, and I assume the blood on your clothes belongs to another? You *are* fine, yes, Yuki?”

“Yup, I am. Sorry for worrying you, Lefi.”

She came down from the sky to stand next to me.

I’d detected her presence not long after I’d spotted this estate. While that wasn’t the reason I’d raided it, it’d let me know that I’d be fine if something *did* happen.

“Well, well… You certainly went above and beyond, you decrepit shrew. I have not felt such wrath in centuries. Be proud of yourself, human.”

Lefi’s eyes bored into the old woman, who had frozen in shock. Battered by the menace radiating from my wife, she was sweating profusely, with one hand clutching her chest right above her heart. Even then, she refused to be intimidated as she opened her mouth to speak.

“In the end, are we destined to be trampled by power?”

“Do not pretend to be the victim here. Had you not laid a hand on my husband, I would not have come here, nor would this country be under the threat of the danger known as I. *You* invited all of this unto yourself.”

Lefi spat those words scathingly, not even bothering to hide her hostility, which wasn’t like her at all. The old woman chuckled bitterly in response.

“No, I’m well aware. I have reaped what I sowed. Even so, despite my best efforts to utilize any and every strategy, to have the tide turned against us by dint of power alone makes me want to lament the weakness of humans. Especially because everything should have continued going to plan, at least up until we captured that demon.”

“Bah. Spare me your hollow words. The simple truth is that you have given up on humanity. Conversely, I know at least one human who strives every day under her own power despite understanding her own limits. That is how this country’s hero has lived her life, whereas you live yours drowning in grief, having forgotten how to move forward.”

“I don’t know how old you are, but don’t you think it’s a bit much to tell an old woman like me to ‘move forward’? How many of your beloved family have you had to send off to the afterlife? Have you ever felt the hatred that comes when you’ve

experienced such grief that it feels like your spirit is being torn apart, and then you try to move forward, only to realize all of that death was for nothing?!”

Frustration and resentment tinged the old woman’s voice. The animosity that hadn’t been there before was now welling up inside her.

“Well, I can admit that I have not experienced those things. Though I have lived a life much longer than yours, perhaps my experience with life itself is short compared to yours. *However*, I can now tell you that today, for the first time, I felt true fear when I learned that my husband had been abducted and was in danger of losing his life.”

This time, anger burned in Lefi’s voice, and the pressure radiating from her intensified.

“In any case, your circumstances mean naught to me. Did you think I would sympathize if you told me? I am the Supreme Dragon, Lefisios. The strongest dragon in the world, counted as one of its calamities. Do not think for a moment that I will show you compassion.”

That was when I cut in.

“Lefi.”

“Do not stop me, Yuki. I do not intend to forgive this *person* just because you ask it of me.”

Even as she tried her best not to take her anger out on me, Lefi couldn’t hide it. I smiled ruefully at her and spoke.

“Nah, that’s not it. The old lady passed out, so she’s not even listening to you.”

“Hrm?”

Lefi finally focused her attention on her actual opponent and stared at the old woman. She was unconscious, still sitting up in bed. Despite enduring my wife’s might through sheer willpower, once she’d taken the full brunt of Lefi’s anger, the old woman had hit her limit. The burden must’ve been extra tough on a senior citizen…though on second thought, it’d be tough on anyone, regardless of age.

“Let’s go home, Lefi. We know the enemy’s ringleader, objective, and mindset. All that’s left is for this country to deal with it. I did my job and then some.”

From next to Lefi, I looked at the unconscious old woman again. The fundamental problem still remained unsolved. We had yet to figure out the original reason they’d decided to act

under the guise of “human supremacy.”

But whatever happened moving forward wasn’t my job. It wasn’t Nell’s either. The king of Alisia had to solve his nation’s problem. Since we were close, I was more than happy to lend him a hand if he asked for it. Having said that, my part in this play was over.

At my words, Lefi took a slow, deep breath.

“How utterly…vexing. After all the trouble she caused, this ends with her falling unconscious? Infuriating.”

“Don’t worry, she’ll get her just deserts. The hag will probably rot in prison until she dies, so there’s no need for us to help her carry out her dastardly schemes by killing her.”

“Hmph. I suppose I have no choice but to accept your argument. In hindsight, you are to blame for dropping your guard to begin with! None of this would have happened if you had only steeled yourself for any and all possibilities! Have you any notion of the chill that iced my blood when Nell called me?!”

“I’m sorry, okay? I never even considered that my food would be poisoned, but that’s on me. Though I gotta say, I *did* think it tasted weird.”

The funny taste had probably been the poison, huh? *I mean, it’s rude to leave food behind when someone serves you. But eating everything ’cause of that philosophy sure was a major screw-up on my part.* The idea had never occurred to me, so I’d never realized that something was wrong.

“If you notice it does not taste right, then do not eat it, you imbecile!”

“Okay, yeah, when you put it like that, you’re not wrong. I honestly thought the food was just bad. Like, normal bad. Maybe it’s ’cause I’ve gotten way too used to Leila’s delicious cooking. Seriously, I am so, *so* sorry for making you worry.”

“Hmph… Good grief. You shall apologize to everyone else later as well. Particularly Nell. You cannot comprehend the deathly pallor of her face when she blamed herself for placing you in danger.”

It was obvious that Lefi had been genuinely worried about me, and her anger was real too. The thought secretly brought me joy as the two of us flew away from the mansion.

◇ ◇ ◇

After that, a human force led by Nell rushed to the scene and immediately surrounded the mansion. They took away everyone I had knocked out, and with that, the curtain closed on the whole affair. We spoke with the king of Alisia, then all of us went home. The only one who didn't was Nell, who stayed behind to investigate the incident. It was only later that I found out the full story.

Apparently, the old woman had had me kidnapped with the goal of causing a terrorist attack. Their plan had been to leave me at the concert of solace scheduled to take place that day, then unleash me to attack civilians in order to intensify the ill will toward the demons that had been easing up. They'd only intended to cause a commotion…but if I'd lost control, it would've been terrible. Since I'd seemingly lost all sense of reason while out of it, a merciless massacre would've been the end result.

Even then, I bet the old woman wouldn't've had a problem with that. After actually meeting her, I'd realized that her thirst for revenge had grown so violent that she viewed everything through the lens of her hatred. As far as she was concerned, anyone who obeyed the country's will was the enemy, along with those who wanted to lead peaceful lives. Otherwise, she would've used me in a much simpler way, crafting a strategy that had me attack important political figures. Seeing people live peacefully, oblivious to what she thought of as the truth, she'd embraced the dark, murky emotions inside her, even though she knew how irrational she was being.

I suspected the old woman's dearly departed and her comrades wouldn't have wanted them to do something like that. While alive, they must've had their own pride and dignity, and that was how they'd died, so they wouldn't have wanted their loved ones to do something that amounted to trampling their thoughts and wishes. They would've wanted their families to spend their days happily, peacefully… But those left behind would just wish for the dead to stay alive and feel hatred for the cause of their deaths.

The deeper the love, the greater the ensuing hatred.

Anyway. The ones responsible for the incident would be executed. Though the judgment made me uncomfortable, it was probably a fitting punishment, all things considered.

Since I was not only a demon lord but also the nominal

emperor of the Reauxgard Empire, the appropriate punishment for my attackers would've been the execution of their whole families and thus the annihilation of their bloodlines. Except I wasn't a fan of the idea, so I'd asked the king of Alisia to sentence only those who were truly involved to capital punishment. I would've had a guilty conscience otherwise. Also, probably partly to appease me, he'd agreed to ensure that their families wouldn't try to take revenge on me through Nell.

Incidentally, the inn the demons and I had stayed at had turned out to be innocent in all this. It wasn't a member of their staff who'd been responsible for drugging us but a spy pretending to be a customer who'd snuck into the establishment. The operative had slipped the paralyzing poison into our food without their knowledge.

The reason we'd been able to eat the food without worrying too much was probably because of the inn staff's cooperative attitude toward us. Plus, we hadn't felt any hostility from them. Following the attack and our abduction, the employees had immediately taken action and contacted that town's garrison...who, unfortunately for us, supported the human supremacists. The mayor was apparently one of them too, so it'd been a crime committed by the whole town. I'd heard that they were already arrested. All this collusion meant communication had been purposely delayed, and since they'd been deemed members of the human supremacists, the guilty folks in the town would be imprisoned for a while.

The truth had come out when the owner of the inn, face pale and lips trembling, had spoken of everything that'd happened and his regrets. Nell told me that despite him and his staff being innocent, because the incident had occurred there, they would face some kind of punishment. For them, it was a bit like being dragged into something they didn't want to be involved in. The inn had been reserved for us by the government, meaning it was safe for politicians and such to use. So while it was a shame that something like this happened there in the first place, perhaps the consequences had been inevitable.

"Yuki."

"Hmm?"

"Come here."

Here in the dungeon, Lefi sat seiza-style and patted her thighs.

“J-Jeez, give a guy a heads-up first.”

“Hush. Now come.”

“…”

After I dithered in confusion for a bit, I walked over to her, lay down on the floor, and put my head on her lap like she’d urged. Her thighs felt so good. Enveloped by her scent, I found myself relaxing unconsciously.

Lefi started stroking my head like she was soothing a child, then spoke.

“If something is bothering you, I shall listen. If you do not wish to tell me, I shall simply sit in silence with you. You see…I do not want you to be alone when you are wearing such an expression.”

She always sees right through me. I struggled for a bit to find the right words before replying.

“Lefi.”

“I am here.”

“I… Do you think I’m starting to become too naive about my belief in peace?”

This time around, I’d managed to make it home safely in one piece. But that didn’t mean the same would happen the next time. Despite my resistance during the period I’d been completely out of it, there was no denying that the situation had been a dangerous one. What made it worse was that I’d been done in by humans, who were much, much weaker than me.

I won’t waver. I know what I have to do. Even though thoughts like that drove me, in the end, I always wound up being too naive. Maybe if I were the same as I’d been during my fight against the black dragon, I might have picked up on the poison and avoided this whole debacle.

Perhaps I’d gotten weaker.

I wasn’t referring to my stats, which had shot way up. Factually, I’d managed to defeat the Dark King Corpse Dragon, a creature much stronger than the black dragon. Now, I was even able to kill the weakest of the powerful monsters inhabiting the western area of the Demonic Forest. But I wondered if acquiring that strength had led me to become less wary.

This was a little different from being conceited. Being conceited wasn’t in my DNA anyway. I’d never thought of myself as a strong person, nor was I in that kind of environment. So maybe that explained my naivete when it came to peace.

Maybe my fun, carefree, peaceful, and hopelessly happy days with everyone here had dulled my senses. Dulled the feeling that this world was dangerous. This latest incident had made me realize that maybe I'd become more complacent than before.

My relationship with everyone was progressing well, and Lefi had announced her pregnancy. Just when I'd thought I needed to step up as a man, this happened. So of course I was fed up with myself.

I told her all this haltingly. But she only chuckled affectionately at me.

"Oh, is that all? Here I was worrying over your uncharacteristically dejected air, yet there you were, thinking of such things."

"Well, I couldn't help it after seeing the state that old woman was in. Not to mention that my mistake this time led to all this trouble for you guys."

If anything happened to the people I loved, I knew I'd become like that old woman and her comrades. That was why I hadn't been able to dredge up much anger toward her. It felt like looking at myself in the mirror, seeing my own shortcomings and inadequacies.

"Gah ha! Despite your composure on the surface, you were worried deep down, eh?"

"I mean, who wouldn't be? Sure, I managed to escape on my own, but that doesn't change the fact that I could've died depending on the circumstances. And if I *had* died, I don't know what would've happened to the dungeon. Worst of all, I never would've been able to see you all again. Just thinking about it gives me the shivers."

"Indeed, I would not like that either. Which is precisely why I was so furious to learn of your abduction *and* angry at you for being careless. Have you still not reflected on your actions?"

"No, I did, but...only because of how much I worried you."

At my words, Lefi continued, her tone gentle like one she'd use to cajole a child.

"Then this conversation should be long over. There is no point in discussing what-ifs, Yuki."

"So you think I'm overthinking this?"

"It is fine to use that old woman as an example of what not to do, but do not let her batter your spirit. Yes, you may have become a tad less cautious than before. That is because you are

truly happy in your life with us all. However, that is not a bad thing."

"But in this world, it's better to have a sense of danger. Sure, I've grown stronger to a certain extent, but that's all I've managed. If I let my guard down, I'm as good as dead. Right?"

"Perhaps. I do not think you have become fatally complacent, though... Well, I can only state the obvious, but if something is troubling you, you should use this failure as a lesson and put it to good use on the next occasion. You survived and made it home, did you not?"

"Yeah... For now, I guess I should work on building immunity to poison."

"Ha ha! Very good. Since your magical energy is leagues greater than that of a normal human, you can easily repel such things. But when it comes to high-quality poison, you can still be caught off guard, as in this case. Still, I am surprised to see you so concerned about the matter. I suppose there was merit in my anger."

"Shut it..."

Lefi cackled hysterically for a bit before poking at my cheeks while my head still rested on her lap. Then, she started stretching them out.

"Hmm, hmm, hmm... I must say, your cheeks are not very fun to play with."

"Ya don't say."

"However, I do believe I would not tire of them even if I spent the rest of my life touching them."

Grinning, she peered down into my face.

"Buuut your number one is my wings, right?"

"So you *do* understand! Then be a dear and put them on display for your beloved wife. I shall stroke and admire them to my heart's content."

"Woman, aren't you supposed to be cheering *me* up?"

"Why, that is exactly what I am doing. Will it not please you to see me, whom you adore so much, delighted? Therefore, I made this suggestion to lift your spirits."

"What an incredibly self-centered and irrational argument, darling."

Smiling wryly, I nevertheless felt my heart lighten at her thoughtfulness.

"Okay, Lefi, I don't wanna feel like a Debbie Downer anymore,

so help me out.”

“Fine, fine. As your mate, I shall stay by your side until your gloom dissipates.”

I sat up with a smirk.

“Then let’s get in the bath together right now. I want you to let me do aaall the naughty, sexy things to you.”

“Hrgh… W-Well, I suppose I could. T-Truly, you will never understand how difficult it is to be the recipient of someone’s love.”

“It’s not gonna get any easier for you either, since I can’t stop my love for you from overflowing. In more ways than one.”

“You are deliberately making your words sound obscene. Stop it, you imbecile.”

I burst out laughing when Lefi, her cheeks red, smacked me on the shoulder.

Side Story 1: A Ruler’s Anguish

In an office in the Kingdom of Alisia.

“Good grief… What a maddening parting gift.”

After reading through the papers before him, Reyd Glorio Alisia sighed deeply.

The human supremacists. In reality, their activities had been born of their resentment against this country rather than a true hatred of the other races…and that mindset had had a profound impact on the kingdom.

Despite having captured their central leaders and proceeded with their handling in secret without revealing the news or the truth to the public, the kingdom’s leadership had been unable to completely stop the dissemination of the human supremacists’ ideology. Many people were dissatisfied with their daily lives and had begun to use their ill feelings toward other species as an outlet for their frustration. Evidently, the individuals apprehended this time had considered what would happen after their capture. They had strategically laid the groundwork for spreading information in a way that would ensure those information routes wouldn’t be crushed.

The idea, little more than whispers before, had suddenly blossomed on a massive scale. Though it might have been fleeting, its spread couldn’t have come at a worse time. But frankly speaking, once upon a time, the nation itself had led the propagation of the idea. And not just this one. It was true of every human country at one point or another in their histories. In order to divert the citizenry’s hostility toward the system itself, every government had used something external, be it another state or race, as a scapegoat, essentially making that target a convenient “enemy” for the system.

However, Reyd could never again do such a thing. Not under any circumstances. Harmony with the other races was a decision he had made for this country, and it was a course of action that must never be changed so that they might all see a future. It was a path this country—no, the world that included this country would walk for the sake of peace.

That was why, as king, he needed to choose. To exercise his

power as a ruler. To make the decision to oppress. He could not afford to back down now, to wait and see.

“Even though my only desire for so long now has been to retire as soon as possible…”

He slumped into his chair and sighed deeply again, staring up at the ceiling.

I know. I know I am much too ordinary a man to ever be called a hero. ’Tis only by the hand of fate that I was born a royal and thus allowed to live my life as one.

Although Reyd had done his best to behave as a king would, it had become clear in recent years that he wasn’t the right person for the job after all. Reauxgard’s former emperor. The Demon King. The Elf Queen. If he only had even an iota of their talent, perhaps his policies would have panned out better, and perhaps he could have prevented harm. He wouldn’t have caused such trouble for the demon lord either. Were he to be told that all this was a result of his own incompetence, he wouldn’t be able to deny it.

“Be that as it may…I do not have the time to ask for the impossible.”

He inhaled deeply, then exhaled, slowly facing ahead. If he couldn’t increase the number of cards in his hand, then he had no choice but to move forward with what he already had. Because after his son’s death, he’d promised himself that he would no longer allow grief to stop him. He would keep running until this aging body decayed. Only then, when he was reunited with his son in the afterlife, would he be proud to say that he died as a king.

As Reyd ruminated on how to deal with the future, a knock sounded on the door of his office.

“Your Majesty. It’s time for the meeting. Everyone is waiting for you.”

“My thanks. I shall go now.”

He stood up and exited the room.

Right, then. Time to fight.

Chapter 2: A Month of Strengthening

I was in the Demonic Forest with Rir, whom I'd summoned, and we were chatting.

"Listen, Rir. I acted like a serious freaking disgrace this time around. I feel like such a worthless good-for-nothing. I think I got so used to peace that my sense of danger dulled."

"Grr..."

When he rumbled apologetically and hung his head, I smiled ruefully.

"Why are *you* apologizing? Oh, 'cause you think you were a beat too late in rushing to my rescue? Nah, man, you're not my guardian. Sheesh, if I let myself rely on you that much, how can I even call myself your master?"

My words did nothing to ease the regret on his face. So I continued seriously.

"Well, I guess we *are* men. Meaning I totally get why you're feeling useless too..."

"..."

"And that's why things are gonna change moving forward. Up till now, we've just sat there with our thumbs up our asses. Time for us to realize again that we're nothing but small fry. Let's remember what it felt like during our early days here in the Forest, running around like headless chickens while bitterly cursing the unreasonably strong enemies making us do that. Then again, we don't *actually* have this region under our control yet either. We're outclassed by so many."

I controlled half of this forest. The southern and eastern areas, plus the northern, Lefi's former territory. As a result, my dungeon's domain was probably even larger than the major power known as the Kingdom of Alisia.

With that said, the western area, the one with the strongest monsters, remained untouched by my hands. I'd left it alone once I'd decided it was more important to expand outward instead of deeper into the Demonic Forest. On a fundamental level, the Forest's monsters stuck to their habitats. They hardly ever set foot in places with thin concentrations of mana. The key word there, though, was "hardly." Meaning the probability wasn't

zero.

In the past, I'd hunted down the monsters from the western area that'd come all the way out here. Therefore, I just couldn't afford to underestimate this forest. Despite being powerful for a humanoid race, I was still way out of Lefi's league in terms of strength. So there was no way in hell I'd let some goddamn humans merc me.

"Rir. We're weak. From this world's macro perspective, we haven't even gotten out of the noob category. I don't plan on living fast and reckless, but I'm gonna get stronger. Strong enough to fight back, no matter what comes."

"Grr," he said after a thoughtful pause. A fierce light burned in his eyes as he nodded in response to my words.

"Excellent, glad to have you on board! Let's get started on training right away! We'll take things one at a time! Instead of just casually hunting monsters like we have been!"

"Grr!"

◇ ◇ ◇

A few days had passed since the human supremacist debacle, and life was calm again.

"Master... I want to grow stronger too," En said out of the blue.

"Huh? Wh-Where'd that come from, kiddo?"

"I...know that you've been thinking up combat plans with Rir lately. So just like you two, I want to train and grow stronger. So I can protect you, Master. That's why I want us to think of a way I can do that together. Okay?" She peered into my face while speaking.

Sooo, recently, Rir and I had been undergoing some serious combat training after reflecting on our failures. And it was clear from her words that En had been observing us.

"You got it. Also, I actually *have* been trying to think of more ways the two of us can fight together, En. How about we strategize together?"

"Okay...!"

Thus began the strategy meeting between the two of us.

"First...I'll tell you my goal. The spear you used was veeery strong."

"I mean, yeah, it is. No doubt about that one. But I'm nixing that. I'd rather not use it ever again, and my plan is to just keep it

in storage forever. I definitely don't wanna take it out of Inventory."

She was referring to the God Spear I'd received in the Dragon Hamlet. It'd been a huge help during the war. Without it, all I could've accomplished was running around frantically while trying to escape. However, that power wasn't something to be wielded willy-nilly. You could call it an absolute last resort. A weapon that wasn't to be used unless I had literally no other options. Plus, I personally didn't want to use it on account of, well, it scared the bejesus outta me. Not to mention that me owning it in the first place legit felt like some kind of mistake.

Buuut...I still wanna delve into its true form. To be perfectly honest, I was very much interested in the existence of God. I didn't really care anymore about the answer to the question "Why am I here?" but as the master of a labyrinth, I *was* curious about that existence.

I wonder if the Spirit Emperor might know something about all this. I'd love to see him again too.

"Hmm... But I thought about why that spear is considered so powerful."

"Oh yeah? And what's your conclusion?"

En nodded and answered.

"Of...course its destructive power to cut through anything, how the blade lengthens, and the reach of its slashes are all reasons. It's impossible not to acknowledge its superiority as a weapon. It's better than me as I am right now, and there are very few other weapons that can even rival it."

"N-Naaah, you're plenty strong enough as a weapon yourself. That spear is just in a class of its own—"

"The...truth is the truth. I've already accepted it."

The hint of anger on her face told me that she really had been thinking deeply about it. *I see...* She'd seriously been trying to figure out how to grow stronger herself. Any awkward attempt on my part to praise her now would only be rudely undermining her efforts.

"You know what? You're right. That spear is definitely superior to you. Likely by a few levels. But I hate it and you're my one and only main weapon. That will never change."

"That...makes me happy. Thank you. But that's exactly why I want to be useful to you, Master. So I thought of something I can do too."

“What’s that?”

“I…am a sword with a will. Meaning that unlike normal weapons, I can control magic. Master, I can use your Magic Edge technique by myself. I’m learning how to use magic properly now too.”

Magic Edge was the sword technique I’d learned during my fight against the previous hero, Lemiro, in the demon world. By cloaking the blade in magical energy and unleashing it, I could execute ranged slashes. The God Spear had been equipped with this ability from the beginning. When swung, something similar to Magic Edge rushed out automatically, but that wasn’t the case with ordinary weapons. The technique required the user to control it, which put strain on their magical ability, making single-move attacks slower than with the God Spear. It might’ve been fairly doable for a swordsman on the level of the previous hero, but it was much harder for someone like me.

That said, En was an Intelligent Weapon, so she could unleash Magic Edge on her own, just like the God Spear. It was thanks to her having a will of her own and the ability to control the magical power that resided in her blade. This fact gave her a huge advantage over other swords.

“Increased…sharpness. Extended attacks. Ranged attacks. These are eternal challenges for weapons, a path to pursue forever. And I must walk it myself. Me being a sword with a will means I have to think about all kinds of things.”

“You have a point. As a weapon, you’ll spend your life searching for all that, huh?”

“The…other thing is the second form.”

“Oh yeah, a second— Wait, what? A second form?”

“I…want to achieve a second form just like the God Spear. It’s super cool. Everyone aspires to that.”

“R-Right… Actually, yeah, it *would* be cool to have a second form.”

Even with her usual expressionless face, En’s eyes shone with expectation. All I could do was chuckle wryly at the sight. *A second form, huh? Since she wants it so badly, maybe I should try to think of a way to make it happen.*

“And…then, when this little girl’s body attains its second form, I’ll have a new body like Leila’s. Because I’m not a normal person, I thought of how I want myself to look as a grown-up, and the only option is her! The little-girl gang wants to be like Leila! No,

wait, that's not what I wanted to discuss. We're getting off track here."

You sure about that, kiddo? 'Cause you sounded real passionate there. In any case, I'm happy you're able to talk so much now.

Anyway, back to the topic at hand. Considering everything she'd just told me, I also needed to put some serious thought into this moving forward.

That reminded me. Yesterday, we'd talked about Iluna getting taller. She would grow normally because she was a humanoid. As for Shii, she could change her body if she felt like it. At the moment, En was the only one without a means of physical growth. On account of her being a sword and all. All of this to say, it was up to me to consider the problem earnestly.

Incidentally, Leila looked embarrassed. She'd been listening to our conversation since she was nearby. *Too cute.*

After setting aside the question of a second form for now, En and I had talked about a bunch of things and come up with a few new techniques. First, an improved version of Magic Edge called "Magic Edge: Revamped." It was a flying slash that also tracked its target through En's manipulation of the attack.

Since magic could be controlled to a certain extent even after being released, we'd tried to see if she could maneuver it in the same way. As expected, she'd managed to bend the upward trajectory. Her accuracy was still rough, and she couldn't make a perfect ninety-degree turn, but the potential was there, so she just needed to practice. For her part, En had been all fired up and said, "This…is my homework. I'll do my best." The ideal slash was one that continued to pursue its target until it landed.

The second thing we'd thought of was Heat Sword. En had a sorcerous circuit called Crimson Flame, which could be used as a jet-engine ability. I had her use it primarily while flying to make myself go faster. Heat Sword improved on it by making that technique easier for her to use and maintain at all times.

It was extremely hot, and I'd felt like I was going to burst into flames when she'd used it. But it cut through rocks like butter without any real effort on my part. I'd even managed to slice through a thick concrete wall I'd bought with DP. One swing was all it'd taken, so this was definitely a technique we could employ sooner rather than later.

There was just one caveat: It consumed a fair amount of

magical energy. However, both En and I were stronger than before, and our mana supplies had increased considerably. Even if a battle dragged on, we could keep using it for around an hour. If I used an advanced magical power potion, I was sure I'd be able to fight for even longer. And a Super Mana Potion would help me fight even longer.

Then, there was the third technique we'd devised. My favorite out of all of them.

"Here we go, En!"

"Yup... I'm ready when you are!"

We were currently on the deck of the phantom ship dungeon, one of the dungeons in my possession. En responded to me while in her sword form, and her scarlet blade glowed an even deeper red as she unleashed a heavy pressure that made even me, her master, break out in a cold sweat.

"Ngggh!"

Holding my beloved sword in a low position, I swung her forward with all my strength. What fired out was not so much a magical edge but a beam. It sent ripples through space, gouging through the ocean and piercing forward endlessly. *Splash.* The air heated up and an intense roar rang out as if something had exploded. Huge waves formed, shaking the deck of the giant ghost ship dungeon. Then, eventually, the gouged-out surface of the ocean returned to normal. En's blade returned to its usual crimson color too.

"Wh-Whoooa... We did it."

"Yup... But I lost control of the magic toward the end there. If I work hard, I can make it go farther."

My face twitched a bit in shock, but En sounded dissatisfied by what she'd just achieved. No surprise there, since my girl was the type to be particularly hard on herself.

That was an attack where I used spirit magic to transfer magical power to the spirits, which I then wrapped around En's blade before firing it in the same way as Magic Edge. I'd test-fired it several times with a lower amount of energy and tried getting the shape right before the real deal, but it'd turned out to be more powerful than I'd thought.

Gotta say, smart move on my part to do it here instead of in the Demonic Forest. The attack was designed to challenge Lefi's Dragon Roar, but I had to wonder if it even came close. Had adding En's slash made it more powerful than Leviathan, my

spirit magic spell? It'd felt like...the Undead Dragon's Dragon Roar back in the Elvish Enclave. That seemed like the best analogy.

If I had to name it, I'd call it "Magic Edge Cannon." Though at this point, it didn't really feel like a slash anymore. Experience and intuition told me it'd be more effective if I gave the same amount of magical power to the spirits than if I used it myself to release the magic.

In fact, if the results were anything to go by, my theory seemed to be spot-on. Even though my body was also formed of mana, spirits, which were purer and could be called "mana with a will of its own," were more suited to the technique. That likely explained the power difference.

One problem was that it took time to charge. Compared to Leviathan, I couldn't adjust the output either, so after firing one shot, that was that. The best way to use it would be to have my pets hold the front line while I charged in, then unleash it as the killing blow.

Also, since the key to this attack was spirit magic, the environment was another issue. My specialty was water, which meant water spirits gathered around me more than other spirits and obeyed my commands. Right now, the technique was powerful enough because we were at sea, where water spirits could best demonstrate their abilities. But if I were to use it in a forest or something, it'd probably be a little less powerful.

"Listen, En. Even if the God Spear is in a class of its own, this is the most powerful attack we have in our current wheelhouse. And the fact that I was able to produce it together with you makes me wanna celebrate."

"Hmm... You're right. The first thing to do is celebrate our success."

"Exactly. Having ambition is a good thing. Heck, I know *I* have to get stronger too. Way stronger. But I also don't think there's any need to drive ourselves into a corner. Let's do our best to grow strong one step at a time."

"Okay...!"

Now we have more tricks up our sleeves. All that's left is to grind more training bit by bit. Although it feels like all I've done is increase my repertoire of one-shot moves, which makes it tricky to figure out the best situations to use them in. But we are *making progress, so I guess we'll call it good.*

Besides, En's design philosophy emphasized one-shot kills. When the old butler dude, the previous hero, had been teaching me swordsmanship in the Elvish Enclave, he'd told me to take that path too. And more than anything, the concept itself was pretty epic. Long live the big ships, big guns doctrine!

While En and I shared in the joy of success, Leila peeked in on us from a nearby dungeon door connected to the Demonic Forest.

"Master Yuki, En, I've prepared a light repast. Would you care to join us? Or would you rather I wrap it and set it aside if you'll be at this a while longer?"

"Hmm. En, I feel like we got a lot done, so whaddya say to taking a break?"

"Snack...time, yay."

She immediately anthropomorphized. The smile on her face made me smile too as I replied to Leila.

"There you have it, Leila. We'll be heading back with you. Oh yeah, I just remembered something I wanted to ask you. Can you tell me about this world's myths?"

"Myths, is it?"

"Yeah. When I thought about it, I realized I don't know much about the goddess Nell's church worships or the popular religions among the different groups of mankind. Figured you might be able to teach me."

"Well, I suppose I'm knowledgeable enough on that topic... Understood. I would, of course, be happy to. I shall tell you what I know later."

◇ ◇ ◇

After we finished eating our snacks, I listened to Leila talk about myths while sipping on hot tea.

"Let me see... There are many gods in which people believe, but two of them form the central pillars of faith. It's said that everything began from the pair."

Lew, who was also drinking tea, joined the conversation.

"Oh, I know this story too! Although werewolves primarily believe in fenrirs as their deities, the grandam faith healer in my village told us about those two gods. During the festival honoring them, the grown-ups would serve super fancy meals along with offerings, so we really enjoyed them."

A nostalgic expression settled on Lew's face, maybe because she was reminiscing about her life in her hometown. *But a faith healer, huh? I guess vocations like that* do *exist in this world.*

"Lefi, are there any such legends among dragonkind?"

Lefi, who, whaddya know, was *also* drinking tea, answered Leila's question.

"Hmm. Well, religion as mankind knows it does not exist among us dragons. However, I do believe we, too, know the legend of these gods. The Original God and the Earth Goddess are the two you speak of, yes?"

"Wooow, Lefi. The fact that your people know about it despite not being members of mankind suddenly makes this even more fascinating, huh?" Lew chimed.

"Indeed. And frankly speaking, I found myself a tad surprised you lot are also aware of that myth. I wonder who in the past spread it."

The ladies chattered excitedly about a topic I had no knowledge of. That was when I asked them a question.

"The Original God and Earth Goddess… Are they mates, then?"

"No. Though they're often spoken of simultaneously, they are not, in fact, mates. It's said that the one who existed first is the Original God, also known as the Primordial God and He Who Did Such and Such, depending on which race you're talking to."

In the beginning, there had existed the Original God. The source of all things. A huge being that possessed immeasurable power. However, it'd lacked consciousness. It'd just been…there. It hadn't moved, simply existing eternally when even time as a concept was uncertain.

And then, one day, the Earth Goddess had appeared. Where she'd come from and whether she'd been created by the Original God were all mysteries. But legend said that the Goddess had encountered the Original God, and everything had begun from there. She'd used the power of the Original God to create the earth and the oceans in the blink of an eye. One after another, life had been born until this world itself had come into being.

The goddess that Nell believed in was apparently one of the daughters born to the Earth Goddess. This goddess presided over love and courage, and in another world, she definitely would've been revered by certain Red Bean Bread Warriors. She supposedly had a humanlike appearance, which explained why humans in general worshipped her.

By the way, although their sect was different, the people of the Reauxgard Empire, which had recently become part of my dungeon's territory, also worshiped Nell's goddess. Though I'd left its governance entirely in the hands of the Demon King and the other monarchs, I was slowly learning about the country's culture.

"…"

"There are minor variations in the myth among the different races, but for the most part, this is how the tale seems to be passed down. And just like the truth in the legend of the underworld Lefi told us about, perhaps there's a basis in reality for this one as well. Master Yuki? Is something the matter?"

"Nah, it's nothing."

The Original God and Earth Goddess, huh? One uses the other's vast power to expand the world and create life. Almost like a dungeon and its master. Almost exactly like how I use my dungeon to do what I want.

I thought back to my conversation with the former emperor of Reauxgard when we'd met in the demon world. I understood now. His theory about this world being a dungeon was based on his knowledge of this myth.

In that case, then like a dungeon, the Original God's existence must've been the "system," one that didn't operate on its own because it could only display its true ability when operated by someone else. Which made me even more curious about the Earth Goddess. For all intents and purposes, her position had been the same as mine was now. So where the heck had she even come from? How had she even met the Original God? Or had the Original God created someone to operate it?

"Do these two deities have actual names?"

"Only the Earth Goddess's name is known. Gaia. The Original God is simply referred to as that or its other appellations."

Lefi quickly refuted Leila's explanation.

"Hmm, is that how it is in the world outside? Dragonkind knows the other's name."

"Ah! Truly? May I ask what it is?"

"Gah! W-Warn me before you approach me so suddenly."

Lefi's exasperated smile said "Ever eager, you are" even as she answered Leila's question.

"Dominus. That is the name of the First God."

Right at that moment, my menu suddenly opened on its own

with a *voom*. It showed me the Dungeon category, the one through which I could remodel the interior.

"…"

I froze for a second before snapping out of it to scroll through the page. And then, within the grouping of words, I saw *it*. A shiver ran down my spine. I could buy *it* for an overwhelming amount of DP, the number so colossal that I wouldn't reach it even if I spent one or two thousand years saving up.

There had never been an item like this before. Was the story the trigger? Did the dungeon decide that it was okay to show me this because of who I was now?

The words were garbled in places, so not all of it was legible. But it showed this on the display: "Domi?s ???"

◇ ◇ ◇

I plopped my butt down on the deck of the phantom ship dungeon and tossed out my fishing line.

"Heeey, Master."

"Yeaaah?"

"Fishies only eat worms?"

Shii sat next to me, asking me that while poking at the worms wriggling inside the bait box. Earlier, when I'd asked her why she wasn't playing with Iluna and the others, she'd said, "Weeell! Today I play with you, Master!" with a sunny smile. Ridiculously adorable.

"Mmm, yeah, pretty much. Technically, these guys are called 'eunicids,' and they're basically earthworms' cousins."

"Wooow! Cousins?! You right! They both wiggle, wiiiggle! I can wiggle too! That mean Shii a worm cousin too?"

"Ooh, gooood question. Maybe you are, but only when you wiggle."

"Tee hee hee! I seeee! Then as part of worm family, I do my best to wiggle like no one ever wiggled before!"

"Oh yeah, you could totally take over the world with your wiggles, Shii. I bet you could even win the Tenkaichi Budokai."

"Tee hee hee! That be nice. Then I use Super Kamehameha and Ultimate Kamehameha and aaall the Kamehamehas!"

"Ooh, yeah, I'm all about the beam life too."

"Master, how to make beam? You and EnEn can do, right?"

"We sure can. When you get bigger and have more mana,

you'll definitely be able to do it too."

"Hmm. When I bigger, huh? Every day so fun already, and future has fun too! Very exciting for me!"

"That is very true."

"I do believe your brains have died."

Apparently, Lefi had shown up at some point while Shii and I were hanging out, because I suddenly heard her voice from behind us.

"Hellooo, Lefifi! I just learning the ess-ence of wiggle wiggle 'cause Shii is worm cousin!"

"Is that so? Well, I much prefer you as you are now—that is, normal—so I would have you remain thus *without* mastering the essence of the vaunted art of wiggling."

"Oh reeeally? Then I a-okay with being normal Shii too! I like you as you are too, Lefifi!"

Beaming, Shii glomped onto Lefi. In turn, my wife patted her on the head and sat down next to me with Shii still clinging to her.

"How goes the fishing?"

"Poorly. I haven't caught squat."

"Unfortunate."

That was all she said before we sat there in silence for a bit, just listening to the sound of the waves. All that chattering must've tired Shii out because she started nodding off, so she lay down and rested her head on Lefi's lap. My beloved wife started stroking the little blue girl's hair. Then, she finally spoke.

"So. Yuki. What is it this time?"

"What do you mean?"

"You have been in quite a contemplative state since learning of the gods' myth. I would not go so far as to call it brooding. However, something about the tale clearly troubled you, did it not?"

As usual, she sees right through me.

"Lefi. If I seriously wanted to meet the Spirit Emperor again, how would I go about making it happen?"

"Hmph. That old man? Well, that is a difficult task indeed, since he is incessantly roaming the world. Moreover, he avoids man's settlements and travels from one secluded place to another. Rather than search for him yourself, it is more likely his whim will bring him back to our home first."

"Hmm. I see. Then I guess I have no choice but to wait, huh?"

“Why the sudden need to see him? Is there something you wish to ask him?”

From next to me, Lefi looked up inquiringly at me.

“Yeah. I wanna know more about the dungeon and about the gods. I feel like he… I don’t even know why I’m stumbling to call him that after all this time. Anyway, I feel like he knows a lot.”

“Hmm, yes, he likely possesses quite a depth of knowledge. He is just as inquisitive as Leila and has lived a life much, much longer than any of dragonkind. A monster in the truest sense of the word… Is there some kind of connection between the dungeon and the divine myth?”

“I think so. And it doesn’t seem like a simple one either. I suspect it’s incredibly deep. The truth is, while I was listening to Leila tell the story, the dungeon reacted on its own to show me something, which in itself was weird since it normally leaves everything up to me without saying a word.”

“Aha. I begin to see the light. So this is what you have been dwelling on.”

“Yeah, except I still don’t know anything because all it showed me was fragments of data, maybe because I still don’t have enough authority. That’s why I wanna know. As the master of this dungeon.”

First of all, I had no doubt that the divine existed in this world. God. A superior being. Or a system. Whatever you called it, something that operated in a different realm from ours, with different logic.

The relationship between a dungeon and its demon lord might not’ve simply been a symbiotic one in the natural world. There *had* to be something deeper connecting the two entities. But just because I knew that didn’t mean I was gonna do anything about it, so this was just…curiosity, I guess. Though I wasn’t maniacal about it like Leila, I didn’t think it was all that strange for me to want to know more about the existence of this dungeon. Y’know, considering we were essentially two hearts beating as one.

When I explained all this to Lefi, her expression also grew thoughtful.

“Hmm… I, too, would find myself pondering over the matter. In short, you do not think there is something strange about the dungeon simply because you yourself are an odd man, yes?”

“That’s sure telling your husband, huh? Even though I can’t

really deny it after all this time.”

“Gah ha! Do not fret, for I love that part of you as well.”

Dragon sure got my tongue with that.

“So, uh, you wanna fish too, Lefi?”

“No, thank you.”

Then, with Shii still on her lap, Lefi leaned her head onto my shoulder. Savoring her warmth, I talked to her about all kinds of things while my fishing line hung completely still in the water.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Huh?”

Iluna found a pair of pants she hadn’t worn recently in the back of her wardrobe, pulled them out, and was about to put them on when she tilted her head in confusion, her voice filled with a hint of impatience.

Aside from Shii, who could shape her own body into clothes, everyone else’s clothes were produced by Iluna’s big brother, Yuki, and his mysterious dungeon power. In the world outside, three sets of clothes would be enough for any normal person. But because Yuki liked to spoil them and let them dress fashionably, she and En had nearly a dozen outfits. He had also prepared dozens of dolls for each of the wraith triplets to possess. The sisters had a special room in the castle specifically for storing those dolls, so naturally, they’d filled the room to the brim.

Yuki and Lefi had debated whether allowing the children to dress as stylishly as they wanted was bad for their upbringing, but he had refused to budge, insisting that it was a parent’s duty to ensure that their children didn’t lack for anything on that front. Thus, she let him indulge them when it came to fashion.

As a result, Iluna owned a lot of pants, and the ones she used to wear ended up at the back of the wardrobe. Meaning she had forgotten about them and not worn them since. And so, she tried to put one such pair on but found that...she couldn’t. Even though they were the same pants she’d worn six months ago.

D-Did I get fat?!

She recalled her big sisters Lew, Nell, and Leila often talking about overeating and dieting. The food here was so delicious that Iluna always had seconds... Maybe that explained her weight gain.

She had heard that as long as she exercised, it wouldn't be a problem. So she played outside every day until she was exhausted. But maybe she had let her guard down because of that, thinking things would be just fine when they clearly weren't.

"L-Lefifiii!"

Wearing only her underclothes, Iluna ran to her other big sister, Lefi, who was lazing around nearby. The little girl still held the trousers in one hand.

"What is it, Iluna? Look at the state of you. How very immodest. Even if Yuki is not here, you should at least wear something on your lower half."

"Um, I-I can't...put these pants...on... Did I get fat?!"

"Hmm?"

Lefi stared quizzically at Iluna.

"As far as I can tell, you have not... Hmm. Iluna, stand up straight."

"Huh? O-Okay."

She did as she was told and stood ramrod straight. Then, Lefi sat up, stood in front of her, and started comparing herself with the little girl. Iluna felt like she was waiting for a death sentence.

However, a few moments later, Lefi nodded to herself, having arrived at some conclusion. She spoke, her tone relaxed.

"Hmm, yes, yes... There is no mistaking it. Iluna, you have not grown fat. You have simply grown taller, and your body is bigger now."

"Huh? R-Really?"

For some reason, she didn't *feel* like that. But with this knowledge, Iluna inspected her surroundings more closely and thought that perhaps things seemed smaller than before. The difference was so minute that if someone told her she'd misunderstood, she would have believed them.

"Heh heh. No surprise you did not realize, for such a change is not something the person themself will sense. You cannot wear those clothes for the simple reason you are growing, so be at ease. I suggest you wear one of your new fineries. Remain in your underclothes indefinitely and you will catch a cold."

"O-Okay, got it! Tee hee hee... I'm growing, huh?"

Now that she knew the truth, happiness steadily unfurled inside Iluna. As she basked in the feeling, her two best friends, Shii and En, clapped for her.

“Wow, Iluna, you got big! We gotta ce-luh-brate!”

“Yup… How wonderful. I’m jealous.”

“Hee hee hee! Thanks, you two! If I keep growing, maybe I can eventually be like Lefi—no, Leila?”

“Yeah! I think so!”

“Me…too. Master always says we’ll grow big and strong if we play a lot, eat a lot, and sleep a lot. I want to grow too.”

“Meee toooo!”

Next to the little girls talking innocently about their hopes for the future were two adults who had taken some damage.

“Urk… I knew it. Of *course* Leila’s name pops up when their conversation takes that kinda turn. As a woman myself, her figure makes even *my* head spin, so it’s not like I can’t relate to the girls’ feelings, but still…”

“Lew, I have sustained more damage than you. Or have you forgotten that she said my name first before she corrected herself? Grr… I should have made my body more mature when anthropomorphizing myself!”

“Wait, you can do that, Lefi?”

“No. Technically, it is impossible. I can only take on this form as a person.”

“So you just *wish* you could… Curse you, Leila. And your bosom, which is our true enemy. Everything is her boobs’ fault.”

“Yes… Yes, indeed…”

And at that moment, the person who had incurred their hate without having done anything wrong joined their conversation.

“Ummm… Personally, I think both of your builds are so lovely and trim that *I* am the one who’s jealous of *you*.”

“Silence, wench! The haves can’t understand the feelings of the have-nots! Just go seduce my lord with that adult body of yours! Or whatever you want, I don’t care!”

“Hear! Hear! Heed me well, Leila. I support you fully and wish you the best of luck in advancing your relationship with Yuki. However, allow me to say this one thing! He prefers thighs to breasts! If you intend to tempt him with your wiles, I suggest you wear your maid uniform, make it look enticingly blowsy, and entice him with a view of your thighs!”

“R-Right…”

Though Leila was slightly annoyed by her friends’ screeching, she didn’t let it show on her face because she was an adult. Instead, all she did was give them a noncommittal—albeit

strained—smile.

◇ ◇ ◇

I was currently in a small clearing in the Demonic Forest. I'd just finished my daily monster hunt, which I'd incorporated into my recently created training routine.

"Haah... Haah..."

I swung an iron—no, adamantite sword several times heavier than En as part of my strength training. The practice sword was so heavy that even my demon lord body could barely lift it. I swung carefully but surely, keeping in mind the form I'd learned from the previous hero, Lemiro, back in the Elvish Enclave. I did my best not to be sloppy. Every muscle in my body screamed. Sweat poured down me and my breathing grew ragged.

Next to me, Rir was using his Super Speed ability, focused ceaselessly on dashing. Faster than anyone. He was intent on breaking through his limits and getting even faster. The muscles in his limbs pulsed furiously, his usually intelligent expression had turned desperate, and right now, his fluffy fur looked hot and sweltering.

Strength training remained important in this world as well. As you leveled up, your muscle strength increased automatically. But for two people within the same level range, the one with a better physique would always have higher stats. It was a steady process, which was kind of exactly what you needed to get stronger. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day.

Then, in the middle of our strength training, I felt a presence slowly approaching us from the shade of a tree. It probably thought we'd let our guard down, because it waited for just the right moment to pounce on me.

"Hngh. Don't interfere, you useless turd!"

"Graaar!"

I swung my practice sword made of adamantite, hitting the thing hard in the noggin. The monster, which looked like a four-legged tiger, blasted away with a roar. And then, it got knocked away even farther when Rir, who'd been dashing over and over again using Super Speed, unintentionally ran it over. It slammed into the ground, motionless.

"Grr?"

"No clue. Something suddenly jumped out. Ugggh, I'm so

freaking hot… I think I'll hop in the bath when I get back."

I sat down right then and there and took off my shirt, flinging it away. The climate in the Demonic Forest was basically subtropical, meaning you got hot as balls while training here. I *could* train in the meadow area since the temperature there was much more comfortable, but the thought of being seen like this made me a little embarrassed, so that wasn't happening.

"Grr…"

"Ha ha. Yeaaah, your fluff is definitely the best in the world, but I also definitely feel sorry for you at times like these. Look, you got some of its blood on you. Let me wash it off."

I used elemental magic to generate water and showered it on him. My pet basked in the delightful sensation, then vigorously shook himself dry. Naturally, since I was right next to him, it was a direct hit.

"Whoa! Hey! Ha ha, you got me, you rascal! Payback time! Take this!"

While Rir and I splashed each other in a play fight, I suddenly heard an adorable scream close by.

"Eek! Wh-What in the world?!"

When I turned my head in the direction of the voice, I saw Nell there, soaked from head to toe. She'd apparently been caught in the aftermath of our water battle.

"Yo, Nell! Welcome home. Did you just get back?"

"Thanks. And yup, I did. Lucky me to find myself abruptly soaked just as I arrive. Argh, look at me! I'm wet all over!"

I laughed at the sight of her sighing in exasperation.

"Ope, sorry, my bad. I was giving us an impromptu bath since it's so hot. The sweat felt gross. Right, Rir?"

"Grr."

In response, she scrutinized my half naked body closely before speaking.

"I was excited to see you, Mr. Yuki, but now I feel like I've been unceremoniously doused by a bucket of cold water."

"I mean, you *literally* were, so not just a feeling, eh?"

Aren't we *snippy, Mrs. Hero?*

"Oh, stuff it… Ahem. As compensation, I demand that you let me touch your abdominal muscles!"

"Huh— Gah ha ha ha! Hey, stop, you— Hee hee hee… S-Stop it!"

Extending both arms, Nell started stroking my abs.

“Heh heh, I won’t, Mr. Yuki! This is your punishment! Therefore, I *will* touch you until I’m no longer peeved!”

“O-Okay, okay! Just calm down a sec, all right?!”

“Mm-hmm, how exquisite! I must make sure to let the Abs Are Amazing Association know about this masterpiece!”

“Wah ha ha ha! Wh-Where the heck does that group even exist?!”

“In our home, of course!”

For a while after, I writhed in agony. When Nell finally got her fill of torturing me, she pulled her hands away from my abs.

“Haah… Haah… D-Damn you, that was even more exhausting than my actual training…”

“Well, I, for one, had all my pent-up fatigue blown away thanks to these few minutes! Hmm, yes, I think I’ll call this the ‘Mr. Yuki Recovery Method.’”

“Oh, jeez. Please don’t.”

Seriously, though, when did you start acting like this? Eh, I guess it doesn’t really matter. What matters is that my wife is happy and healthy.

I smiled wryly, then schooled my expression into a more serious one as I asked her a question.

“So, how are things in Alisia?”

Her attitude changed too at my words, growing solemn.

“Right, well… His Majesty took the recent incident caused by the human supremacists very seriously, and…decided to send in the military to bring the country under control. That helped calm things down, at least for the time being.”

Ideological oppression using the military, huh?

“That’s…kinda extreme.”

In my previous life, a decision like this would’ve caused an uproar, but in this world, it was a fairly common use of the military. Still, there must’ve been a reason he’d done it. The king of Alisia was a good man. He was a fundamentally decent human being, and if not for his position as king, he definitely would’ve been just a regular neighborhood old guy, living his days in peace.

And yet, he’d made such a weighty decision. I wondered how conflicted he’d been.

“He has to endure so much hardship now because of me and my carelessness.”

The unpleasant experience had made me realize how

incompetent I actually was. I thought I'd been prepared for anything, but in reality, it was an example of not being prepared enough. My mistake had caused a lot of trouble for a lot of people.

Nell, however, shook her head at my words.

"No, it's not your fault or Rir's, Mr. Yuki. From the beginning, that idea was something humans had to do something about themselves. This time around, it all came to a head in a bad way. It's been a long-standing fact that humans tend to be more exclusive toward other races than anyone else."

"I can only hope that in the future, all this prejudice will be gone. I know it'll take time, though..."

"Yup, me too. As the hero, I want to help make that happen."

After saying that, Nell deliberately changed her tone and continued.

"Oh, right, the nature of my work has changed."

"Huh? Whaddya mean?"

"From now on, I won't be maintaining the peace, instead mostly just hunting monsters. So I think I'll have less work than before, which will allow me to come back here more often. The main reason being that the threat from other races has diminished. Maybe this was just a way to curry favor with you, Mr. Yuki."

"Gotcha. I know you might feel some type of way about that, but I couldn't be happier to spend more time with you. Three cheers for your bosses making the decision!"

Overjoyed, Nell smiled at me.

"Tee hee. Well, I suppose I *should* be happy about the country moving forward. If there's no longer a need for the hero, that should be a good thing for the nation and for me. In which case...I can touch your abs *and* hug you however much I want, just like now!"

"Whoa! Hey, dang it... Jeez, woman, don't you know I'm filthy right now?"

"I can't exactly complain, since I'm still damp from all that water."

She wrapped her arms around me with a grin, and I hugged her back tightly with a smile of my own. My wife had a soft, soothing body with a uniquely tantalizing scent.

"Oh yeah, I just remembered. I was thinking of visiting the dwarves soon, sooo...you wanna tag along?"

“The dwarves?! In their homeland?! Where there are tons of swords?!”

Nell shoved her face aggressively close to mine. My automatic reaction was to bend my torso backward away from her.

“Y-Yeah. I dunno about the sword thing, but I wanted to ask them a few questions about dungeons. I figured now was a good chance to drop in on them.”

During the war, I’d promised Dodah that I’d visit him and his people. Now that I had more time, I was thinking about doing just that.

“Yes! I’ll go, with bells on! Tee hee hee… The home of the world’s greatest blacksmithing techniques… The holy land of weapons… When?! When are we going?!”

Miss Nell was incredibly fired up. Stoked, even. *Heh.*

“S-Soon. For sure. We need to work around your schedule since you’re going. Off the top of your head, how’s it looking?”

“Well, I’ve taken care of all my urgent tasks, and I have plenty of time on my hands at the moment. Hmm… Okay, wait just a little while! I’ll wrap up all the little jobs in a jiff! So don’t you dare leave without me, okay?!”

“S-Sure, you got it.”

Clearly, Lady Hero’s weapons fetish was as strong as ever.

Visiting the dwarves meant visiting the therianthropes too, since their land was apparently nearby. *Then I might as well invite Lew too, right?* I decided to ask her when I got home later.

Chapter 3: A Name to Pass Down

A few days had passed since I'd suggested the trip to Nell.

"All right, peeps, we'll be back! Hit me up right away if anything happens. We'll come home in a jiff."

"You may receive a work message for me, so if you can, let me know. I'd appreciate it a lot! I also let Rir know that a visitor or two might drop into the Demonic Forest."

"Nothing on my end, but I'll definitely buy you all souvenirs! Look forward to it!"

"Yup… If anything looks tasty, I'll buy it for you."

I spoke to everyone first, followed by Nell and Lew, then lastly, En. I'd asked my little sword girl to tag along on this excursion too.

"We shall indeed contact you should something happen. In the meantime, I bid you not to fret over us and simply enjoy your journey."

"Please have a safe trip."

"Byeee!"

"Byeee!"

Sent off by our family members, the four of us set out.

◇◇◇

Our destination this time was the homeland of the dwarves, so we headed to the Reauxgard Empire first. The dwarves' home was basically the same distance from both the Kingdom of Alisia and the empire, but the only airships going there departed from Reauxgard. Although the kingdom had purchased several airships and hired engineers and crews to man them, the government's current priority was deploying them domestically, which meant the airship routes to foreign countries hadn't been finalized yet.

In that respect, since the Reauxgard Empire was basically colonized now, it was prioritizing accommodating other nations over itself, which was why its travel routes extended to the countries that'd won the war a while back. It made sense for the empire to be treated like this because it'd lost. However, because

it would function as a transit point for the foreseeable future, the situation wasn't without its economic benefits.

In fact, if you thought to the future, the empire had gained a definite advantage over other nations. The Demon King and other rulers of the demon world had excelled in ensuring that a variety of races were able to live there so far. Airships had given the various species of mankind wings, thereby greatly expanding their world. So you could say that the Ellane Allied Federation, which had been responsible for developing them, had pushed the world a step forward.

"Urk... I didn't even give it a second thought when you asked me to take this trip with you, my lord...but we're taking an airship *again*?"

We were currently in an airship hangar in Reauxgard, and Lew grumbled quietly after finding out that we'd be traveling by airship. The expression on her face was the kind someone who hated roller coasters would have before getting on one. She'd gotten really airsick last time, and she was still clearly traumatized by the experience.

"Ha ha! Well, you got used to it by the second half of the trip last time, right? And the motion sickness went away by then too. You'll be fine. Just try not to tense up so much. But also, I did bring motion sickness meds just in case."

"Wait, did you really?"

"Yup, so relax. If you worry too much about getting airsick again, you definitely will."

"He's right, Lew. Oftentimes, motion sickness happens because people *feel* like they're sick. Since Mr. Yuki is saying you'll be fine, adopt that mindset and your symptoms will surely be much easier to manage."

Sitting on a bench next to me, En cocked her head curiously as she listened to our conversation.

"Is...this the same kind of sickness that alcohol causes?"

"Nah, the destination for booze can be the same as motion sickness, but the journey is way different. While getting drunk makes you feel good, getting 'drunk' because of a moving vehicle only makes you feel awful. Though I guess it's hard to understand if you've never experienced either of these things..."

"I...want to try alcohol."

"Sure. When you're older. Which makes me wonder... Nell, Lew, how old do you think En needs to be before she can drink?"

“That is…a very good question. Based solely on her appearance, I’d hesitate to let her drink adult beverages at all. That being said, I feel like she’d be able to handle her liquor *really* well…”

Yeah, I can see that. Maybe it’s just my imagination, but she might end up being the best drinker in our family.

“Definitely a tricky question considering how unique En’s existence itself is… How about letting her drink when Iluna is old enough to, my lord?”

“Hmm… I think that’s a good idea.”

You could say Iluna was the only normal kid in the little-girl gang. So the best thing to do for En and Shii was to match their freedoms with Iluna’s as she aged. Now that the thought had been planted in my mind, I was looking forward to the day I could drink with them too.

“You know something? Despite hearing about how you’re the emperor of Reauxgard now, I finally actually believe it,” Nell murmured, glancing around.

This hangar was situated near the imperial castle, and at the moment, we were surrounded by more than a dozen soldiers acting as our bodyguards. They were imperial guards, to be exact. Most of them were demons, with a few elves, therianthropes, and humans mixed in.

When we’d arrived here, I’d asked one of the demon government officials who knew me if I could use one of the airships, and he’d promptly assigned this group to escort us. They would accompany us as far as the dwarves’ homeland. It wasn’t like I needed them, but I guess he also couldn’t just let the emperor travel with just his family. Although the official knew how strong I was, he couldn’t’ve just been like, “Oh, I suppose you don’t need any escorts, then?” He probably would’ve gotten fired from his post if he had, so his eyes had practically begged me to let him do his job and assign them to us. I’d somehow managed to convince him to only have them stick around for the flight, though, so all was well that ended well.

Still, humans in my imperial guard, eh? Does this mean things’ve settled down a bit?

By the way, there were other passengers set to board too. Since the airship was heading to the dwarven homeland, it came as no surprise that most of them were dwarves. Then, there were a few therianthropes, and several humans too. Some of

them, seemingly high-ranking officials from their respective nations, greeted me, and we chatted a bit. I'd be dealing with this sort of thing more and more in the future, so there was no time like the present to get used to it.

"'Oh, right, I'm an emperor now.' Trust me when I tell you that thought pops into my head a lot too."

"Well, it *is* unusual to have a king who's so unlike one. Excuse me, an emperor, Your *Imperial* Majesty."

"I see someone's feeling sassy toward her husband, eh, darling?"

"Don't worry, my lord! Me and Nell and En and everyone else like you just the way you are! Even if you lack the aura of a real emperor!"

"Yes, I agree with Lew."

"Dang. You two think you're real tough now, huh?"

"You could say we were forged in the fires of our home."

"All just the result of your training, my lord."

I couldn't think of a suitable retort in the face of their cheerful grins.

Just like that, we passed the time chatting about a bunch of stuff. Then, finally, I heard the sound of an engine roaring from afar and spotted a flying airship in the distance. Once the airship docked in the hangar, passengers started pouring out one after another, and the ground crew immediately got to work prepping the vessel for its next voyage.

Ooh, looks like they have a real smooth system going.

It took about thirty minutes before the airship was ready to take on its next round of people. We followed our guide on board, heading to the private room reserved for us.

"Well, Your Majesty, please don't hesitate to summon me if you need anything. We're at your service," said a demon woman, one of the imperial guards assigned to us.

Our room this time was just as luxurious as the one we'd had during our journey to the ovine village. What you'd call a VIP suite. Apparently, this airship was also a passenger ship—actually, technically speaking, all airships besides the military ones were built along those lines.

"Great, thanks. And you guys let me know if any powerful monsters or whatever show up. I know it's kinda weird for me to say this, but it'd make me feel better if you guys relied on us rather than just coddling us."

“Understood, Your Majesty! We’re all well aware of your strength on account of the war, so we shall definitely call on you if the occasion warrants!” Then, she saluted sharply and left.

“Hmm... Mr. Yuki, her eyes were blazing something fierce, you know. Almost like a fangirl excited to meet a celebrity.”

“Truer words have never been spoken, Nell. My lord really is a celebrity, huh?”

Confronted by my two wives’ intensely suspicious stares, I rushed to explain myself.

“H-Hey, cut me some slack here. You know I’ll gladly tell the guards to kick rocks if you’re seriously that opposed to them. It’s not like I asked for them either. The official just wouldn’t stop pushing it, so I had no choice except to say yes—”

“Ha ha ha! We’re joking, silly! You honestly don’t have to panic so much. Don’t worry, we know.”

“‘Cause we know you put us first, my lord.”

With a laugh, Nell came up to me on one side and squeezed me tight while Lew flanked me on the other and did the same. The weight and warmth of my wives comforted me. It was the best damn feeling in the world. I’d even go so far as to say that paradise was right here in this world.

“Wanna know a secret? Lately, I’ve been thinking that you guys find more and more ways to beat me.”

“That’s because women are strong! Right, Lew?”

“Yup! Even though I’m still learning what it means to be a woman. Every day, you, Lefi, and Leila teach me all sorts of things about it, Nell.”

“Ohhh, stooop. I think you’re plenty adorable, Lew.”

Incidentally, En was way more interested in the goings-on outside than us in here. She had her face pressed against the window as she intently watched the crew prep the ship for departure. Despite this being her third airship journey, she obviously still found it unusual and fascinating.

“Right. Back to business, Mr. Yuki. I don’t really know the particulars, so why don’t you tell me why we’re visiting the dwarves and therianthropes. I know you promised them you would during your time here in Reauxgard with them, but I have a feeling there’s more to this trip, isn’t there?”

Lew answered for me instead.

“It’s ’cause hearing the creation myth made you curious about something or other, right, my lord? I saw how deep in thought

you were when you were listening to it. Lefi told me a bit about your reaction too."

"'Creation myth'? Well, I certainly wasn't expecting that. Why the sudden interest, though?" Nell gazed at me with puzzled eyes.

"I'm a demon lord. That makes me both the dungeon's master and its caretaker. Still, I've always thought that I don't know much about the dungeon itself, y'know? Up till now, it didn't really bother me much 'cause I figured 'That's just what it is.' But long story short, I guess you could say that hearing this world's creation myth sparked my curiosity."

"So how do the dwarves and therianthropes fit in?"

"Well, going to all kinds of places means you can learn all kinds of things, right? The truth is, there's someone I *really* want to meet—the Spirit Emperor. Except he's like a ghost apparently, popping up at the most random time and place. Lefi said my best chance of seeing him again would be just to wait in the dungeon, so I figured that if I'm gonna wait anyway, I might as well travel to other lands and learn as much as I can on my own."

"The Spirit Emperor... You're referring to Lefi's elderly friend, aren't you?"

"Hmm, now I'm starting to see the light. Since your curiosity is itching, then you have no choice but to scratch it, huh, my lord?! Tee hee. I'll do my best to help you with that."

"I'm excited too now. I don't have many chances to leave Alisia, so I'm thrilled to go on this trip with all of you."

While we talked, the crew seemingly finished the departure preparations, because the airship vibrated a bit, like the engine had been fired up, and a floating sensation enveloped us. And then, our journey through the skies began.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Seriously, my lord, you need to be careful. I was so worried when I first found out that I lost all the strength in my body."

I was talking to my wives in the room we were provided. A few hours had already passed since the airship had taken off. We were making good time on the flight.

"Sorry, sorry. I use my Danger Detection ability to judge if I'm in danger, but it apparently doesn't respond to poisoned food. So I can't really deny the fact that my sense of caution has gotten

duller."

I had brooded over the human supremacist incident countless times since it'd happened. Because even the slightest change in circumstances might've led to my death.

"If you lead a normal life, poisoned food isn't something you ever really have to think about. However, even run-of-the-mill soldiers like me receive training in identifying poisons. Considering your position, Mr. Yuki, it would be best for you to acquire the same kind of knowledge."

Just to let you know, you're nowhere being a run-of-the-mill soldier, Mrs. Hero. That aside, today I learned that heroes learn that sort of thing too.

"Oh, I just remembered something. You have the Analysis ability, don't you, Mr. Yuki? Could you use that to inspect food and determine whether or not it's been poisoned?"

"Ya know, I've never tried, but I think it just might work."

Huh. I never would've considered an application like that of the ability. At least not on food. But just like Nell'd said, if you led an ordinary life where you never had to worry about that sort of thing, of course the idea would never even occur to you.

"Why don't you just have Nell train you, my lord? Wouldn't that be the easiest solution in this case? If I'm being honest, you can be a bit careless. And apparently, that includes forgetting to use your abilities. Though I suppose I shouldn't be throwing stones."

I couldn't even offer Lew a rebuttal. What a sad, tragic day.

"I'd be happy to train you on poisons! I'll do my very best to provide you with a proper education."

"S-Sure. Thanks. Is it bad that just thinking about the words 'poison training' gives me the heebie-jeebies?"

"You'll be fiiine, Mr. Yuki. Stop worrying. You have veritable stacks of elixir, don't you? So even if you ingest lethal poisons, we can heal you right away, which means you can memorize the tastes better than anyone! I'm certain we can find poisonous flora in the dwarf and therianthrope nations, and I'll teach you about the ones I know."

"P-Please go easy on me."

"I-I know I'm the one who instigated her, so why do I feel kind of uneasy? My lord, please make sure you survive Nell's training, okay? I mean it."

Lew and I unconsciously found ourselves filled with trepidation at the sight of Nell so gung-ho about our upcoming

training. Just then, the door to the room opened with a *kachak* and En walked in, coming back from her solo exploration of the airship.

By the way, let me mention the outfits each of us was wearing right now. En and I had our usual outfits on, while Nell's shorts and shirt were very casual. She didn't have her normal light armor on. She didn't have her holy sword on her either. As for Lew, instead of her maid uniform, her outfit pretty much resembled Nell's.

Lew was down to wear anything, whereas Nell rarely ever wore skirts. In particular, whenever she left the dungeon, Nell stuck to pants and such—outfits that were easy to move around in. She said wearing skirts and the like made her feel strangely restless, like she couldn't calm down. If I had to guess, it was because she was a soldier.

Also, regarding Lew's and Leila's maid costumes, they'd worn them at first because they'd been my employees. Now that they were family like everyone else, though, I'd told them they didn't need to anymore. Except Lew'd responded with, "I actually really like this," and Leila had said, "Agreed, it's very convenient," so they both still wore their maid outfits in the dungeon. *Weeell, I guess if that's what floats your goats, then that's good enough for me.*

"Ope, look who's back. Welcome back, En— Whoa, where'd you get that meat?"

She was chomping on some tasty-looking meat that looked like bacon. She swallowed the bite she was working on with a small *gulp* before answering my question.

"While…I was exploring, I accidentally entered the galley, and a nice old man there gave it to me."

"Ah, okay. But En, you know you can't just go in somewhere all willy-nilly if there's a sign that says 'Authorized Personnel Only.' Last time, the crew showed you around 'cause they were having fun with a cute little tyke, but that's not gonna fly this time around."

"I…know. So when I said, 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'Food ain't ready yet, but I hope this'll help ya hold out till it is,' and then he gave me this meat."

Well, shoot. Looks like En's lovability factor is operating at full force. No surprise there, since all of my kids were super popular wherever we went.

Just like the ones on oceangoing vessels, it felt to me like airship crews were full of good-natured people. Maybe you had to be when your work environment had you constantly dealing with the tremendous, unbeatable forces of nature that were the seas and the skies.

"Ha ha! Gotcha. Good for you, then. You thanked him properly, right?"

"Yup...I did. Oh. One of the sailors told me it'll be sunset soon and that we can see the pretty sight from the stern of the ship. Let's all go together?"

"Ooh, great idea. How 'bout it, ladies? Since we have the chance, might as well, right? Lew, you don't look airsick to me either."

"You're correct, my lord. I got knocked out right away last time, but I don't feel like throwing up at all this time. I wonder if it's 'cause of your motion sickness medicine?"

It sure is. The stuff I bought with Dungeon Points that I'm almost positive is from Earth. Though you've probably gotten used to flying too.

"But Lew, if it gets worse, you must tell him, all right? Don't just endure it."

"I'm fine, Nell. But if that happens, I'll definitely speak up! Thanks for worrying about me."

And so, the four of us left our room and trekked down the narrow hallway to the viewing deck at the stern of the ship, constructed specifically for sightseeing. There were already a few other passengers there when we arrived, but we weren't bothered since the space was huge. We chose a corner for ourselves.

The setting sun shone through the glass walls. Way down below stretched fields and an endless expanse of rolling hills. I wondered if the city I could see off in the far distance was part of the Reauxgard Empire. We'd flown so far, I didn't know either way.

As a deep crimson stained the sky, night started encroaching on the world from its edges. This sight never got old no matter how often I saw it. The moment when this world seemed to transform into something else entirely.

"Wooow... It's beautiful, don't you think?"

"Yup. It feels like the first— Huh?"

"Hmm? What's wrong, Mr. Yuki?" Nell looked curiously at me.

My Danger Detection skill wasn't reacting at all. Nothing on Maps either as it steadily filled itself in based on what I saw. But I'd definitely felt an indescribable something, like a weird, brief ping.

Obeying my intuition, I continued to gaze closely at the scarlet-tinted horizon, and eventually, I spotted *it* between the mountains.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Are you freaking kidding me?"

My voice sounded hoarse even to my own ears. I immediately sprang into action and rushed back to our room, where I'd left En's real body. The instant she detected the change in me, En released herself from her human form and vanished from next to me.

"M-My lord, what's wrong?"

"Mr. Yuki… Please give me my holy sword."

Lew, looking worried, and Nell, her expression telling me she was already in combat mode, followed behind me. I pulled Durendal, Nell's holy sword, from Inventory and handed it over to her. Next, I took out the necklaces that functioned as dungeon return devices and handed one to each of them.

"I have no clue if it's an enemy or not, but something kinda crazy is flying toward us. Put those on so you can be ready to go back to the dungeon whenever. Gotta admit, though, I'm finding it hard to believe since this was supposed to be a secure airspace."

At this distance, the airship was already within the creature's attack range, but it wasn't taking any kind of action. I really, *really* wanted to believe it wasn't an enemy. However, if I dropped my guard now, I'd end up as dust in the wind without even realizing I was dead.

What I saw way off in the distance was a magnificent being flying in the air. The figure of something massive, radiating an overwhelmingly intimidating aura and heading straight toward us. It was the type of aura demi-dragons and your average, everyday monsters could never give off—one that screamed "*We* are the rulers of the sky."

I had no doubt in my mind about its identity. It was a dragon. And not just any dragon. An Ancient Dragon like Lefi.

◇ ◇ ◇

After telling Nell and Lew to stay on the observation deck at the stern so that they could spot me immediately if I gave them the signal to escape, I headed over to the imperial guards.

"Hmm? Your Majesty, is something the matter?"

"I saw a dragon outside, heading toward this airship. I'm going to the wheelhouse, so can one of you accompany me?"

For a second, they all froze like they couldn't understand what I'd just said. A moment later, the same demon soldier who'd been our initial guide aboard the ship became the first to recover.

"Did you say a-a dragon?!" she exclaimed.

"Sorry, but we don't have time for a Q and A session right now. I need one of you to come with me since that'll make it easier for me to talk to the captain than being on my own."

Their expressions transformed upon hearing my words, and the air around them sharpened instantly. *Yup, they really are the best of the best.* Though they still seemed to be in disbelief, they immediately shifted their focus, rightly assuming that this was an emergency. *They're so cool.*

And just like I'd thought, the one who followed me was the female demon soldier. *I think she said her name's Elanna?* She was apparently the captain of the imperial guards.

At the same time, I saw the ship's crew members running around hurriedly to and fro. They had obviously realized that something was wrong. The other passengers also looked confused by all the commotion.

If I didn't settle things quickly, there might be a full-scale panic. Couldn't have that, huh?

"Captain!"

When a crew member failed to stop me from entering the wheelhouse, which had a sign on it that said "Authorized Personnel Only," he shouted out that warning to the airship captain. The captain, who'd been shouting orders to his staff, looked surprised for a second before his expression grew resigned. His face was saying, "Ugh, this guy's gonna be a pain in the ass."

Well, from his perspective, my appearance meant exactly that and then some. We'd greeted each other briefly before departure, so he knew who I was and vice versa.

"Your Majesty, my sincerest apologies, but we have an emergency on our hands. Whatever business you have with me, I'd be happy to speak with you later—"

I interrupted him, cutting straight to the heart of the matter.

"*I* will go talk to that dragon. You just keep this ship en route."

"I beg your pardon? Y-You want me to stay the course?"

"Yeah. Just fly according to your original route."

The airship captain grimaced.

"B-But then we won't be able to escape if the need calls for it…"

"Look, man, it was already too late for us the minute the dragon spotted us. At this point, escape is futile. So at the very least, I suggest you avoid doing anything they could interpret as provocation. Please. Dragons are generally placid and tolerant, so as long as we don't do anything, I don't think this one will turn hostile. Having said that, it doesn't matter how many of us there are. Any dragon could kill us all in a snap."

Dragons weren't normal wildlife but intelligent, broad-minded creatures. That wasn't true of all of them, though. And considering I knew jack shit about the dragon currently heading toward us, the stupidest thing I could do was *not* be wary.

After saying what I needed to, I didn't wait for a response from the captain. I ignored the crew members who tried to stop me and opened the airship's hatch, something I'd done several times before. The wind rushed in, and as it roared around us, I repeated myself to them again.

"I'm begging you, don't do anything stupid, okay?! And any demons with wings, don't come out here! Please, just do what I ask."

"Wh-What if it attacks us?!"

"If that happens, just give up."

Then, I unfurled my two pairs of wings and flew off the airship.

◇ ◇ ◇

The dragon was definitely flying toward us. And they had most definitely noticed me flying toward them from the airship. Had we accidentally trespassed into their territory? I nixed the possibility right away because a dragon's domain would've been discovered during the preliminary investigation of the area. Especially since this region was full of nations populated by various species of mankind. People didn't build their cities in a dragon's territory, and other dragons wouldn't approach it if one

did exist. Mankind only established settlements in places where the concentration of mana was thin.

All of that led me to believe that this particular dragon had come from somewhere else. And that begged the question, what was their goal in heading our way? Maybe, just maybe, the dragon had business with me, who just so happened to have become the Dragon King by pure happenstance?

“No choice but to ask directly, huh? En, I’m counting on you if shit hits the fan.”

“Yup…leave it to me. I’m your sword for any and every occasion, Master.”

There was no eagerness in En’s voice. Only a quiet fervor acknowledging that as her role, her way of life. Times like these always made me wonder just how much courage I received from her simply being by my side.

We kept flying forward until we finally drew close enough to talk to the dragon.

“Demon… No, not quite. Close, but something else entirely. And that presence. Such a familiar one. Who are you?”

The dragon looked at me, sounding both mystified and fascinated. I got the feeling from her voice that she was an elderly dragon. There wasn’t even a hint of hostility in it either. And although the heavy aura of intimidation was still going strong, I didn’t sense any increase in her magical energy.



Phew. I had a feeling things would be all right, but it's good to know *for sure.*

As relief flooded over me, I answered her question.

"I'm Demon Lord Yuki. I became the Dragon King after a bunch of stuff went down. Nice to meet you."

When I introduced myself, she scrutinized me from head to toe.

"Hmm? Hmm, hmm, hmm... Oho, I see, I see. So you are the rumored new Dragon King. The selfsame, fearless demon lord who took that hoyden Lefisios to wife. They spoke of you when I returned to the Hamlet not long ago."

By "Hamlet," she meant the Dragon Hamlet. Did that mean this old woman dragon also hailed from there? Based on her words just now, I'd be right to assume she hadn't been there when we'd visited.

And another thing! Every time I met someone who referred to Lefi as a "youngster" or a "hoyden," like this dragon had just done, I was keenly reminded of the enormous scale of this world.

"So you know Lefi?"

"Heh heh. Such a foolish question. You can search the world ten times over and you will not find a dragon who does not know that child. I am Siserius. Well met, Dragon King Yuki."

```
Name: Siserius
Race: Ancient Dragon
Level: 7??
```

*God*damn*, she's powerful.* At my current level, I couldn't see all of her stats, but I knew without a doubt that she had numbers suited to the world's strongest race. Unlike that moron of a black dragon I'd killed forever ago and the ruins of the Dark King Corpse Dragon from not that long ago, she was the real deal. A true dragon in all her race's glory.

Anyway, even though En was still sheathed, I figured it was rude to keep my weapon out, so I decided to put her into Inventory. But just then, the old dragon remarked thoughtfully.

"Oh? I see your weapon has a will of its own. An Intelligent Weapon. How unusual."

"Hmm? Oh, yeah, spot-on. My beloved weapon, Zaien. 'En' for

short.”

“Hello…granny.”

En must have realized from my attitude toward the dragon that caution was no longer necessary, so she greeted her in her usual, relaxed tone of voice.

“Yes, yes. Hello, young lady… It *is* young *lady*, is it not?”

“Yup…it is.”

“Ha ha! Forgive me, but I simply had to confirm my hypothesis. Do not take offense. Hmm… Now I understand how strong and clear your sense of self is. Truly, how remarkably unusual. You are the first of your kind I have seen, and that is saying something, considering my many years.”

Seeing the curiosity glittering in her eyes reminded me of Leila and her mentor, Madam Eldgalia.

“Are you maybe…a scholar?”

“Hmm? Ah, yes. I suppose if you were to describe me using mankind’s language, that would be the closest. In truth, ’tis merely a way to keep myself occupied. Although we dragons live long lives, I could spend the whole of mine on the mysteries scattered about this world and it still would not be enough to unravel them all. So I thought, would it not be more enjoyable to while away my days learning about them instead of wasting my life meaninglessly? How those decrepit dotards in the Hamlet have not died from boredom already is beyond me, secluding themselves as they do there.”

What does she remind me of… A firecracker. Oh yeah, this old lady’s a firecracker. Something told me she was probably pretty famous among dragonkind herself. Heck, her name might even be carved in mankind’s histories, just like Lefi’s.

“Now then, I bid you tell me of the flying object you are all on. What in the realm *is* that? I have seen others of its ilk in the skies recently, yet the design is entirely unfamiliar to me. For the life of me, I cannot determine what sort of magic fuels it. Mayhap the humans developed it?”

Ohhh, so that’s *why she was coming toward us.* This elderly dragon just couldn’t contain her inquisitive nature. Her youthful attitude, completely at odds with her age, made me smile ruefully.

“I don’t really know anything about the mechanisms or the magics either, but…you see that swollen part over there? Well, there’s a gas lighter than air inside, and…”

◇◇◇

Around that time, in the airship's wheelhouse.

"C-Captain, what should we do?"

At his crew member's flustered words, the captain checked the radar on the control panel, his deeply grim expression conveying how troubled he felt inside. The radar was a new magical technology the Ellane Allied Federation had received in exchange for selling their airships to other races. It had been a condition of the negotiations. The prototype radar was capable of identifying creatures possessing magical energy above a certain threshold that airship crews should be wary of. It was currently in the testing phase, and right now, it displayed two blips of light.

One blip represented a being with an exceptional magic supply. The other showed something emitting an undetectable amount of magical power, which made the captain wonder if it was a radar malfunction. A member of mankind who fell outside the scope of that category, and a living thing that fell outside the scope of *that* category. They both might as well have been in a completely different dimension.

"Lady Demon Soldier, I didn't participate in the war. I'm just a simple airship captain from the Ellane Allied Federation. However, I have heard he's the new emperor and a champion to boot, so I ask you...can I believe that's true?"

Dragonkind. The world's strongest race, which nothing and no one could defy. Although those who were a part of it held no interest in world affairs, they were capable of turning anything that opposed them to ash. Even a cursory look back through history revealed the names of the nations they had destroyed. And just looking at the data on the radar forced him to come to grips with this truth despite not wanting to.

Elanna, the demon soldier who had accompanied Yuki to the wheelhouse, responded to the airship captain. Though her expression was also grim, unlike his, a hint of hope remained in hers.

"First of all, he was the one responsible for defeating the Undead Dragon that appeared over the skies of the Reauxgard Empire. Without him, we likely would have been wiped out and lost the war. While there's no doubt a living, adult dragon is much more powerful than an Undead Dragon, should there be

one among man capable of fighting dragonkind, it would be him and him alone."

"..."

Elanna continued after giving him a moment to digest that.

"Besides, as His Majesty said, escape is futile at this distance. I don't want to be rude, but I don't think this vessel is capable of outflying a dragon."

"So what you're saying is that we don't have any other choice, eh? Crew, we'll do as he commanded and stay en route. But we really don't know what will happen. Do *not* drop your guard for even a second. If you notice anything abnormal, anything at all, tell me right away."

"Then...what should we tell the passengers?"

"Hmm... Tell them a powerful monster appeared. Don't mention a word of it being a dragon, though. Any panic inside the ship will only cause more trouble for His Majesty."

You could cut the crew's tension with a knife. They didn't know that even at that very moment, the dragon and the new emperor were chatting like old friends.

At the other end of the ship, on the viewing deck. Nell and Lew had glued themselves to the spot so they could keep an eye on Yuki's movements. They'd been nervous at first, but now, they were completely relaxed.

"From the look of things, I don't think we need to worry, Lew."

"Phew. I was surprised, but thank goodness it turned out to be one of Lefi's people. In the past, just the word 'dragon' would've been a symbol of fear to me. But now, thanks to my lord, I know that they really *are* good-natured folks. Especially after meeting Lefi."

"Yup, they're normal living things, just like us. We'll just ignore the 'tremendous power' bit."

Yuki carried En on his shoulder. That in itself was a sign to them he wasn't in attack mode. And then there was the fact that he seemed to be enjoying his conversation with the dragon. Based on what they saw, the little girl was talking to the dragon too, because their gaze sometimes shifted to the greatsword that was En in her true form.

He had a careless side to him. However, whenever any of them was with him, particularly the little girls, he never dropped his guard. They wished he would be just as cautious when he

was alone, but that was a matter for another time. Everything was fine now.

Upon witnessing the tension gradually leaving Nell and Lew, the members of Yuki's personal guard, who had stationed themselves nearby to protect them, seemed both nervous and curious. One of them questioned the pair.

"Um, Y-Your Majesties, can we assume that the situation is under control?"

"Yes. Mr. Yuki—I mean, our husband isn't overly guarded, so I don't think that dragon is an enemy. Therefore, you all can relax too."

"I sincerely hope that's true, because we would love nothing more than to do just that..."

The man responded uncertainly, his stiff expression reflected on his comrades' faces too. No wonder, since they didn't know much about dragonkind or Yuki, unlike the two of them.

Nell and Lew glanced at each other as if silently saying, "Well, it is what it is."

At that moment, the airship fired at the dragon.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Hmm... I see, an element in the air itself. I never even considered the notion. To think mankind has progressed so far in its research."

"Yeaaah, well, now you know."

That vague statement was all I could think of to say because talking about things from my old life would make the conversation unnecessarily complicated. However! It didn't change the fact that the people of man had discovered the same knowledge here!

Anyway, after telling her what I knew of airships and then digressing to whatever knowledge I had of chemistry, Siserius, the elderly dragon, seemed satisfied. She pondered what she'd just learned for a few minutes before speaking again.

"Yes, yes... What a very fascinating and marvelous tale. The world truly is full of wonders."

"Ha ha. Yeah, I couldn't agree more."

"That settles it. 'Tis not fair for me alone to do all the asking, so have you any questions for me? I would be glad to tell you whatever I know. Perhaps an interest in the type of Maximum

Magic that will allow you to pulverize an entire mountain? Or a forbidden art that transforms all to naught more than dust?"

"You know, I think I'm good on both those fronts. Thanks, though."

Dang dragons are all the same... I smiled ruefully and continued.

"Then...do you know about Dominus?"

"Dominus, you say? I do, in fact. The Original God, yes?"

So she *did* know. Her reaction told me that Dominus's story must've been something all dragons knew.

"I'm on a journey right now because I wanna know more about the topic. Can you tell me what you know?"

"Hmm, let me see... Here is something that might interest you. The living things known as gods did actually exist once upon a time."

"Did you say '*living things*'?"

She nodded.

"In the distant past, so far back that even dragonkind has difficulty tracing it, there were more than a dozen of these beings called 'gods,' and they lived upon this very world. Sadly, they are long since dead."

"Gods...can die?"

"That is the best conjecture I can make based on the accounts left behind, you see. Thus do I believe they *were* alive. Regardless of their power far beyond anything we mere mortals could possess, if they were unable to escape the absolute law of death, then they were also part of this world. Would that not, then, make them living beings just like the rest of us?"

Ya know, she's making a lot of sense. She was getting a bit academic, but if gods were just beings that went by that title, then they'd actually existed. The fact that she could state that so definitively must've meant she had some kind of proof.

"And Dominus was the object of worship of these gods. When speaking of the Original God, the goddess, Gaia, inevitably appears in the tales too. However, she also worshiped Dominus."

You could say that meeting Siserius here was a...godsend. Here I had the chance to hear such an amazing story in such an unexpected place.

Just when I was about to ask her more questions, my Danger Detection skill sounded the alarm! Not from the dragon in front of me, but from the airship behind me.

“What the—”

My body moved before my mind did. I spun around using my wings to stabilize myself and then, with all my might, unsheathed En. Since En handled the minute adjustments of her blade, all I had to focus on was smashing whatever was hurtling our way—and I did without even looking at it.

With its momentum forcefully snuffed out, the massive metal arrow fell, spinning wildly. I knew without a doubt that the airship was outfitted with several ballista-like weapons to fight off monsters, and those were what fired these arrows. Even as my mind churned, the airship fired again, sending several more metal arrows racing toward us. This time, I was ready. I used elemental magic to create a gale as a defensive barrier to repel them all.

“Oh? Was that directed at me? Or was it an attack on you?”

The elderly dragon sounded curious. She didn’t seem to be feeling the slightest hint of danger.

“Based on the angle, I don’t think their target was me. I *specifically* told them not to pull this shit.”

“Ahhh, forgive me. I must have frightened them, hm?” she said apologetically.

I’m not so sure about that... Despite my repeated warnings to them, had the captain maybe launched a preemptive strike out of nervousness?

“Sorry, I have to go check on them. What I *really* wanna do is talk to you more, but...”

“Fret not. Go. I shall wait here.”

So I flew back to the airship as fast as my wings could carry me.

◇ ◇ ◇

At that moment, the people inside the ship’s wheelhouse were frozen.

“Which one of you idiots just did that?!”

The airship captain shouted angrily, gobs of spittle flying from his mouth. It went without saying that he hadn’t given the order to attack. His only instruction had been to ready the armaments in case they needed to use them. However, someone on this vessel had launched what couldn’t be construed as anything except a preemptive strike. To make matters worse, it hadn’t

been just one shot but multiple successive ones. It clearly hadn't been an accident born of nerves. And this foolish act wouldn't be forgiven as such either.

Thankfully, the emperor had defended against the projectiles. If the attacks *had* hit the dragon, however, it wouldn't have been surprising for this vessel to have been reduced to rubble.

"Make contact with the rest of the crew and seize the imbecile responsible for this!"

"R-Right away, sir!"

One of the crew members grabbed a speaking tube to contact the weapons hold, but before he could, another came running into the wheelhouse, out of breath.

"C-Captain!"

"What is it now?!"

"O-One of the crew members is revolting! He's currently confronting His Majesty's wives!"

At those words, darkness clouded the captain's vision.

◇ ◇ ◇

Her training as a hero meant quick action on Nell's part. Before she even thought about what had just happened, she focused on the fact that Yuki was under attack. In short, she determined the presence of an enemy aboard the ship and unsheathed the holy sword hanging at her hip. Though watching him had calmed her nerves, she went right into battle mode.

"Where are the armaments on this ship located?!" she asked one of Yuki's military escorts who was protecting her and Lew.

"S-Straight down that corridor!" he answered at once.

"Understood. Please look after Lew! Lew, don't move from here, okay?! Something bad might happen!"

"G-Got it!"

"W-Wait! One of you come with me. The rest protect Lady Lewin!"

"Yes, sir!"

Nell took off down the narrow hallway.

The attack wasn't planned. Whoever fired acted on the spur of the moment when they saw the dragon. They likely wanted to enrage the dragon enough to kill my husband.

Most races of man in this world would never try to defeat a dragon. Unless they were foolhardy to the extreme, the idea of

defeating a creature akin to a natural disaster would never even cross their mind. Dragonkind was spoken of in the same breath as events like storms, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes. That was precisely why Yuki, who had slain an Undead Dragon and even the black dragon before that, was out of the ordinary.

This was an impulsive, almost suicidal attack, with no thought given to what might happen to the airship afterward. As such, she had to handle this situation very carefully. She couldn't afford to make a mistake. *Because when people are feeling emotional, they sometimes do things without thinking. Things that they normally wouldn't. Like now.*

"Stop it! What the hell are you thinking?!"

"Don't do anything dumb!"

When she arrived at her destination, she found one of the crew members using another as a shield while holding a knife to his throat. A few of the other crew members that surrounded him were bleeding. The crazed perpetrator must have slashed at them.

"Sh-Sh-Shut up, shut up! None of you know anything!"

He was a young man. Perhaps only a few years older than herself.

"You understand the meaning of what you've done, don't you?"

He finally noticed Nell when she spoke in an ice-cold tone.

"Y-You're his wife?!"

"Why are you here?!"

"My husband was the target. As his wife, I simply couldn't stand idly by."

Normally, someone of her status would have already been asked to escape at any cost. But the force in her tone stunned everyone there, including the culprit, into silence. She certainly had the bearing fit for the hero and the wife of an emperor.

She looked around quickly and assessed the situation. The area was small, making it difficult to find her footing. However, one step and she'd be within reach of the man. She was also confident enough in her ability to cut his arm off before he could hurt the hostage.

Lives were at stake. She needed to move with certainty. So she spoke.

"Do you truly understand? Who exactly you've antagonized? What will happen after this?"

“Hah! O-Of course I do! He’s our country’s enemy! For the sake of our country, he must die!”

“Then…are you a citizen of the Reauxgard Empire?”

“No! I hail from the Ellane Allied Federation!”

Nell frowned in confusion at his answer. The Ellane Allied Federation had stood by Yuki’s side in the war and emerged as one of the victors. Thanks to their role in the conflict, the superiority of airship technology had become well-known, thereby improving the country’s standing. Although it wasn’t a major power, it still stood head and shoulders above the other human nations. By selling airships and establishing trade routes to distant countries inhabited by other races, they had also profited enormously.

Furthermore, as far as ties to those other races were concerned, Yuki’s position as the current emperor of Reauxgard was extremely important. At the moment, the empire was the federation’s largest trading partner. As he’d been a key figure in the resolution of the war, any offense they caused him could lead to cutting off those economic exchanges. This was true even if Yuki himself did nothing. Her husband’s influence had already grown so much that far from being treated like an enemy, Yuki was a guest of honor to be welcomed by the entirety of Ellane. As a hero of the Kingdom of Alisia, Nell was deeply familiar with this situation.

“Enemy, hm? Even though he should represent a vital entity to your country. In other words, your actions right now are in direct opposition to national interest.”

They had ridden an airship just like this on their journey to the ovine village. Its captain had been on friendly terms with Yuki, and even from an outsider’s perspective, it was clear how highly the man’s countrymen thought of her husband. This incident, however, was the exact opposite. Nell felt anger burning inside at this man’s attempt to alienate Yuki from his allies.

“Sever those disgusting connections for all I care! That’s all anyone’s been doing lately, bowing their heads subserviently to the other races, smiling at them without a thought in their stupid heads! N-Not a single one understands they’re just destroying our country like that! The other races are cunning, and all they want is to eat us out of house and home!”

“You sound so sure of yourself when all *you’re* doing is giving voice to your own bias of ‘This is how the other races are.’ You’ve

never actually met one, have you? Because you're the sort to do the same thing to a fellow human too. What is your nationality? What do you do for work? Your dislike for other races based on nothing but trivialities suggests to me that you discriminate against your own in the same manner."

The man's face twisted even more at her scathing, provoking words.

"Sh-Shut up! What the hell does a shameless woman like you know?! You sold both your body and heart to a demon!"

"More than you. After all, I *am* the hero from the Kingdom of Alisia. So what do *you* know?"

"Th-The hero?"

For a minute, the man wavered at the revelation that she wasn't just the wife of an emperor but also *the* hero.

"Come on, tell me. What exactly do you know about other races? Have you ever spoken to one of them? Visited their cities? Killed them? I've done all of these things and more. That's why I know much about them and can speak of them."

"Nh..."

The man could say nothing. His mouth remained unmoving.

"You don't know anything, do you? You. Know. Nothing. So I'll be nice and teach you something. Do you know what the world at large calls people like you? 'Terrorists.' Regardless of your so-called lofty, noble ideals. And once you involve ordinary people in your schemes, you're no better than any other criminal. You will *never* be called a champion."

Nell laughed derisively at him.

"Gaaah! Shut up, shut up, *shut up*!!!"

The man hit his boiling point, and his eyes bulged with rage. He shoved away his hostage, then lunged at her with his knife.

Good. She smiled on the inside, having succeeded in changing his target to herself. Then, she took up a defensive stance to intercept his attack. But when all was said and done, Nell didn't have to do anything at all.

Yuki charged in first.

"You son of a bitch! What the hell do you think you're doing to my wife?!"

"Aaahhh?!"

Her husband had apparently returned to the airship at some point. He'd come racing down the other side of the hallway and used his momentum to kick at the man's knife-wielding arm. A

terrible cracking sound echoed in the cramped space. The man's arm bent in a direction it shouldn't have, and bone ripped through flesh. The knife fell to the floor with a clatter.

His kick just now was the real deal. It would've split open the head of any monster in the Demonic Forest. I suppose he should count himself lucky his arm didn't just fly off.

"Huh?! My aaaaarrrmmm?!"

"Shut the hell up, dipshit! Stop crying over a flesh wound when you literally just tried to kill yourself and take everyone else with you!"

"Nnngh!"

Showing no mercy, Yuki kicked him in the midsection next, and the man blasted backward, slamming violently into one of the walls. The collision created dents in the pipes running through the wall. This time, it seemed her husband had held back a tad. He must have unconsciously curbed his impulse after almost killing the man with the initial blow. Even then, she couldn't deny that the second strike had nonetheless dealt an almost fatal wound.

Since Yuki didn't show any signs of cooling his anger, Nell decided it was time for her to step in, lest he risk the airship as a whole by going on a rampage. With a rueful smile, she stowed her holy sword in its scabbard and intervened.

"Um... Hey, Mr. Yuki. Calm down. The damage to the ship looks awful."

"Haah... Haah... Hey, asshole! Thank your lucky stars Nell's a nice person! If it wasn't for her, I would've smashed every last bone in your body to bits."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Yuki, he's unconscious, so he can't hear you."

In an attempt to divert her husband's attention from the young man, Nell grabbed his hand in both of hers and asked him about something else.

"More importantly, are you sure it's all right to leave that dragon alone?"

"Yeah... Yeah, no worries. She's an elderly dragon and an acquaintance of Lefi's. She's pretty awesome, actually, so I'll introduce you guys to her later."

"Gosh, I'm so excited now. And well done, En. We saw you talking to the dragon too. Did you have fun?"

"Yup... She's a really nice and interesting granny."

In her sword form, En remained gripped in Yuki's hand, and she spoke to him and Nell telepathically. It was then that he must have realized he couldn't let the little girl see him like this. Nell finally sensed his fury abating, so she took the opportunity to start handing out orders to the crew members in the area. They were frozen in place by his wrath.

"Will one of you soldiers deal with that man? As for the crew, please tend to your injuries right away. I'm sure we'll have a chance to discuss this in detail later, but for now, let's prioritize medical treatment and cleaning up here."

Her words brought them to their senses, and they immediately set out to put things in order.

Yuki muttered quietly as he watched the scene play out.

"Maaan, you're so cool."

"Tee hee, thanks. All right, Mr. Yuki, let's head back to Lew. She must be worried sick."

◇ ◇ ◇

When he'd seen me talking to the dragon, that man must've thought, "This is my chance." He'd been assigned to maintain one of the ballistae in case of emergency, and the idea must have flashed through his mind while loading it with the metal arrows.

Not much time had passed since my most recent screw-up. I understood that my current circumstances posed some measure of danger, and this time around, I wasn't alone. Along with En, Nell and Lew were here too.

That was exactly why I'd been proactive and vetted all the crew members in advance. I'd used Analysis in combination with the dungeon's Maps feature and my Danger Detection skill to observe everyone and make sure nobody suspicious slipped on board. That was also the reason I'd been waiting at the airship depot in the Reauxgard Empire before the vessel had even arrived. Why I'd greeted the other passengers and captain even though small talk annoyed me. At the time, there'd been no blips or warnings of hostiles near us, so the man really had acted entirely on impulse when he'd fired the metal arrows at me.

"I'm not gonna do anything. Your country has been a huge help, and I'd rather not escalate this. So I'm leaving you guys to handle the man who tried to kill me and turned a weapon on my

wife. Let me just say this again. I'm trusting *you* to deal with the dumbass who tried to cut down my wife."

"U-Understood. We'll ensure the appropriate punishment is handed down. I can't apologize enough for this..."

The flustered captain, who'd rushed over to me once the situation had gotten back under control, bowed his head, nervous sweat dripping down his face.

"It's fine. I know it's not your fault. As long as you fulfill your responsibility as captain, I won't say anything. Neither of us wants this to turn into a diplomatic incident."

Christ on a cracker. If shit like this is gonna keep happening, maybe I should just buy my own damn airship. Hell, I am *the emperor, so I can totally own a private jet—I mean, a private airship, right? Then again, I doubt I'd actually use it that much, and I'd feel bad for wasting the maintenance folks' time and effort, so maybe not. I wouldn't even know what to do with it anyway.*

Just like last time, *those* assholes were obviously at the root of this incident too: the human supremacists. Though the last time had been a scheme driven by revenge against the Kingdom of Alisia, the ideology itself must've spread among the humans like a slow-acting poison. The fact that the idiot who'd caused the current incident was from the Ellane Allied Federation was a good example.

Not only had the Ellane Federation emerged victorious in the war, it'd also expanded its airship sales dramatically, specifically through its connections with other races. Thanks to that, I'd heard the country was experiencing a wave of prosperity. But even then, jerkoffs like this man still had beef.

Members of other races suddenly appeared and took away domestic jobs due to national policies to increase cultural and economic exchange. The additions to their country's population meant an uptick in crimes committed by these newcomers. Their families were killed by other races in battles. All these changes in the world allowed for resentment to keep growing and other negative emotions to erupt.

This phenomenon wasn't limited to humans, but in my opinion, it was most noticeable in humans because their weakness as individuals resulted in placing importance on the power of the collective. I didn't know what kind of grievances that man had, and frankly, I didn't care. Even so, there must've been something that'd caused all that hatred toward other races

to build up inside him.

Also, depending on how you looked at it, a human nation—one of the largest on the continent—had been destroyed by other races in the Great Corpse Dragon War. Well, technically not *destroyed*, but it'd become a completely different country from before, and to add insult to injury, its emperor—me—wasn't human either. Anxiety and unease abounded at the moment, so to those with ill will toward other races, I had to seem like an honest-to-goodness evil boss.

Rapid change meant friction. It was an inevitable reality. No matter how well anyone managed it or how much the Demon King planned, that friction would never be reduced to zero.

And despite knowing all this, it didn't change the fact that this period right now was incredibly challenging for me. So I decided that once this trip was over, I'd hole up in the Demonic Forest for a while. For the first time in what felt like forever, I'd work on expanding my territory.

"I couldn't be more grateful for your kindness, Your Majesty. Right, um, pardon my asking, but...is that...*her*?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah, it is."

Our gazes were focused in the same direction, toward the three people in my family—and an old woman. The horns growing out of her head and the tail on her back were so rugged-looking that they reminded me of boulders. At the moment, she was wearing a loose robe. The four of them sat around a table enjoying tea time.

"Granny...this tea is very yummy."

"Aha ha ha! Well, you certainly have very elegant tastes, young lady. I was torn on whether to choose this one or a sweet one, but glad I am to hear you enjoy it."

"I...eat and drink all kinds of things, so I know what's delicious and what's not."

"Indeed? 'Tis a good thing to cherish that which gives us sustenance."

The elderly woman smiled at the sight of En savoring the tea.

"She's right, though. This is sooo delicious! One of our family members is an amazing cook, and this tea is almost as addictive as hers!"

"I agree, Lew. I can't recall the last time I found a tea with such a deep flavor so delectable... Madam Siserius, would it be safe to assume these tea leaves are special?"

“It would. ’Tis made from the ash left behind by phoenix fire.”

“Phoenix… Wait, what? Did you say ‘phoenix’? Like from fairy tales?”

“No, no. They actually still exist in certain places. And I, too, enjoy this particular blend. Although I cannot deny that phoenixes are very rare creatures. The last time I ran out and went searching, it took me nigh on a century of wandering the world to finally acquire more of this ash.”

“W-Wow, that’s definitely something a dragon would say… Shoot, now I feel bad about you using it for us…” Lew opined.

“Oh, not at all. Consider this my thanks for the fascinating knowledge your husband has been kind enough to impart to me. ’Tis the least I can do.”

“Lew…Nellie, good table manners means complimenting whatever is delicious. Pushing for answers beyond that is tasteless.”

“Urk! Y-You’re so right, En. Madam Siserius, thank you so much for sharing your scrumptious tea with us.”

“Tee hee. Seconded, En. Thank you very much from me as well, Madam Siserius.”

“Aha ha ha! I am delighted that it suits your tastes. Go on, enjoy it. Do not hold back on my account.”

I spoke to the airship captain while watching their friendly conversation.

“That person is the dragon from earlier—Madam Siserius.”

She was using the Art of Human Transformation to take on her current form and had done so earlier because she was worried about the airship situation. At first, I’d been surprised too, but, well…Lefi used the same magic, so it hadn’t taken long to get accustomed to her new form.

By the way, the first time Lefi had used the Art, she’d been butt-ass naked. But Siserius’s human form included the robe. I was guessing that the results changed depending on one’s proficiency with the technique.

“Other races really are…incredible, eh?”

“Yeah, for real. Although the only ones I know who can do that are dragons. Apparently, the especially powerful races can take on human bodies.”

The captain looked completely overwhelmed by my answer. That was when Madam Siserius herself called out to us, joining our conversation.

“My apologies, human captain. It seems my coming here has caused you a great deal of trouble.”

“Oh, n-no, not at all. If anything, I’m the one who has to apologize. My negligence in managing my crew led to you being attacked, my lady, so—”

“Fret not, dear boy, fret not. Were it not for my sudden appearance shocking those aboard this vessel, perhaps such a thing would not have occurred. So when you tell me that, it pains me to acknowledge my own part in the fracas. Please, be at ease. Anyhow, I know many varieties of man live in our world, and no two are alike. What happened today is one individual’s problem. I have no intention of venting my spleen on another.”

The captain was doing his best to apologize while trying to keep his face from twitching with nervousness. In contrast, Madam Siserius looked completely unbothered as she waved her hand dismissively. *I’m pretty sure he lost a few years off his life today.*

Still, she was a nice old lady. Just more proof that dragonkind as a whole was pretty open-minded. As far as Lefi in particular went, the word “sloppy” fit better, but this elderly dragon was definitely in the “generous” category. The fact that En had become attached to her in such a short time told me as much.

“Now then, human captain. I realize ’tis boorish of me to ask after already coming aboard, but would you mind terribly if I spent a little more time here? I would very much like to enjoy conversation with these children and that Dragon King.”

“Dragon…King? Y-Yes, of course, not a problem at all. Please stay as long as you wish.”

Dollars to donuts, he was actually thinking, “Please just go home.” Nonetheless, the captain did his damnedest to smile.

You’re doing great, my guy. Keep it up. Since I had some pull of my own, I decided that I’d drop in a good word or two on his behalf later. Wouldn’t want his reputation to go down the tubes because of this debacle, y’know?

◇◇◇

“While I am well aware of the diversity in man’s societies and cultures, of late, I, too, have sensed a sort of restlessness among them. Considering the different races on this very vessel, did something happen recently?”

After I'd finished talking to the airship captain, I'd headed over to the table where my family was enjoying themselves over tea with Madam Siserius. She asked me that question when I arrived.

"The truth is, they waged a war among themselves not too long ago."

"Oh? War. I see... Ah, that would explain the tremendous clash of magical energy in the southern part of the continent."

Well, the Reauxgard Empire is *situated in that general vicinity. I guess when you're as powerful as her, you can detect stuff like that even from far away, huh?*

"Yeah, that's probably it. I'm not exaggerating when I say the scale of the war was massive. It completely changed the relationships between the different humanoid races, leading to much greater contact between them."

"Fascinating... And may I presume that is how you earned the appellation of 'Your Majesty'?"

"Mm, pretty much. It's a long story, but I ended up becoming the emperor of Reauxgard."

"You should tell her exactly what that 'long story' is, Mr. Yuki."

"Yes! We were super shocked the first time he told us the whole thing."

Laughing, my two wives chimed in.

"I see, I see. You are a demon lord, but you are also the Dragon King, then you further your station by becoming an emperor of mankind. 'Tis a *very* eventful life you lead, hm?"

Not to toot my own horn, but yeah, I sure do. I mean, I was *born in another world.*

"Sooo, is it okay if we go back to what we were discussing before all the dramatics?"

"Of course. You are interested in learning more about the divine, yes? Having said that, I have told you most of what I know. Creatures known as 'gods' once roamed this world. And in it remain several bequests from the Age of the Gods."

"The Age of the Gods..."

A time when gods still lived. Speaking of, I just remembered Lefi having mentioned something about this. The Demonic Forest was a place where a god died. Whatever it was, it'd likely been a creature that'd lived long enough and was powerful enough to have been called a god by the end of its life. So could the Demonic Forest have a part to play in this story of the divine?

“Your decision to visit the home of the mountainfolk to learn more about them is the correct one. There, you will find the bequests I spoke of. You will learn much and more after you see the relics for yourselves and hear what the mountainfolk have to say.”

“Mountainfolk” was another way to refer to the dwarves*. So this trip aligns perfectly with my goal after all. Good job, me.*

“What else, what else… Ah, yes, let me show you this.”

She waved a hand, and a rift in space appeared. She thrust her arm inside it. That *had* to be the same thing as my Inventory. After rummaging around for a bit, she took out something resembling a leather notebook.

“Ooh… The fact that you have that, can I assume you use the Art of Human Transformation a lot?”

“You would be correct. ’Tis much more convenient to conduct my investigations on the ground in this form. A dragon’s body is the optimal one for conduct, but ’tis unsuited for nigh on everything else. And that includes writing.”

Lefi had said basically the same thing once upon a time. I was starting to understand why dragonkind had developed the Art of Human Transformation in the first place.

“This is a record of everything I have witnessed thus far. Can you read the dragon language?”

She handed me the notebook.

“Yeah, well enough.”

“Oh, quite the erudite young man, I see. Did young Lefisios teach you?”

“Got it in one. Um, is it okay if I take a look now?”

“Of course. You may read it at your leisure. My notes on the divine are toward the end.”

“Mr. Yuki, show me as well.”

“Me too!”

“Me…too.”

“Okay, okay.”

I plopped En onto my lap and shifted so I had a wife on either side. Once I was all settled, I opened the notebook to make it easy for everyone to see. Siserius, sitting across from us, watched with an amused smile.

“You are all quite close, hm?”

“That’s family for ya,” I replied with a shrug, then started flipping through the notebook.

The first thing I noticed was the abundance of sketches. Ruins of different types of structures and mysterious relic-looking items. Even illustrations of unusual living things and tasty-looking foods. *Guess she's a gourmand. A good hobby to have.*

"Wow, Madam Siserius, you draw so well!"

"I bet Leila would be over the moon to see this treasure trove of knowledge, huh, my lord?"

"Yeah, I can just imagine her eyes sparkling with curiosity."

"This…looks very delicious."

"Seriously. Let's ask Leila to make it when we get home."

Detailed descriptions were written next to the sketches, and when I flipped to the section about the Age of the Gods, I saw the elderly dragon's inquiries on that topic, which basically noted the same things she'd already told me. Some old ruins she'd found contained descriptions of the gods' lives, and apparently, the same information could also be found in ruins on the opposite side of the continent. From this, she'd deduced that the information was likely accurate. The exact same description in two completely different cultural spheres. Meaning the origin story had to be true.

As I continued reading, my eyes landed on *the* sketch.

"This… This is it!"

"Oh? Did something catch your eye?"

"Yeah. What's this sword?"

I was looking at a drawing of something that had the words "God Sword" written next to it. But there was no blade. It was battered and consisted only of the hilt and guard. Without the description, I would've had no clue what it was.

"That is the God Sword, and 'tis a weapon supposedly used by one of the divine pillars. At first glance, it looks nothing like a weapon. Such are the words written on a certain ruin. What else did it say? Ah, yes, 'bringer of war.' But the lack of a blade led me to believe that 'tis likely a symbol of peace."

"No… I think this might actually be its first form. Pouring magic into it will activate its second form, the one with the blade."

A deep curiosity flared in Madam Siserius's eyes at my words.

"Hmm, is that so? I take it you know something I do not?"

Nodding, I opened Inventory and pulled out the God Spear, as well as the God Staff I'd received from the ovine village not too long ago.

“Oh my!”

“This is the God Spear, and this is the God Staff. Pretty sure they’re part of the same series as that God Sword.”

“Whoa! Mr. Yuki, what the heck *are* those things? You didn’t tell me you had weapons like that!”

“They *are* terrifying, aren’t they? Did Madam Eldgalia give you the staff, my lord?”

“Bull’s-eye. Both of them are hella dangerous, which is why I do my best not to take them out of Inventory. As for the God Spear…well, Rhodanus gave it to me during our visit to the Dragon Hamlet.”

“Intriguing… So that blasted elder was hiding something of this caliber, eh?”

“Wait, so you didn’t know about it?”

At my question, a pained expression twisted her face, like she had a headache.

“You received that weapon because of some oral tradition or such related to the Dragon King, yes?”

“Yup. Rhodanus told me that the human Dragon King generations back left it behind.”

“That would explain why he kept its existence a secret from me. He is quite a stubborn one, you see. Still, ’tis hard to believe something so interesting was in the Hamlet all along. Dragon King, may I inspect those?”

“Of course.”

I handed both of the weapons to her, and she scrutinized every nook and cranny of each one.

“The texture, design, and idiosyncrasies… These were undoubtedly crafted by the same creator. Both seem to be made of bone, but there is a difference in the quality of the dormant magic. Perchance the materials are not the same? Then there is the precision of the sorcerous circuits. To mold such an inorganic substance so meticulously requires skill far beyond that of a mere mortal.”

Her eyes gleamed brighter and brighter the more absorbed she got in analyzing the weapons. A smile had slowly been forming on her lips too, and by the time she finished talking, the elderly dragon was beaming.

“You said it changes when magic is introduced?”

“Yeah. But if you’re gonna try it, please be careful. I can’t emphasize enough how dangerous that thing is. I don’t know

about the staff ’cause I haven’t used it, but as far as the spear goes, Lefi told me it’s sharp enough to easily slice through even dragonscale.”

“Hmm. Yes, I can sense it possesses that ability. Then I shall take the utmost care.”

With those words, Madam Siserius waved her hand, and the atmosphere in the space transformed instantly. I was almost positive she’d just put up some kind of magical barrier, just in case the worst happened. Having taken the necessary precautions, she poured her magic into the spear first. In the blink of an eye, it evolved into its second form. After observing it closely from one end to the other, she used her magic again and reverted it to its first form. Next, she picked up the staff, and same as the spear, the weapon took on its second form, she checked it over, and then she returned it to its original form.

Hooooly baloney... That level of magical control is out-freaking-standing. Maybe it was because of her being a dragon—actually, scratch that, because no way could Lefi have managed such delicate work. It must’ve been Madam Siserius’s own mastery of magic. Was that what a species with potential could achieve if it fully realized that potential? Just like with Leila’s teacher, I wondered if age and experience led to better command of your skills.

“Haah... Fascinating. And enjoyable. This is why the world is beyond compare. The most unexpected things can thrill you. You have my thanks, Dragon King, for showing me something so splendid.”

“What did you learn?”

She handed the weapons back to me, and I put them away in Inventory. Eyes sparkling, she answered my question.

“They are tools of war. The wand changes depending on the user, but what I just witnessed tells me they are clearly made for combat. In other words, there was an enemy. These were not made merely to put on display. Something was happening. Something in the distant past that compelled the creator to craft such weapons.”

“...”

She’d said that the description for the God Sword had stated “bringer of war.” It had to be related.

“I do not know what that something was. Although I have seen much and learned more, I cannot recall accounts of any

such historic events. However, as I am now, my repository of knowledge ought to be much larger than before. Thus shall I begin my inquiries anew. Ahhh, such fun this will be!”

Then, with an “Onward and forward!” she stood up.

“What’s up?”

“I have imposed on you far too long and will now take my leave. Should I stay any longer, I worry for the others aboard this vessel. But above all else, I have a grand reason to take flight across the reaches of the world once more!”

“That’s…too bad. I wanted to talk to you more.”

“Heh heh. Forgive me, young Zaien. Just know that this is not our final farewell. I find myself intrigued by this Demonic Forest you all live in, so I will visit soon enough.”

“And when you do, we’ll be the ones to serve you delicious tea!”

“You’re gonna love it in our home!”

“Thank you, young Nell, young Lewin.”

Next, it was my turn to speak to her.

“Well, you gotta do what you gotta do if your curiosity’s itching to be fulfilled. Thanks for everything you told me. You’ve been a huge help.”

“You have my gratitude as well, Dragon King. If I learn anything new, I shall be sure to inform you. Give my regards to young Lefisios too. Now then, ’tis high time I go. Thank you for such an enjoyable time.”

Those were the last words she said to us before asking the crew members on standby how to exit the airship. They told her about a hatch leading outside, and she headed there. Then, finally, an enormous dragon appeared in the sky, her figure disappearing leisurely into the distance.

◇◇◇

A few days had passed since Siserius left. Our meeting had been incredibly valuable for me. That alone was enough to tell me that taking this trip had been the right decision. I definitely wanted to see her again someday. She’d reminded me all over again how freaking cool the old men and women of this world were.

Despite the trouble at the start of our journey, the rest of it was smooth sailing through the skies… Well, aside from one

person who started breaking down.

“Bath time is tub time! Rub a dub dub, fart in the tub! Ohhh, bathtub, how I miss thee!”

“My lord, this is bad. Nell misses bath time at home so much, her mind has exploded and her IQ has started dropping like crazy.”

“Hmm… I’m not surprised Nellie’s brain is gone. You have to take baths regularly or you risk losing your mind. Shii gets so weak if she goes too long without a proper bath.”

Uh, yeah, sooo… Since this route was a few days longer than the last one we’d taken on an airship, Nell’s endurance gauge for bath time had gone past its limit.

“I-It’s all right, Nell, calm down. The dwarves live in a volcanic region, and that means natural hot springs. Let’s jump into one the minute we get there. Sound good?”

I’d learned that from a merchant dwarf, another passenger on this ship. We’d sorta become friends during the ride. Since the homeland of the dwarves rested at the base of a volcano, hot springs bubbled naturally there, making the locale a tourist hot spot. No pun intended.

Nell was sitting in a chair and leaning against the wall at a weird angle. My words must’ve reached her brain because she suddenly stood up, making a racket.

“Really?! Awoooo! Hot springs! Lew, En, did you hear that?! Hot springs, hot springs! Our staple food, our daily source of comfort we can’t live without! Yes, indeed, bath time is our tranquilizer!”

“Nell, as much as I love bath time too, Shii’s the only one who uses it as food. And apparently, you too. No, I don’t think she actually *eats* the water, so technically, just you.”

“Details, shmetails! We are all revived and protected by baths. Yes, we must all worship the bath…”

Protected by the bath, huh?

“Damn, woman. I’m amazed you can put up with not having a proper bath whenever you’re back in Alisia. Your place there doesn’t even have one, right?”

That was what she’d told me, anyway. In fact, bathtubs in general were considered a luxury item in this world. The only ones who could indulge in baths every day were people like us and those living in volcanic regions or houses in unique environments that could fit tubs.

“Um, well, you see, I *was* able to control myself, but…I’m so used to having a bath at home in the dungeon that I don’t have much restraint anymore, so I was actually a bit selfish and asked them to build a bath in the dormitory. Since I hardly ever ask for anything, they approved the request without much hassle. Tee hee hee.”

I-I knew she liked baths, but I had no idea she was such an extreme fan… Well, there was no doubting Nell’s VIP status as the hero, meaning she might be important enough to pass stuff like that through in a flash. Still, I felt kinda sorry for the Church’s administration. The look in her eyes at the time must’ve been fierce as hell. I was sure they’d known from her scary aura that she wouldn’t have taken no for an answer.

“Hmm… This is just more proof that Nell really is one of us, huh?”

“Yes…agreed. I see that look in her eyes at home all the time.”

“Oh, snap. You gonna take that from them, Nell?”

“Bwa ha ha ha! Say whatever you like! For I am the bath warrior and the bath demon lord! Everything I do is for the sake of the bath!”

Then, a few hours after the three of us tried to calm the bath maniac, the airship arrived at the dwarves’ homeland.

◇◇◇

A deep crimson bubbled and oozed.

“Whoooa, that’s amazing… I’ve never seen it before.”

“It…looks very hot.”

“I’ve seen it plenty of times in my life since the therianthrope homeland is close to here and I’ve visited the dwarves’ domain a few times.”

“I am absolutely astounded they can inhabit such a place. I’d wager the hot water is simply sublime, then!”

“Yeah, so just hold on a little longer, you bath maniac.”

What we saw through the airship’s windows was magma. It flowed and spumed from the mountain, spewing fire everywhere. The mountain in question that towered over its surroundings was obviously an active volcano. And at the foot of that mountain was the dwarves’ hometown.

Actually, it was less a town and more a full-blown city. The best words to describe it were…“heat” and “iron.” I saw smoke

rising from chimneys all over the place and even spotted mines not too far away. Overall, the place gave off a very industrial air, making it easy for anyone to realize that the people who lived here primarily made a living as blacksmiths. The fact that the dwarves had built their home so close to the eternally flowing magma made me wonder if it was protected by some kind of magic.

"Ha ha ha! Aye, water boils well here. Despite the distinctive volcanic stink to it, which I'll have ye know some tourists cannae stand, I can guarantee the effects of our spring water."

The one who spoke in a gentle manner was Radah, the dwarven merchant we'd become friends with on the airship journey. Except he looked nothing like the fierce, bearded dwarves I'd met in the war. No, he had a very neat and tidy appearance. I guessed that was because he conducted business all over the world, so he needed to pay attention to how he presented himself. He also just so happened to be related to Dodah, the Dwarf King I'd met a while back. He'd been dispatched to the Reauxgard Empire because of his familial connection, and it was pure coincidence that he'd ended up on the same ship as us for his return flight.

"Ooh, nice. I'm not as extreme as Nell about baths, but I'm excited too. On trips like this, hot springs are definitely a must."

"I...agree. Sinking into lovely hot water every day as a change of pace is very important. That's where you shed your tiredness and enjoy the end of one day so you can look forward to the next when you go to sleep."

"Out of the mouths of babes. Right on the mark, En. Couldn't have said it better myself."

"Radah, is the Gem Shaft still the same? I was thinking I'd like to show my lord."

"Aye, it remains unchanged. Ahhh, if I recall correctly...Madam Lewin, ye hail from the Groll clan, do ye not? Can I assume ye visited our homeland with yer kin?"

"Yup! We used to come here a lot because of my father's work, and we did touristy things when we came too."

I had a sudden and unexpected thought while watching Lew talk to Radah.

"Lew, you... You really are a pampered young lady, huh?"

"I-It sounds so embarrassing when you put it like that, but I guess you're right. That *was* the life I led. Tee hee hee, what's the

matter, my lord? Do you see me differently now?"

"More like my concept of 'rich girl' has totally been destroyed."

"How rude!"

When I laughed at the sight of Lew puffing her cheeks out in anger, Nell clapped her hands imperiously.

"Hey, hey, save the flirting for later. Right now, we have to return to our room and prepare for landing! Up and at 'em, soldiers!"

"Well, *someone* clearly has her energy back."

Cheese Louise, woman, tell me you're excited about hot springs without telling me you're excited about hot springs. A moment later, I realized I'd been staring at her in exasperated amusement without meaning to. I pulled myself together and spoke to Radah.

"There you have it, Radah. Our first order of business after disembarking is hitting up a hot spring, sooo…do you have any recommendations?"

"Of course. I'd be glad to show ye all to the best one in the city. It actually belongs to an inn, so would ye like me to help make a reservation?"

"Oh, that's a good idea. Sorry for the trouble, and thanks a million. You're a lifesaver. We traipsed all the way here without any real agenda, you see."

"Which is nothing new for him, Radah. He's always like this."

"My lord is very haphazard. Apologies in advance for any trouble he causes."

Radah replied to my wives with a grin.

"Och, no, no trouble at all. Just meeting ye and having ye know my face is worth its weight in iron for a merchant such as myself. In fact, it's an honor for us dwarves when others rely on us like this. So please, think nothing of it."

While we chatted, the airship arrived at the depot. Then, we took our first steps into the dwarves' domain.

◇ ◇ ◇

After that, thanks to Radah's assistance, we booked a room at the inn without having to wait at all, then headed straight to the hot spring Nell so deeply desired. Though he'd already told us he was Dodah's relative, it still surprised me to learn how influential he actually was among the dwarves. Because just a few words

from him at the inn's front desk and bada bing, bada boom, we'd gotten all checked into our room.

Then there was the matter of my security. My imperial bodyguards were already on their way back to Reauxgard, but there was still the matter of my continued security here, and he handled everything on that front while we enjoyed the hot spring. He said he was glad to meet us, and that honestly went both ways.

"Connections are power." That'd proven true time and time again for as long as I'd been in this world.

And now, it was the next day. We rested well after our fantastic time in the hot spring.

"Welcome, Demon Lord, welcome! Radah told me yer journey here was eventful, ta say the least, eh?"

So said Dodah the Dwarf King.

This morning, a dwarf had shown up while we were eating breakfast and asked me to accompany him to the king's estate. I was the only one who'd gone with him. My wives were having fun playing tourist elsewhere.

"Yeah, you can say that again. But all my exhaustion melted away thanks to the hot spring here."

"Well, mighty chuffed am I ta hear ye say so. Our hot springs are our main attraction, ye ken, so enjoy 'em ta yer heart's content while ye and yers are here."

"We will. Oh, and Radah's been a huge help with everything he's done for us so far. I can't thank him enough."

"Gah ha ha! Makes a mon right proud to hear his kinfolk have been helpin' others. The lad's a thoughtful one even among us dwarves. Does nae miss a thing, I can promise ye that. He's a merchant by trade, but priceless too in everythin' else he does for us."

The Dwarf King chuckled heartily.

We chatted for a while longer, catching each other up before I finally broached the topic on my mind.

"So, uhhh, Dwarf King. Mind telling me what these folks are doing here?"

Besides me and him, there were a ton of other dwarves here in his house, listening quietly to our conversation. Their intense stares made me a little—okay, a lot uncomfortable.

"Och, aye, almost forgot. I told 'em some time ago about yer first-rate smithin' skills, and when they heard ye'd be visitin', they

could nae contain themselves and insisted on joinin' us. Forgive me fer askin', but be a lad and show these numpties what ye can do, eh?"

"Wait, *me*? For real?"

"Aye."

You want me to put on a show for the "numpties" even though your eyes are sparkling the brightest, huh?

"Okay, but, like...you know I don't *actually* know how to smith, right? All I can do is use my Weapon Enhancement ability."

"I do, and that's just fine. I think I've already told ye before, but fer us, that skill is akin ta a legendary technique since only the first Dwarf King was able ta use it as he pleased. So just bein' able ta see it in person is more'n enough fer us. We dwarves are ever a curious lot, ye ken."

All I could do was laugh ruefully when I saw his boyish, impossible-to-hate, ridiculously excited smile. Considering how eager he and the other dwarves looked, I knew I'd made the right decision leaving En in the care of my wives. They probably would've been so fascinated by her that we'd have been stuck here for a good, long while.

Might as well make something since he and his people have done so much for me.

"All right, let's do this. Dwarf King, you said your weapon is a hammer, right?"

"Aye. This'n."

He picked up his hammer, which had been leaning against a wall, and handed it to me. I took it from him, appreciating its heft. It was nice and solid, just like En. Its gorgeous engravings didn't detract from its utility, so at a single glance, I could tell the weapon was made for combat. *Damn, what a cool-ass hammer.* Definitely something made by a race of people whose calling was blacksmithing.

"Thanks. This is a real work of art."

"Och, well, it's the least I can do since ye showed me Li'l Miss Zaien. One good turn deserves another 'n' all that. Speakin' o', where are the wee lassie and yer lovely wives?"

"They're taking a tour of your city. I'll introduce you to them later. If I showed En to these guys, I bet good money they wouldn't let us leave for ages. Smart move on my part, eh?"

"Gah ha ha! Aye, well played indeed. The lassie's existence itself is the stuff o' legends. My people may be docile now, but I

cannae say they would've remained so with 'er here."

Laughing cheerfully, the Dwarf King agreed with me. And then, I stopped talking to focus.

Hmm... What if I make a hammer? It won't be anywhere near enough to count as a "thanks for having us" gift, but I can at least give it to him.

I decided that adamantite would be the best material to use. Though it was a rare metal, it had bang for my DP buck. Plus, I was already used to using it, and on top of that, I just so happened to have some in Inventory. Expensive, but a very easy-to-use magical metal.

The only issue was that the Dwarf King already had an incredible weapon, so I didn't want to give him something he had no use for. In that case, I needed to make him something both cutting-edge and practical. Something he would only use in special circumstances.

Next, I had to consider the shape. The wheels in my head turned for a while.

Once I'd finalized the details, I took the adamantite from Inventory and infused a generous amount of my magical energy into it, then activated my ability. A few moments later, a sledgehammer was born. While listening to the oohing and aahing of the dwarves behind me, I gave it to the Dwarf King.

"I made this specifically for you. It's not much in the way of a gift, but I'd appreciate it if you'd accept it. Its name is 'Gousai,' which roughly translates to 'thunder smash.' You can use it when you're facing a huge enemy. For example, something along the lines of the Dark King Corpse Dragon. It's pretty heavy, but I know *you* can handle it, right?"

Gousai: A black war sledgehammer crafted by Demon Lord Yuki. Shatters any obstacle to pave a way forward. Quality: S-.

Despite my desire to create something both cutting-edge and practical, there was just no way for someone like me to create anything sophisticated. Not when I lacked the dwarves' level of expertise on weaponry. If I was going to pit myself against them, it had to be in another area. Besides, it was no secret that my specialty for creation lay in making huge, heavy things.

Thus, I'd dumped as much of my demon-lord power as I could into this and made this insanely weighty thing that even dwarves would just barely be able to wield with their tremendous physical strength. Anybody weaker wouldn't even be able to lift the damn thing. But I remembered how easily the Dwarf King had raised En before, so I was confident he'd be able to use this sledgehammer too.

Having taken Gousai from me, the Dwarf King now scrutinized it with an artisan's eye, looking over every detail. He then swung it around a few times, testing it, before finally nodding in satisfaction.

"Aye. A fine piece. I accept this boon with thanks."

His words made the other dwarves ooh and aah again. *Okay, but why the commotion this time?* While I puzzled over their reaction, Dodah addressed his subordinates.

"Now then, ye lot saw what ye wanted ta see. Burn the Demon Lord's technique inta yer eyes. He 'n' I have things ta discuss in private, so ye can all go back ta work."

They did as he told them, their excitement not dampened at all. Once they were gone and it was just the two of us, the Dwarf King spoke again.

"Now to the heart o' the matter. Why have ye come?"

"Right, so, the truth is, I'm conducting research into this world's divinity. Staying in one place doesn't help when it comes to something like that, so I thought I'd go travel around. And since we made a promise for me to drop in at some point, I figured, why not now?"

Dodah fell into a thoughtful silence for a bit before replying.

"Hmm... Understood. Then let me take ye ta the shrine my people worship."

◇ ◇ ◇

The place the Dwarf King took us to was...a mountain. It towered just behind the village. There were several mining tunnels, and a lot of the passages seemed to be open to the public for tourism purposes. But the tunnel we were walking through probably wasn't one of them.

Clusters of ores that looked like jewels glittered all over the walls. There were no lights installed, but the rainbow-colored glow from the ores lit the way forward, making it easy to see

what lay ahead. The surreal sight hit me right in the chest, exactly what you'd find in a fantasy setting.

"So…pretty."

"I'm shocked by how beautiful it is too. I can't believe a place like this exists… Lew, is this the Gem Shaft you were talking about?"

"Yup! But…the colors look more vibrant than I remember. Maybe this is a special route?"

"Aye, it is. Sharp eyes ye have there, beast girl. This shaft has nae been mined at all, which makes the quality o' the mana here much better'n the others, so the ores shine like jewels."

That was the Dwarf King's response to my wives. They'd been doing their own thing in the city, but when Dodah'd told me to invite them to see "summat good," I'd done just that, and that was how we'd all linked up.

"Wooow… So all of this is ore?"

"That's the nature o' this mine, ye ken. Even the same stone can shine a different color dependin' on how it absorbs the mana. I can only show ye this passage now, but later, I suggest ye take a look at the Gem Shafts 'round the other side."

We walked like that for a while, maybe half an hour or more, chatting away.

"We're here. The depths o' this sacred mountain."

After he said that, we reached the exit of the passage. It was a sight to behold. In an instant, a light like nothing we'd seen before practically blinded us. Hot. Red. Simmering, molten magma, emitting sparks. The passage was probably protected by magic, but the heat was still so intense that it felt like even my sweat would burn off. If I'd been here while it was in its natural state, without the magical protection, my body would've already burst into flames.

And at the end of this path was a single shrine. Though small and simple, it possessed an overwhelming sacredness, as if the space it occupied existed solely for it. In the center of the shrine was an old stone slab, probably in worship of whatever god or deity the shrine was dedicated to.



The letters carved on the stone slab said “Lay thine hands upon me.” Did that mean I should touch it? Pretty strange words for a shrine.

“Is this what you wanted to show me?”

“Aye. Though sadly, it’s just a plain ol’ stone with naught carved in it.”

“Huh? But there are words right there.”

“Och, aye? Words, ye say… Meanin’ ye can read whatsoever is on there?”

At that point, the Dwarf King’s expression grew serious as he stared at me.

“Yeah… It says, ‘Lay thine hands upon me.’”

After a few more seconds of boring holes into me with his eyes, he looked at the stone slab again.

“Let me tell ye summat interestin’. There’s a legend passed down from one Dwarf King ta the next. Should one come searchin’ fer God, bring ’em here. I see now… So it was ye we were waitin’ for.”

Looking like he’d just had an epiphany, the Dwarf King continued.

“Demon Lord, be a lad and do as it says. Touch it.”

“Uh… Okay. En, will you stay with me?”

“Of…course.”

She dispelled her human form and returned to her physical sword form that I carried on my shoulder. Once she’d done so, I spoke to the others.

“Guys, step back a bit. I don’t know what’ll happen.”

After the three of them did just that when I asked, with the Dwarf King’s expression so grave it was almost scary and my wives looking a bit nervous, I stood in front of the stone slab. Just like it said to, I tentatively reached out with my right hand. The moment I touched it, the words disappeared and new ones appeared.

Oh. I know this feeling. Whatever this thing was, it was the same as the dungeon’s display. The only difference was it being a stone slab. Otherwise, it felt no different from what I always used. And I’d been granted the authority to use it. Madam Siserius must’ve come here once upon a time, but nothing would’ve happened for her. It made me wonder if the main requirement to use it was being a demon lord.

I read the new words: “Present the weapons crowned by the

divine."

"Crowned by the divine"? Maybe it means the God Spear and the God Staff? When I took both out of Inventory, my guess turned out to be the right one. Suddenly, some sort of gravitational pull activated, and the two weapons left my side, floating upright in front of the stela.

Then, the words on the stone monument changed again. "Speak the one true name, Lúin. Speak the one true name, Kerykeion."

"Lúin? Kerykeion?"

For a moment, my mind went completely blank. The sensation was unpleasant, like the world had flipped upside down.

"Ngh…"

The sudden change made it impossible for me to stand, and I dropped to my knees, leaning on En's blade.

No. I *hadn't* fallen. I was still standing right there. White. Everything was white. As far as I could see. In a space devoid of anything. I didn't know what was up and what was down. Unable to establish my sense of equilibrium, I couldn't tell if I was standing up straight, diagonally, or upside down.

Silence.

"So, I am to be thy guide."

In the blink of an eye, *it* appeared before me. A skull. A body made of bones. Several limbs that looked like arms, a tail, and horns too. A grotesque form far from anything remotely humanoid. And its presence. So overwhelming that I almost felt crushed.

But I knew what this was. I knew this sensation. I'd felt it before. Once, when I was in dire straits and had used it as a weapon. Even if its appearance was something I'd never seen, I still recognized it.

"You're the God Spear?"

Then, the God Spear slowly, very slowly nodded.

◇ ◇ ◇

I had tons of questions, but before I could even open my mouth, the God Spear—Lúin, the god with the skeletal frame, swiftly stretched forth his bony fingers. The gesture automatically drew my eyes, and for the first time, I noticed

some kind of ball of light floating in front of me. That was literally the only way I could describe it. The impression I got was that it was a pure mass of power.

Just as I was wondering what was going on, something changed. A figure suddenly appeared. I couldn't make out their face. It was some kind of silhouette. Probably a woman, judging from their appearance.

The woman slowly reached out her hand and touched the light. In the next moment, a massive tract of land was born beneath her feet. Earth. Rocks and soil as far as the eye could see. However, the transformation didn't end there, and after a few moments, a vibrant green that gave off a sense of life was born above it. Lush green trees formed a forest, water overflowed into the sunken earth to become the sea, and finally, the sun and moon rose overhead to form the sky. Where there had been nothing, the world now existed.

This must be…this world's creation myth? It bore a striking resemblance to the stories Leila and the others had told me. That meant the woman had to be the goddess, Gaia, making the ball of light the Original God, Dominus.

When I looked at Lúin, he pointed his finger in a different direction. This time, the scene was different. Gaia was in a prayer pose, and in the next moment, new figures appeared. I counted eight of them. Unsurprisingly, I couldn't see their faces, but each had a different shape. From what I could tell, there was a human, a dwarf, an elf, and a therianthrope at the very least. As for the others, three of them looked humanoid but were hard to make out. *Are those demons?*

All kinds of demon species existed in the current day and age, so they were all lumped together as "demons," but things might've been different in the Age of the Gods. Based on their silhouettes, most of them were men. Only the human and one of the three demon-like figures were women. But also, one of the eight possessed a giant, four-legged body. That must've been the dragon, on account of the horns, tail, and massive wings.

So those eight figures—no, Eight Pillars must be the first creatures and gods?

"Are you…one of those three demons?"

Lúin nodded and pointed a bony finger at one of the silhouettes on the far end. Made sense now that he— Uhhh, I was pretty sure he was a he? Something told me I was right.

Anyway, it made sense that he wasn't always just bones.

"What about the God Staff?"

This time, he pointed at the elven silhouette.

Huh. Interesting. Before I could ask him why he'd appeared but not the God Staff, Kerykeion, the silhouettes started moving. The Eight Pillars apparently had the power to grow each of their own races, and I watched the land being populated with all sorts of peoples.

The whole time, Gaia took a stance of noninterference. She was always together with Dominus, focusing on creating new life, such as monsters, and expanding the world. Eventually, with the gods' guidance, the humanoid races in the newly formed world increased their numbers to the point that they could form countries, albeit ones that were small in scale compared to modern ones.

Is this how the world began? Might've been a little late, but it'd just hit me how crazy it was to actually be seeing this.

"But…you must have a reason for showing this to me *now*, right?"

At my question, Lúin raised his palm in a "Be patient" gesture before pointing a finger in yet another direction. He was clearly telling me to keep watching. So I looked where he urged me to, and I saw two people there.

Gaia and one of the demons in the Eight Pillars. Not Lúin, though. Another god. Whoever the man was, he was pleading with her. If I were to guess, it probably had something to do with his own followers. He cradled a woman's corpse in his arms and wept. Maybe he wanted the goddess to bring the dead person back to life.

But his pleas seemed to fall on deaf ears. Even as I sensed her sadness, Gaia shook her head in refusal and walked away from the Pillar. The demon god stared at the ground in shock, then dropped to his knees and wailed. His tears fell for a long time. And then, he created a weapon. From his own flesh, as if extracting a piece of his soul, he used his power, reminiscent of Weapon Enhancement, and transformed it into a weapon. *It looks like a longsword.*

"The God Sword…"

Weapons were tools for fighting. Tools to defeat one's opponents and carry out one's desires through force. So what sentiment had driven that god to create his weapon? *"Bringer of*

war,” huh…

As I watched, the species that demon god had created turned on the other races, and the first war since the birth of the world took place. Most likely between demons and humans. I didn’t know the reason for it, but watching the events take place, by the end of the war, the demons had decimated the humans.

That angered the human god—most likely the goddess Nell and her people worshipped. This goddess objected to the demon god’s actions. In response, he…pointed the tip of his sword, the one he’d created of himself, at her.

But he didn’t cut her down. He spoke to her quietly. The human goddess’s expression went from furious to surprised to sad. Tears ran down her cheeks as she questioned the demon god. He shook his head from side to side and answered her. Then, finally, the two went their separate ways.

That was apparently the end of what Lúin had wanted to show me because the silhouettes all vanished. I didn’t know the details because I understood that what he’d shown me was an oversimplification. All I knew was the general flow of events. Still, it was enough. I understood.

“So. The gods fought each other, didn’t they?”

Lúin gave me another slow nod.

The God Spear had to have been born in the same way as the God Sword, then. As another part of that conflict.

“Which means, the you who’s here right now is a piece of your original soul, just like that sword?”

He nodded again, then spread both hands wide, creating two factions in the space between them: the human goddess and her supporters protecting Gaia, and the demon god and his supporters targeting her. The only one who didn’t take a side was the dragon god. As for Lúin himself, he seemed to be part of the second group.

“You sided with the demon god, huh?”

Based on the sequence of events, I understood that something major had to have led that demon god to take up his weapon, and I didn’t need details to figure it out. So it stood to reason that this god, the one dwelling within the spear, must’ve had a similarly important reason for doing the same. At this point, he spoke for the second time since bringing me to this space and explaining things to me in the form of a movie.

“It was what thou might call a rebellious phase.”

“Ain’t no way!”

I gasped when I realized maybe I shouldn’t have blurted out a response like that. But then, he was probably chuckling himself. I looked closely at him and saw his shoulders shaking as he seemed to be stifling an amused laugh. *Argh, this dang god got me good.*

Lúin enjoyed himself for a bit longer—at my expense no less—before his laughter died down and he continued.

“The Original God sought chaos. For chaos meant the flourishing of all things in creation.”

Chaos. Variety, in other words? That was the power needed for progress? Maybe it was. Just because everything moved in the same direction didn’t mean it was moving forward, so being different from others was probably a force for development. And Dominus, who was this world itself, wanted that, huh?

“Thus doth love exist. As doth war. It is the nature of chaotic creatures.”

Nature, huh? He wasn’t wrong. No two beings in this world were alike, which was exactly why we loved each other and fought each other. Even though Lefi and I argued every day, we still loved each other. Same song, different verse. His words were very godlike, and right on the mark. *No beating around the bush with this one.*

“So, basically, something bothered you too, and that’s why you sided with the demon god?”

Despite his joke about his reason being that he’d been in his rebellious phase, I knew there had to be more. This god must’ve also had a belief strong enough to stake his own life on his choice. Lúin chuckled.

“Heh. It all lieth in a far distant past. What is done is done. I have more important matters to discuss with thee than what was. Namely, what will be. For I know well that Kerykeion wisheth the same.”

“Okay, well, speaking of, is Kerykeion not *in* the God Staff?”

“Nay. Yet two things hath he left behind. One to be spoken of after, and one I shalt speak of now.”

“A message? He left a message?”

“Yea. For the next wielder of the staff. Heed his words well. ‘For truth, I do not wish to part with it, but I have no choice. Thus do I give to you my staff. Treat it with disrespect and I will torment you with the power of a god.’”

I couldn’t help but snort with laughter at how snobby the

message was.

"Well, not exactly a message I *want* to hear."

Torment with the power of a god, huh? Ooh, scary.

"Heh heh. He was a stubborn and unreasonable fellow."

Lúin's shoulders shook with mirth. He really was a chill god.

"All right, so what's this business about 'what will be'?"

He nodded.

"Thou hast been chosen. As the successor of life."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"Thou hast power over a miniature garden. The power to manipulate and develop it."

"And a miniature garden is…what, exactly?"

"Hmm… Ah, in this age, it is called a dungeon."

My heart thumped hard in my chest at his words. Then, it sped up. Even in this space that I wasn't sure was real or not, sweat erupted on my skin. *Huh? Am I nervous?*

"A miniature garden is an egg. The Original God is the same as we. A living being like us, and thus doth he wish to carve proof of his own life."

The world wanted to leave its own mark. His words reminded me of something from my old life. What was it again… Oh, right, the Gaia hypothesis. It stated that Earth is a single living organism. Since this planet was also a single life-form, it had to be trying to leave behind offspring like a life-form. In other words…

"…"

The next thing that came to mind was what Shendra, Reauxgard's former emperor who now went by "Shen," said.

"In my opinion, this world is simply one enormous dungeon."

"I'm not a theologian, but if we're to unravel the mystery of 'God,' the quickest route would be studying dungeons."

He'd ended up being right. Dominus was the one who'd created dungeons. And at the end of the dungeon, I'd found God. Well, the God that gave birth to this world.

"I… Well, since you say I'm the successor now, is there something I have to do as part of my duty?"

"Nay. There is no denying thou art the chosen one. However, what comes after is for thee to decide. Thy life is thine own. We wish for thee to live freely as one with the miniature garden."

My life was my own. Meaning I could do whatever I wanted?

"Why… Why me?"

My voice sounded rough even to my own ears. The skeleton chuckled again.

“A question for the ages indeed. Fortuity? Or divinity?”

So only the gods knew the truth, huh? I breathed deeply to pull myself together and attempt to wrap my head around all this. Meanwhile, Lúin continued.

“One more thing. Thy weapon. That small maiden.”

“En? What about her?”

“She will be our equal.”

Lúin created a shadow of En in this strange space. Next, a path stretched straight in front of her, and at its end, eight weapons appeared. *Those must be…the God weapons.* He was trying to tell me that if I kept training En like I had been, she would ultimately attain the same level of power.

“Cherish her. That child’s existence is beyond rare.”

“Hey, she’s like my own kid, so I don’t need you to tell me.”

Besides, even if she wasn’t such an impressive being, it was a given that I’d still take care of her. She was a part of my family, and all of them were way more important to me than my own life.

This was totally off topic, but something I’d been thinking about for a while now was this god’s gestures and the way he used shadowy images so skillfully to express himself. Despite the lack of words, he managed to convey exactly what he wanted to. Then, Lúin suddenly nodded like he’d read my mind.

“I practiced.”

“Ain’t no way!”

When I blurted out the same thing as before, he chortled again, his shoulders shaking cheerfully. *Son of a bitch, this god keeps slipping dumb stuff in. But, well, better a god like him than one with a stick up his ass.*

He continued, his attitude giving off entertained vibes.

“Heh heh… I enjoyed this moment in time. Though I am loath to depart, this is the end of my story.”

I twitched a little in reaction when I heard that.

“No. Don’t tell me you’re gonna vanish from the spear?”

Lúin nodded.

“I am but an ember, long since dead. Remaining in this world violates the law of nature.”

“Wait, please. I still have so much to ask—”

Before I could finish, he stopped me with a raised palm.

“I bid thee to find the answers on thine own. For thou yet live.”

“Oh. Well, I guess when you put it like that… I’m glad I got to talk to you too.”

Lúin laughed happily. Even though he was just a collection of bones, the affection in his eyes was clear as day.

In the next moment, the space wavered. The white void started collapsing, and I couldn’t focus my eyes on one spot. Then, in the end, only his words burned in my ears.

“Live life to the utmost. Rejoice in life. For that is the duty of the living.”

◇ ◇ ◇

“Wow. What a great god. If he has a religion, I’m definitely converting.”

I said those words without thinking as I slowly opened my eyes. I felt the heat of the boiling magma. The stela in front of me was a blank slate now. The white, never-ending space had disappeared.

“Master…?”

I’d been holding my beloved sword daughter this whole time, and now, she spoke to me telepathically, a hint of worry in her voice.

“Hey, En, how much time has passed since I stopped talking?”

“Maybe…a minute. You didn’t say anything, just stood there. It was kind of weird.”

“Fascinating. Only a minute, huh?”

Even though it *felt* like I’d been talking to him for at least half an hour. I shifted my gaze from En in my right hand to the God Spear and God Staff still floating in front of me. There was nothing here anymore. The cheerful bone god was gone. I knew this truth in both my head and my heart.

Right before he’d left, Lúin had taught me how to use the spear and staff. That was the other message Kerykeion had left behind. The best way to describe how he’d done it was that he’d implanted the knowledge directly in my brain. Now I knew. I knew how to use these weapons.

“Sorry, En, but give me a sec, okay?”

“Okay…”

I put her down, then grasped the spear with my right hand and the staff with my left. Raising them in front of me, I spoke

the words.

“Extol life, mine spear.”

“Exhort reason, mine staff.”

And then.

The God Spear and the God Staff, with their unrefined appearance, grew by leaps and bounds. Within seconds, they achieved the second evolution I was very familiar with, and then they went beyond that. Normally, they sucked out my magic to its limit, but right now, they didn’t touch me at all. Because both Lúin and Kerykeion had acknowledged me as their rightful owner.

The magma burst all around me, and the shrine in front of my eyes began to glow faintly. The magical energy in the air raged fiercely, and the God Spear and God Staff absorbed it all, then poured it into me. *Oh. I understand now.* After fulfilling their roles in battle, they’d become keys. Keys to open the door and help whoever came here someday. Someone like me.

“Wh-What in bleedin’ ’ell?!”

“Wh-Whoa!”

“M-My lord!”

I heard three voices behind me.

“Master…?”

“Don’t worry. This won’t reject us.”

It felt just like the first time Lefi had shared her magic with me. An overwhelming force swirled inside my body, but unlike then, I didn’t feel like I was about to collapse. It must’ve been because those two were shielding me, standing as barriers between me and the magic.

Eventually, the transformation ended. The colossal amount of mana the God Spear and God Staff had sucked in was all inside me. Not borrowed, but a part of me, one with my flesh and blood. That was when I checked my stats.

```
Name: Yuki
Race: Supreme Ruler
```

Hmm… My race evolved, huh? Thanks to the power Lúin and Kerykeion gave me.

◇ ◇ ◇

Name: Yuki
Race: Supreme Ruler
Class: The ??? of ???
Level: 214
HP: 999,086 / 999,086
MP: 1,960,349 / 1,960,349
Strength: 20,029
Stamina: 24,870
Agility: 24,005
Magic: 58,651
Dexterity: 46,274
Luck: 120
Special Abilities: Demon Eyes, Polyglot, Flight, Indomitability, Ruler's Might, Spirit Magic
Abilities: Inventory, Analysis 10, Unarmed Combat 6, Elemental Magic 8, Stealth 6, Scout 7, Swordsmanship 5, Weapon Enhancement 8, Sorcerer's Grant 10, Traps 6, Greatswordsmanship 8, Camouflage 7, Danger Detection 7, Dance 3, Awareness Priming 4
Titles: The Demon Lord from Another World, The Supreme Dragon's Owner, The Adjudicator, Enemy of Humanity, One Who Defies Death, Demon King of Dragonkind, The Supreme Dragon's Consort, One Acknowledged by the Spirit Emperor, Demon Emperor, The Supreme Demon Lord

First of all, I couldn't read my class, probably because I didn't meet the requirements yet. It was basically telling me in not so many words that I still had a long way to go. Then there was my new title, "The Supreme Demon Lord."

The Supreme Demon Lord: A great and powerful demon who is a ruler without equal among mankind. In reality, no one should have been able to attain this level.

"'No one should have been able to attain this level,' huh..."

At this point, the numbers didn't really make sense anymore, but…it was possible that I had the highest stats among all mankind now. Maybe that was what my new race and title indicated. So it stood to reason that this demon lord body of mine had changed to adapt to my new race. Although the fact remained that I was still classified as a humanoid.

My next question was, how well could I fight in the western area of the Demonic Forest, where the monsters were the strongest? I suspected I could venture deeper than before, but I still needed to find out for sure. Having said that, I still probably couldn't beat something as extraordinary as a real dragon, and like any other living thing, I'd die if my head got cut off, so there was that too.

This world was harsh. My life didn't belong to just me anymore. I couldn't let my guard down. Even so, I'd taken another step closer to Lefi. This time, I'd evolved into a different race, and that made me happier than anything.

"Anyway, Supreme Ruler, huh? Now it's like Lefi and I are the champions of this era."

Once I get home, how about I pretend to be the man with the seven scars and make a game of it with her? Yeah, I like the sound of that. While those thoughts ran through my head, I looked down at my body. Just like the first time I'd gone through a racial evolution, there weren't any real changes to my appearance. All I could feel was a lot more magic than ever before filling my body. Everything was where it should've been, though.

I unfurled the wings on my back. What used to be two pairs had turned into…*whoa, three.* The first pair looked ambiguous since it could've been bat or dragon wings. The second was very demonic and sinister-looking. As for this new third… *I think they're bones.*

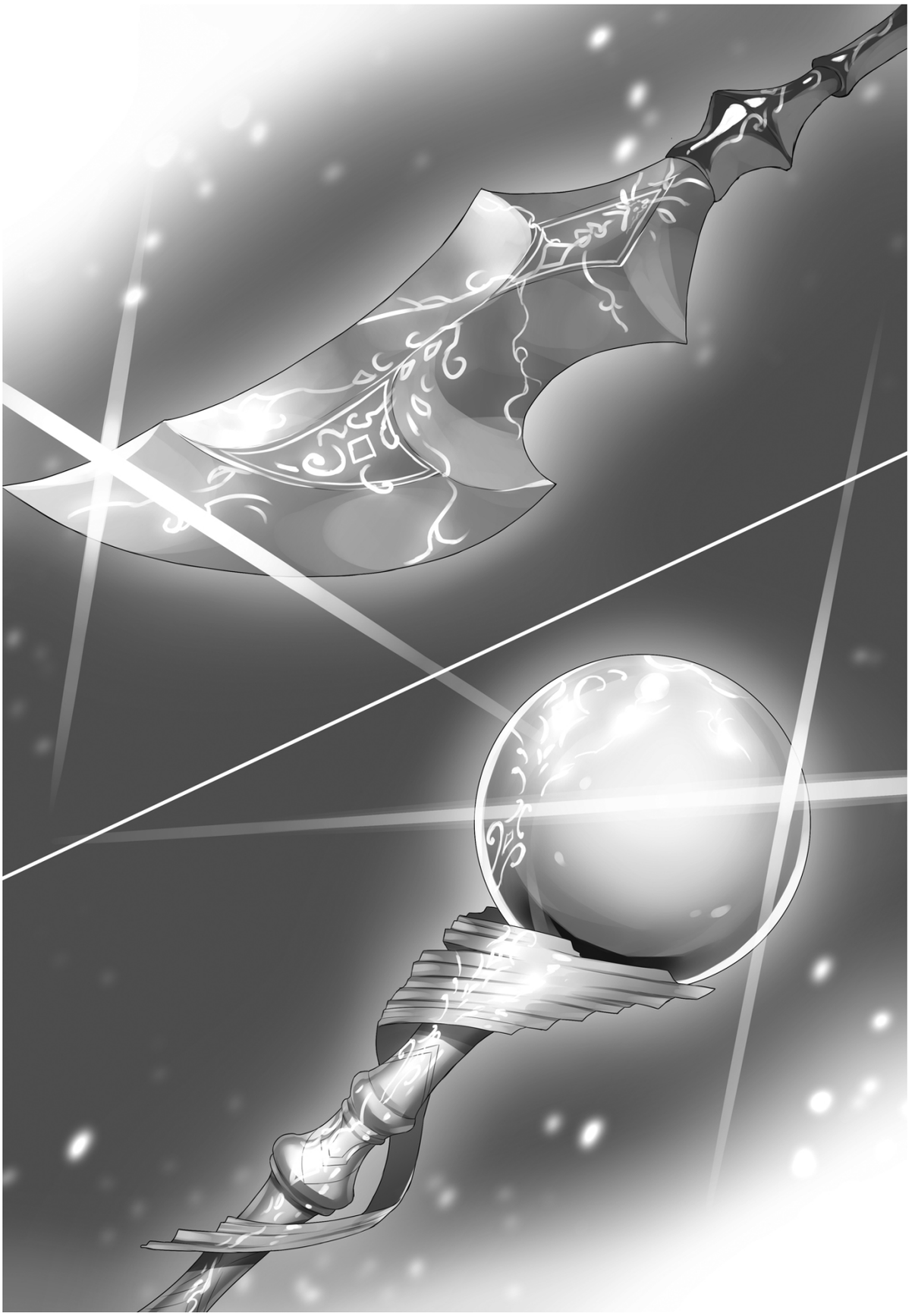
Black wings made of bone. The patagium was in tatters. Actually, more like practically nonexistent, meaning these wings likely didn't function as wings anymore. I thought their ominous vibe was super freaking cool, and I personally loved them, but any way I looked at them, these wings didn't belong to a protagonist. They were a lot more like the kind you'd see on the evil boss.

Hmm. If a hero were here, I'd be hunted down in a heartbeat. For freaking sure. Never mind that this generation's hero was my wife.

Smiling wryly, I inspected the God Spear and God Staff next. I knew their first and second forms. But both of them were currently in their third form, looking even more magnificent than ever.

First, the spear. Its overall design was that of a naginata now. On top of that, there was a design I'd never seen before running through its body. And that wasn't all. It glowed faintly too now. I'd say it was a size bigger than before. Plus, the pattern didn't just extend into the spear, but up my arm as well, forming what looked like armor and reaching up to my shoulder. It also emitted a faint glow.

The staff was pretty much the same story. It was overall a size larger and had a similar design that reflected on my arm and stretched up to my shoulder. At first glance, it seemed like both the God Spear and the God Staff were eroding my arms, but that wasn't the case. They were, in fact, protecting me, granting me power, and allowing me to wield them perfectly with what amounted to a reinforced exoskeleton.



Unlike last time, when I'd used the spear in battle, the God weapons would never again devour my mana automatically. I'd been forcing power into them from the outside, handling them roughly, so I realized now that I just hadn't been using them properly. *Hindsight's a bitch, huh?* But man, still didn't change the fact that the whole experience had been a nightmare. I'd been terrified of opening Pandora's box, but I never imagined that at the end of the spear awaited such a playful and cheerful god.

Remembering the past, I smiled as I activated Analysis to inspect the two.

God Spear Lúin: God of Demons Lúin used a piece of his soul to bring this spear to life, and God of Iron Dweorg perfected it. There is nothing that this spear cannot pierce. Now, it has been passed on to the next generation. Quality: ???

God Staff Kerykeion: God of Law Kerykeion used a piece of his soul to bring this staff to life, and God of Iron Dweorg perfected it. To correct the world, establish reason, and execute justice—these are its duties. Now, it has been passed on to the next generation. Quality: ???

Before, I hadn't been able to read the text at all because it'd been garbled, but I could now. The God of Iron, Dweorg, had had a hand in the creation of both. Come to think of it, when Madam Siserius had compared the God Spear and God Staff, she'd said that the weapons' designs were the same. And seeing them in their third forms like this made that plain as day. From the footage Lúin had shown me, the God weapons were created by each god using their own power, which I'd found curious. But now, I wondered if it was the God of Iron who'd made the objects into weapons.

As I pondered the various changes, En sent me a telepathic message.

"Master... The quality of your magic changed."

"Oh, yeah, about that. I was actually talking to a god just now, and he gave me power."

"Oh...really? That's amazing. I would have loved to talk to a

god too."

"Sadly—and I mean that from the bottom of my heart—he's already gone. I wanted to talk to him a lot more too, ask him all kinds of questions."

While replying to her, I dispersed the magic in the God Spear and God Staff, and each weapon reverted to its second form, then its first. *Wow, it's so much easier to wield them now.* Before, any attempt to divert the magical energy had come with the danger of explosion. But I knew I didn't have to worry about that happening ever again.

Thank you, Lúin, Kerykeion. I'll make sure to use the power you gave me wisely.

I put them both away in Inventory, then picked En up off the ground and hefted her back onto my shoulder. The other three, who'd backed away a short distance, approached when they realized it was over.

"Mr. Yuki, your third pair of wings... Don't tell me..."

"Race evolution, my lord?"

"Yup. My race is now 'Supreme Ruler.' To be honest, though, my reaction is still 'What the hell does that even mean?'"

Also, it'd be suuuper helpful if my total pairs of wings capped out at three. In light of my demon lord body, it was likely I'd undergo race evolution again in the future, and having four pairs would definitely be a hindrance. Then again, I obviously didn't know whether there was another category beyond Supreme Ruler.

Nell looked overwhelmed at my words.

"Supreme Ruler... Just like Lefi..."

"Nell, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Even if I had a hundred of me as I am now, I still couldn't beat her. We're not even in the same league."

I *might* have a shot at winning if all hundred clones wielded either a God Spear or God Staff in its third form. But that just went to show how extraordinary Lefi actually was. Speaking of, an interesting thought had taken hold of my brain. If she'd joined the battle of the gods that Lúin had shown me, she probably would've survived and won like it was a walk in the park. Still, no matter how strong I got or what kind of gear I equipped, I was fundamentally no match for Lefi. Even with hundreds or thousands of me, it'd be impossible to win.

"But this just means you've taken your first step into a world

where she's the basis of comparison, my lord. I dunno how to say it right… The only word I can think of is 'amazing.'"

"Yes… Master is always amazing."

"Aw, shucks. You're gonna make me blush. In any case, these are just numbers, and I know better than anyone how carelessness will get you killed. You can bet I'm not dropping my guard…"

"Aaand there goes your air of supremacy, brief as it was, Mr. Yuki."

"A Supreme Ruler without the aura to back the title up is very like you, my lord!"

"Grr. You two really know how to hit a guy where it hurts…"

"Just…ignore them, Master."

That was when the Dwarf King finally spoke from next to us. His serious expression had yet to crumble all this time.

"So, laddie…what did the god say?"

I knew it. He knows something.

"Mm. Long story short, he told me to do whatever I want and live life to the fullest. He also told me what my existence actually is and the nature of this world. Dwarf King, can I ask you what you know now?"

"Aye… Aye, I'll tell ye everythin' I ken. But first, I suggest we take our leave from this place. Though I'm accustomed ta this heat, I cannae say the same for ye all. Yer swelterin', aye?"

"Hmm, you're not wrong. All righty, let's head back for now and—"

The minute I said that and took a step forward, my body decided not to obey me. I couldn't move properly. In fact, I almost collapsed on the spot.

"Mr. Yuki!"

"My lord!"

Thanks to Nell and Lew rushing to support me on either side, I managed not to tumble down ass over head. But my body still refused to cooperate. My legs felt unsteady. Just the simple act of walking seemed impossible. It felt like this body belonged to someone else.

Well, this is a shock. I didn't feel any exhaustion, so I didn't realize until it was too late that my body hadn't fully adjusted to the latest transformation. *Makes sense.* Regardless of how easy it was for my demon lord body to change, it would take a few hours to accept the newest one considering how suddenly and

quickly it'd come about.

I probably hadn't experienced this sensation last time because the race evolution had happened while I'd slept. Not to mention that the sharp increase in stat values this time was much higher than the last. *Wait, I just remembered what happened when I killed that damn dragon a while back.* I hadn't been able to move my body well back then either.

"My bad, Dwarf King, but I think we'll have to table this discussion for tomorrow. I'm...kinda in a bad spot right now."

"Hmm... The morrow it is, then. Lassies, I'll keep yer mon up in yer stead."

"Sorry again. And thanks, Dodah."

And then, with the Dwarf King lending me his shoulder, we left the shrine behind.

"Domi?s ???" That option had popped up on the display during our talk on gods and creation at home. The mysterious one that required an insanely enormous amount of DP to buy. So much DP that I could spend millennia saving and it still wouldn't be enough.

The letters were obscured like that even now because I still didn't meet the requirements to view them. But I'd already figured out the answer. Dollars to DP, it said "Dominus Upgrade."

As the dungeon grew, it would ultimately become Dominus.

◇ ◇ ◇

The group had returned to their inn. Nell, Lew, and En sat on the sofa of their room, watching Yuki as he slept deeply in the bed. The moment they'd gotten back, he'd collapsed onto the bed with a "Sorry, I'm gonna nap for a bit," and within seconds had come the sound of him breathing in sleep. He'd said he wasn't tired, but there was no doubt about the burden weighing his body down. Despite having appeared calm and composed, his experience must have been terribly draining.

"I've known for ages now that he's different, that he's special. Even so...how much stronger will he get from here on out?"

Nell whispered her question to avoid waking Yuki up.

"As strong as Lefi, of course. He's always said that was his goal."

In response to Lew's remark, Nell nodded.

“You’re right. And I think it’s incredible that he’s capable of seriously aiming for that. Although I wish to grow stronger as a hero, I’ve honestly never wanted to become as strong as Lefi.”

“Master…gets discouraged a lot, but he doesn’t give up when it comes to strength. He and Rir work hard every day.”

En joined their conversation while chomping down on the dwarven specialty of a giant, bone-in piece of meat. It was as big as her head and grilled to perfection, seasoned only with salt and pepper. Despite the rough preparation style and rich flavor, strangely enough, it was considered an addictive junk food. Nell and Lew had bought it for her after Yuki had fallen asleep. They’d refrained from buying ones for themselves because of the insane amount of fat and juices, but En, capable of eating anything with relish, savored every bite.

“Yeah. I do worry about him sometimes, but that’s just how men operate, right? Going a bit off topic here, but En, is that meat really that good?”

“It…tastes like junk food. The sinful fat and seasoning only make me hungrier. But it’s very greasy, so it comes down to personal preference. Do you want a bite?”

“Ooh, yes, thanks. Mmm… You’re so right about the sinfulness. The dwarf men apparently eat this every day, so I’m wondering how their stomachs can even handle it…”

“I’ll help myself too. Thank you, En. Urk… The fat is definitely overpowering. I think just that one bite is more than enough for me… So this is what the dwarves eat as an appetizer while they drink? They must have iron stomachs.”

“Ohhh… I want an iron stomach too.”

“Well, you have a bottomless stomach, so you’re all set on that front, yeah? A lifestyle that necessitates an iron stomach is simply not good for your health.”

The three smiled at each other, then shifted their gazes to Yuki once more.

It was common knowledge in their family how careless he was. Recently, he’d made a huge mistake because of that, and it had hit him hard, judging by the way he’d looked a bit depressed. But thus far, they had never seen him stop moving forward. He was always looking ahead.

He had fought every day in the Demonic Forest. From there, his adventures had led him to the world outside, where he’d involved himself with the peoples of other nations. It had all led

to him becoming an emperor.

And now, he had become the Supreme Ruler. Based on what he'd told them, there was no doubt his abilities transcended mankind. He had also mentioned speaking to a god, so if he said so, all of it was surely true. Barely two years had passed since Yuki had become a demon lord. Was there anyone else in this world who could have accomplished so much in such a short period of time?

Incidentally, the Demonic Forest was part of his dungeon's territory. Nell and Lew, who had simple authority over the dungeon, knew from the Maps function of the formidable defense system in place. Nell in particular often went into the Forest with Yuki to check on the traps together, so she knew the exact effects, ranges, and power levels of each one. From that, she'd determined that even if the entire army of the Kingdom of Alisia were to charge in, it would likely be exterminated within a week.

Neither defeat nor destruction. Complete and utter extermination. Eradication from the face of the planet. Solely from the arsenal of traps, without Yuki, Rir, or the pet army lifting a finger. She doubted any territory settled by mankind was as well equipped for defense. In her opinion, Yuki's defenses rivaled the Secret Art of the Forest that the elves were so proud of.

Nevertheless, he was often still outmatched by the monsters in the deepest part of the Demonic Forest, which Yuki called the "western area." She often heard him mutter complaints along the lines of "What the hell is even going on over there?" Because residing in the dungeon for long stretches of time made it easy to forget how dangerous and unexplored the Forest remained.

"He only recently became an emperor, but I truly think it was bound to happen regardless. I'm almost positive everyone else feels the same way. Surprised, but also not at the same time."

"You're right. I personally think a hero is someone like my lord. But I'm sure he'd deny it with a wry smile and say something like 'Nah, no way. I'm just a selfish guy.'"

Yuki often referred to himself as a selfish man. To him, being at the center of everything wasn't so much something to be praised but an unfortunate inevitability. He might indeed have been selfish, yet that was exactly why he refused to compromise on his beliefs. No matter what stood in his way, he would crush it all and hold fast to himself. And he had demonstrated as much

with his performance in the Great War not long ago. No matter how strong the enemy, he would grit his teeth and fight with determination for his comrades.

"But...Master always thinks about everyone."

"He does. His first priority is everyone in the dungeon, so he always ends up thinking about himself last. Even when he's being weirdly obstinate or selfish, he always puts us first. But that's exactly what we all love about him, yeah?"

"Tee hee, you're so right, Nell. He risks his life while staying true to himself. That's why we need to become strong enough to support him no matter how far he charges."

"You said it, Lew. We're now the wives of an emperor, so we must strive to do our best to keep pace with him."

"Wow... I know I'm a little late to the party here, but it just hit me when you said that. We really *are* an emperor's wives, huh? Sounds unbelievable when I say it out loud, especially since I was just a maid."

"I suppose technically you may have been a maid."

"'May have been'? What does that mean?"

"Um... Actually, it's nothing. Never mind. Yes, you were definitely a maid."

Nell swallowed the words that almost slipped out of her mouth: "It doesn't feel strange at all for Leila to be called a maid, but putting you in that category too is a bit..." Instead, she tried to show that she didn't have any ill intentions.

"Hmm, I'm totally sensing a hidden meaning there. Go on, don't be shy. We're family. Say what you wanna say."

"No, no. It's precisely *because* we're family that I think there are times one needs to be careful with their words."

"Nell, lately, you talk and act like my lord."

"That's the pot calling the kettle black."

While they teased each other, En spoke nonchalantly as she continued to gnaw away at her giant, bone-in piece of meat next to them.

"Oh...yeah, I just remembered. Master's third set of wings. They're so cool. Lady Lefifi is going to be so excited."

"Aha ha ha! You're right. She'll make a huge fuss because of her wing fetish. I wager she won't leave his wings alone for at least three days."

"It's so easy to imagine my lord letting Lefi do whatever she wants to him even while he complains about her being a pain in

the butt.”

The three of them kept talking without pause. Though they were always together, they never ran out of things to talk about and continued chatting away.

Incidentally, Yuki woke up at some point due to their voices. He was unable to get up because of the content of their conversation, however, so he remained in bed in agonized embarrassment.

Side Story 2: The Dungeon Around That Time

In the dungeon.

“Lefifi! Lefifi, look! Look! I have a mustache!”

Iluna grabbed a bit of her hair and brought it down over her lips, creating a fake mustache.

“Oho, such a splendid mustache. However, I, too, can fashion my own! So? What do you think?”

Lefi did the same as Iluna, except her mustache was longer.

“Hmm, hmm, hmm! You got me! You’re too good at everything, Lefifi! Then I have no choice but to reveal my ultimate weapon! Your turn, Mustache Master!”

“Ta-daaa! Mustache Master is Shii, and I answer your summons!”

Shii the Mustache Master appeared while striking a dramatic pose.

“Well, well. The Mustache Master, is it? Show me what you are capable of.”

“Watch meee! First, kitty whiskers! Then, doggy whiskers!”

“Wooow. Awe-inspiring indeed. And most adorable.”

“I adooorable!”

Shii had modified her body to produce cat and dog whiskers. Although, frankly speaking, both looked pretty much the same, no one had commented on that fact. As long as she looked cute, anything was fair game.

“Tee hee hee! I keep going! Red uncle’s mustache from the Land of Mushrooms! Smoking uncle’s mustache from Ten Masters! And, and! Pirate whale uncle’s mustache! No mustache too tough for Shii!”

“Wooow! Amazing! Those mustaches are just like the ones Yukiki talked about!”

“I-Indeed… They are indeed magnificent, yet I would advise you to refrain from reproducing the last few, for they do not leverage your charm.”

“Hmm, hmm, hmm. I see, I see. Then I stop. Too bad. My’s aim was Mustache Master of the world.”

“Shii, my dear, if you would aim for the world, I suggest you change your target to something more expansive. Your scope as Mustache Master is much too narrow.”

“No worry! I not just mustache, but full trans-for-may-shun! Master of Im-per-suh-nay-shun! That how I take over the world!”

“Ooh, Master of Impersonation!”

“Oh, I see. Well, then who am I to put a halt to your grand plans?”

As they played, the girls’ next focus became Rir, who just so happened to be there as well. He often dropped by the dungeon to check in on everyone whenever Yuki wasn’t in residence in the Demonic Forest. His sense of duty dictated that he both protect them all in his Master’s stead and act as the little-girl gang’s play companion. He was a capable male. However, because of his earnestness, he faced constant hardships.

“Rir! Mm, you’re Detective Mustache now! Here you go! You can’t take it off, okay?”

Iluna pressed a mustache fit for a detective onto the end of his nose. The magical adhesive meant even he could wear things like it.

“Wooow! Great Detective Rir! Now do something like detective do!”

“Ooh, ‘Great Detective Rir’ sounds so cool! Shii’s right! Do your job, Rir!”

“Grr?”

“We make rounds! I smells adventure and mystery!”

“I love that! Onward and forward, to the unknown!”

At Rir’s suggestion of “Then shall we go for a walk— Forgive me, shall we make our rounds outside in search of a mystery?” the two little girls nodded delightedly.

“Hey, hey, Lefifi, you come with us too! You can be a detective too, on our hunt for the unknown!”

“Play with us! Play with us!”

“Very well. I, too, shall accompany you, then. I must say, Rir, you have become quite adept at entertaining the wee ones. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to call it evading them?”

“Grr.”

With a rueful smile, he responded to Lefi with “Well, they’re much easier to handle than Master.” Compared to Yuki’s unreasonable requests, which he dealt with every day and thus knew painfully well, the little-girl gang’s unreasonable requests

were sweet.

“Gah ha! Fair point. He is, after all, an adult who never quite grew up. Although his adult knowledge makes him far more troublesome than the little ones. We are destined to suffer, you and I, thanks to our mutual ‘master.’”

“Grr.”

At Lefi’s cheerful smile, he said, “Yes, it would seem so” with a chuckle of his own. She was absolutely right about their reckless master whose heart was as pure as the little girls’ and who did everything in his power for their sakes, albeit in an outrageous fashion. He was a man worth supporting.

“Grar.”

“Heh heh. I am counting on you henceforth as well, Rir.”

“Come on, Lefifi, Rir! Hurryyy! It’s adventure time!”

“Huuurryyy!”

“Yes, yes. Come, Rir, you heard them. Leila, we are venturing outside! We shall return soon!”

Leila waved lightly in acknowledgment, not looking up from the book she was reading quietly as she sat in her chair. When they saw that, the four of them stepped out into the meadow area. And then, it happened. Light suddenly began to envelop Rir’s body. Some formless, mysterious power surged from around them. The dungeon. It brought the power forth into space, wrapping around him. Magic. Magic so dense they could see it.

“Whaaat?!”

“Rir! Are you okay?!”

“Hmm, this is…”

“G-Grr?”

“What in the world— Oh, that light is…”

Each of them exclaimed in shock. Not just the three near Rir, but Leila too, who even stood up in surprise.

The light surrounded him for a few moments before eventually being absorbed completely by his body. Once it disappeared, he was clad in armor. Transparent armor made of magical energy. A design curved through its surface, and overall, it was reminiscent of a headpiece and breastplate set. The magical armor inspired feelings of both awe and dignity in those who set their eyes upon it. They didn’t know it yet, but it strongly resembled the God Spear’s third form.



“Grr…”

Confounded by the sudden event, Rir inspected himself.

“Wooow, Rir! So cool! But no more Detective Mustache, huh?”

“Aha ha ha! It is what it is, Shii! Gosh, Rir, you look super-duper cool!”

“Super-duper cool!”

“Hmm… Clearly, something must have occurred to that imbecile, wherever he is. Rir, your abilities have changed.”

```
Name: Fluffrir
Race: Fenrir
Class: Supreme Wolf

Supreme Wolf: One who possesses a great deal of magic alongside claws and fangs that tear through everything. When in the company of his lord who reigns supreme, nothing can stop him. Yet this is not his final form.
```

Yuki’s transformation had also led to one in the subordinate with whom he had the deepest bond.

Chapter 4: The God of Iron

It was the day after I'd fallen dead asleep, and I was back in the Dwarf King's estate, where he started spinning a tale.

"Legend has it that shrine was built by Dweorg, the god we dwarves worship."

Dweorg, the God of Iron. One of the Pillars mentioned in the descriptions for the God Spear and God Staff when I'd Analyzed them. Based on what Lúin had shown me, I'd figured out that he must've been the god who'd created the dwarves.

"Further, that place used ta be his forge, and afore he breathed his last, he remade it ta what we saw. And he told one dwarf how ta use that sanctuary—the first Dwarf King."

The first Dwarf King. The one who'd been able to utilize Weapon Enhancement, just like me.

"Wow... So dwarven historical records go that far back?"

The era when the gods existed, the Age of the Gods, was a time so far in the past that it was difficult for even dragonkind, with their extremely long life spans, to trace. Even Madam Siserius, a scholarly dragon who traveled all over the world, had limited knowledge about the time. Yet knowledge had been preserved by the short-lived members of mankind and survived to the present day. And I knew there was a secret there.

"Aye, they do. Fascinatin', eh? Compared ta the other races, we dwarves dinna live very long. Nor do we spend those lives engagin' in the arts and sciences. Simple folk we are, dwellin' in the mountains. However, we are also a clan of iron. And iron—metal, if ye will—outlasts us by a great deal."

The Dwarf King knelt briefly before standing up in front of *it*. I also got up from my cross-legged sitting position and went to stand next to him.

"Metal is a livin' thing. Like us, it has life. It breathes. And it pulses. So if ye can truly understand that life how it's meant ta be understood, ye can leave it behind like this."

"It" was a massive stone monument that stood taller than me. Probably made of the same material as the shrine we'd visited yesterday. Looking at it again now, I suddenly realized I'd seen the likes of it before. *This is the same as the dragon annal in the*

Dragon Hamlet, the one I carved my name in.

Letters were carved densely into the surface, and—yup, I could read them no problem thanks to the Polyglot ability that I'd acquired when I'd first found myself in this world. Apparently, two identical texts were inscribed here, one on the left side and one on the right. The fonts were slightly different, so maybe one of them was a translation or something? Just like the Rosetta Stone that existed in my old world.

"The divine language is written on the left. On the right is the ancient dwarven language. The words on the right must've been carved at a later date so that the words o' the gods would nae be lost ta the sands o' time. We dwarves now can just barely read 'em. But...what about ye, Demon Lord?"

"Yeah, I can read it. But you know this is an incredibly important relic, right? Are you sure you should be showing it to an outsider like me?"

"Gah ha ha! Too late now, eh? 'Sides, I judged ye worthy o' it. That was one o' the duties tasked ta us."

Every leader of the dwarves had several duties that were passed down to them from the first Dwarf King. Mainly, if anyone asked about God, they were to be judged, and if deemed worthy, the Dwarf King had to pass on the legends left behind. In other words, if someone like me had shown up but he was an idiot, the Dwarf King's job would've been to pretend not to know anything and deceive them. But if the Dwarf King thought the individual could be trusted, their task was to act as a guide to the shrine. Since Dodah had told me so much, I figured he trusted me.
Thanks, man.

"Well, I appreciate it. In that case, I'll take my time reading this."

I read the ancient inscription from top to bottom. About half of it consisted of instructions to the dwarves. Instructions on how to coexist with iron and how to blacksmith. It felt like the direction Dweorg had wanted his followers to take as the race he'd created. That part pretty much had nothing to do with me.

As for the other half, the subject was vague and thus hard to understand, but it seemed to be spelling out Dweorg's thoughts on the conflict between the gods. Turned out that the God weapons had indeed been crafted with his help. The gods had split into two camps and fought, but the dwarf god had helped make the weapons regardless of whether they were friend or

foe, and he'd regretted making the tools they'd used to kill each other.

But at the same time, despite his regrets, I could sense from the writing that he'd been proud of having done everything he could've. It'd been necessary to do what'd needed to be done, and if it were to have happened again, he would've done the exact same thing. Even though the sadness of killing each other was there, there was also a firm conviction and pride.

The abstract way this is written makes me think that the gods didn't plan on leaving detailed records of their conflict for posterity. Judging from the "video" Lúin had shown me, I was pretty sure the gods had gotten along well enough. Case in point, Dweorg. Although he'd chosen a side, he'd still made weapons for the gods opposing his. Normally, you wouldn't ask an enemy for help making a weapon, nor would you make the enemy's weapon with sincerity.

So it wasn't that they'd had any grudges against each other, but more a huge difference in ideologies that couldn't be bridged, which had led to them turning their weapons against each other. Enemies, but also friends. And maybe that explained why he hadn't wanted to leave behind records of who his comrades were, or who they'd defeated.

Maaan, this would've been impossible to make heads or tails of if not for the background Lúin gave me on the gods in that white void. This information was something I could only understand because I'd been told about their conflicts. And one sentence stood out the most among the words—the sentence Dweorg had probably been most keen to leave for future generations:

"Ye who reaches the throne of God, I bid thee seek the Shrine of the End."

"The Shrine of the End... The one we saw yesterday?"

"Aye. For it is where the god Dweorg breathed his last. And legend says that is why it was named so."

"That makes sense. When you put it like that, the place *did* feel like a tomb. Damn, I can't tell if he was crazy or a genius for choosing the center of a caldera, somewhere literally flaming hot, as his final resting place."

"Gah ha ha! Well, he *is* our god fer a reason. He must've been a stubborn and passionate mon in his lifetime. So magma would've been nothin' more than bathwater to him, ye ken."

While joking with Dodah, I continued reading the inscription.

That was when I noticed words on the left side that weren't on the right. In other words, text written only in the divine language, with no translation into ancient dwarvish.

"We shalt fulfill our roles. Much room doth still remain for progress, yet the shape of the world that the First God desires shalt be complete. The task now falls to thee. We leave the rest in thine hands."

A shiver raced down my spine.

"…"

"We dinna ken what this material is either. It seems ta be an alloy made with orichalcum, but the composition of ores is so complex and meticulously intertwined, we cannae determine the exact ratios. Och, what's this? I could've sworn it was blank…"

The Dwarf King's expression became puzzled as he stared at the same spot I did.

"Looks like this message appeared because all the conditions were met. And it's meant for *me*."

These dang gods… Does every friggin' one of them love mischief or what? I had a feeling that this God of Iron, Dweorg, was cackling somewhere with Lúin.

"Aha, I see… The same mechanism we saw yesterday was installed here too, eh? Now then, might I likewise ask ye what ye yersel' ken?"

"Sure. But just to warn you, it's not much. The only thing I know for certain is that the existence known as a dungeon is deeply connected to the gods. Since I'm the demon lord in charge of a dungeon, both that shrine and this stela reacted to me like this."

The Dwarf King fell into a thoughtful silence for a bit after hearing my response.

"Och, bloody hell, Demon Lord. What an unbelievable secret…"

"Yeaaah… Also, there's more, but unfortunately, I can't tell you. I'm sorry. You've taught me so much and shown me even more, but I just can't let anything else slip. It's something I have to keep hidden for the rest of my life. So I can't tell you. I'm sorry."

Because dungeons were essentially Dominus's children. They were the seeds of the world, and as their caretakers, demon lords…probably were on the same level as those gods, in terms of status. They were the hands and feet that developed a world

unable to move on its own.

That information could never see the light of day. No one other than my family could know. I had to make sure of that. *I wanna go home right now and talk to Lefi about this.* I'd been burdened with an insane secret.

Where the hell was my path leading? I felt like I was getting further and further away from being a demon lord. I mean, for frick's sake, I was the Supreme Ruler at the moment.

The Dwarf King stared intently at me and nodded gravely.

"Aye, fair enough. Then I will nae press ye any further."

"Thanks. I won't forget this favor. If you're ever in trouble, just reach out. I'll do what I can for you to the best of my ability. Speaking of, if your people are at a disadvantage because of all this, let me know and I'll figure something out."

I'd only found out this morning, but when Lúin had shared his power with me and I'd gone through another race evolution, the whole volcano had rumbled with shakes and tremors. Magma and the magical energy of the earth had gushed out from several sites at the same time, causing quite a commotion, with people having even wondered if it was an eruption.

The dwarves had always known that this volcano was an active one, so I'd heard that the city was equipped with magical defensive measures. However, because I'd absorbed the volcano's power, which fueled said defensive magic, at the Shrine of the End, the defensive magic that would normally activate when something strange happened wasn't functioning. This, of course, only exacerbated the confusion. Thankfully, the Dwarf King had managed to calm things down while I'd been out like a light, but I still felt awful about the whole thing.

The Dwarf King in question now grinned cheerfully in reply.

"Och, laddie, if revealin' ta ye a secret that does nae affect us is enough ta earn yer goodwill, then I'm the happiest mon alive. As fer the volcano incident, dinna fash yerself. Nought more'n a spell o' confusion, which did nae take long to quell."

Ya know, I really appreciated times like this, when the dwarves showed themselves to be exactly who they were. No hidden agendas or anything, unlike a certain blackhearted Demon King who excelled at being two-faced. *This is why the dwarves are so much easier to get along with.* For better or for worse, they were honest folks, and I was damn sure of that even though we'd only known each other for a short time. I was glad to have more good

friends.

Although to be fair to the Demon King, he *probably* wasn't a sinister son of a bitch all year round. But no matter how much we talked and how much I got to know him, that shady side of his always snuck through, so I definitely could never drop my guard around him.

"Now then, riddle me this. Are ye and yers plannin' ta stay with us a little longer?"

"Hell to the yes. I've been wanting to hang here forever, so I was thinking a few more days at least. Especially since En is obsessed with the heartiness of dwarven cuisine."

"Gah ha ha! Little Miss Zaien does nae disappoint. I've said it afore and I'll say it again, the wee lassie shows promise. Then why don't I drop by after this with our best chef who makes the most braw meat?"

"Ooh, we'd all love that. Appreciate it!"

So we chatted while the Dwarf King walked me out of his estate. From there, I headed back to the inn where my family waited for me. Then, a few hours after that, a call for help came from the therianthropes, whose homeland was near the dwarven domain.

◇ ◇ ◇

Beast Lord Vardroi, the leader of the therianthropes, listened to his subordinate's report, his expression intrigued.

"Oh? The demon lord's visitin' the dwarves right now?"

"Yes. It seems he arrived today on an airship from the Reauxgard Empire. He went straight to the king's mansion."

Friendly relations between the dwarves and the beastfolk stretched back many years. First of all, the capitals of their respective nations were located very close to each other, so if one side ever raised an army for battle and needed reinforcements, they could reach the other in just a day. A single coach could leave in the morning and arrive by evening, the distance was so short. Actually, considering the therianthropes' superior physical strength, which made them excellent walkers, they might have been able to arrive in just a few hours. In other words, from the time their nations were formed, they'd had no intention of becoming enemies.

If they traced their origins back, legends stated that the gods

both races worshiped were on good terms with each other. The truth, however, was unclear. But one thing was certain: their long-standing exchanges since the distant past.

And so, they'd fought side by side against shared enemies, never once having clashed themselves. Moreover, because they knew each other's histories so well, they had come to regard one another as family. They might have quarreled like family, but they would never kill each other. Thankfully, they hadn't suffered any misfortune that would lead to such a tragedy.

Due to the relationship they'd formed, liaison officers were always stationed in each capital. In addition, an information network had been built, allowing news to be passed on immediately if something happened. That was how word had reached the beastfolk that a hero of the recent Great War was staying in the friendly neighboring country.

"Hmm. He on official empire business or summat?"

"No. Evidently, he's here for personal reasons. He said he was planning to visit us as well. One of his wives, a young werewolf, is with him, so it could also be a homecoming."

The demon lord—or rather, Demon Emperor Yuki. The current leader of the Reauxgard Empire and also the man whose international presence was currently the greatest. Though he rarely appeared in public, it wouldn't have been wrong to say that he possessed an influence rivaling that of the Demon King. He was a key figure that couldn't be overlooked in the realm of politics, and was one everyone would have to keep in mind for future interactions with other countries.

However, that influence was only a side effect of his esteem. The most important thing when describing Demon Emperor Yuki was his power. It wasn't politics or anything like that, but pure power that made Demon Emperor Yuki *the* Demon Emperor Yuki. He alone had the fighting power to match that of their countries' armies—actually, his prowess greatly exceeded their military might. Add in the few monsters he brought with him during the Great War, and his combat strength quickly became an unknown variable. It was impossible to measure accurately at that level.

In this world, one could muster all the troops and more at their disposal and it still wouldn't be enough to stave off utter destruction by an overpowered individual. If anyone was actually considering eliminating them because of the threat he and his subordinates posed, they would have to amass the same

number of troops as had been gathered during the Great War to even have a chance. It would be a hopeless war of attrition, with troops constantly deployed by the aggressors in an attempt to wear them down. Even then, there was no certainty of victory, which only further demonstrated the unparalleled power of Demon Emperor Yuki.

Thus, Vardroi had thought it prudent for his nation to establish friendly relations with him. A generation ago, people would have laughed at the mere idea of forming an alliance with a violent and dangerous opponent like this demon lord. Yet times changed, and so did the world.

"All right, then get everythin' ready to welcome 'em. And send a message to the werewolf, will ya? Tell 'im that 'is daughter 'n' son-in-law've come a-visitin'."

"Understoo—"

It happened then. A slight shock, like a thud. The furniture in the office shook violently. After a few seconds, the shaking subsided.

"Hmm, a tremor. Eh, not big enough to be called a problem. Still, keep an eye out, just in case. If it ain't anythin' in particular, no need to report to me."

"It's been a while since we've had an earthquake, huh, my lord? Duly noted, and I'll be taking my leave now."

All was calm and quiet after their exchange. During this time, the Beast Lord went about his business as usual. Just as he was starting to get an itch for some strength training...

"My lord."

The subordinate who'd left his office only a few hours ago came rushing in again, this time with a slightly grim expression. Realizing something was wrong, the Beast Lord stopped what he was doing and questioned the man.

"What is it? Spit it out."

"The monsters in the forest are acting strangely. Our defense force is currently dealing with the situation, but there are too many of them. At this rate, they may overrun the city."

Vardroi's brows twitched.

"Did the tremor cause this?"

"I believe that's a strong possibility, my lord."

The Beast Lord fell silent for a few moments. Since the therianthrope homeland was located near the dwarves' volcanic region, they'd experienced many earthquakes in their time. Ergo,

they had a general idea of the magnitude of earthquakes capable of affecting the ecosystem, and from that knowledge, the tremor shouldn't have had much of an impact. Not to mention that several hours had already passed since then. The forest might have sustained some degree of damage, but the defense force should have been able to handle it on their own. And yet, his subordinate's claim of "too many" meant there was something abnormal occurring beneath the surface.

"Hmm... Then double the number of troops. Bring the ones resting off duty too. Just to be safe, I'll head out meself 'n' take command. Send a notice to all residents to be on alert."

"Yes, my lord!"

The swift, precise manner in which he'd given those orders proved the Beast Lord's competence. Unfortunately for him, this incident would turn out to be far beyond his reckoning.

◇ ◇ ◇

The Dwarf King and I were talking when suddenly, I heard the pounding of footsteps, followed a second later by a dwarf rushing toward us.

"Chief!"

"Can ye get any louder, mon? What is it?"

The Dwarf King looked and sounded displeased by his kin's rudeness, probably because it was me here with him. But the other man didn't even flinch as he continued.

"Forgive me fer interrupting, my lord, but we received an emergency call for aid from the beastfolk! There's a swarm of monsters! What be yer orders, Chief?!"

The Dwarf King's expression did a complete one-eighty, and his reply was an angry shout.

"Say that first, ye daft bugger! Take any eejits with too much time on their hands with ye and gather at the outer gate! And while yer at it, find out everythin' ye can! We dinna have time ta waste. Helpin' 'em is our top priority at the moment!"

"Aye, m'lord!"

After his kinsman ran out of here like the hounds of hell were chasing him, Dodah turned to me apologetically.

"Well, there ye have it. Forgive me, but we cannae delay."

"Nah, I'll tag along too. I'm not a big enough piece of shit to say something like 'All right, cool, I'll go play tourist, then' at a

time like this."

"We should nae be involvin' our guest o' honor in such matters, but I am right grateful to ye. We need as many fighters as we can muster at this point. The fact that the therianthropes even asked fer our aid means things've taken a real bad turn. That lot is powerful enough ta wallop monsters easily."

"So you're saying it must be a crisis, right? Was there an omen or something beforehand?"

"Aye, I can think o' one... More'n likely...*we* may be the cause."

"Huh?"

My question had been kinda offhanded, but the Dwarf King's reply had me genuinely curious.

"Well, when we were in the Shrine o' the End, the volcano's magic erupted all at once and flowed inta ye. The magic was so dense that it solidified temp'rarily in space and caused the earth ta tremble. If monsters are more sensitive ta magic than mankind, it is nae surprising that they would run in fright. I thought o' that too when he told us about the swarm..."

The strained expression on his face told me he found it difficult to tell me all this. But everything he'd said made sense. The power at the Shrine *was* incredible. The monsters inhabiting this volcanic region must've sensed it and fled all at once. Plus, the "wave" of the magical burst would've hit the therianthropes' homeland since it was so close and all. Having thought the situation through, I realized something.

Wait. Doesn't that mean this is my *fault? Ah, shit... Ahhh, sheeeiiit.*

Of course, I hadn't done it on purpose. You could call it an accident. But if we were talking about the direct cause, then it was me, without a doubt. I was the starting point of this unfolding situation. I would feel unbelievably guilty if even a single person died in this place I was planning on sightseeing in. And depressed. Depressed as fuck. *This is bad. This is really freaking bad.*

"D-Dodah! Which way to the beastfolk's land?!"

"Eh? Och, aye, the outer gate—that's the biggest gate in this city. Exit there and follow the road west. If ye go straight down it, ye'll find yerself among 'em eventually."

"Got it! I'll see you there!"

With cold sweat running down my back, I raced out of there, looking for my family.

"Aha! Found you guys!"

“Oh, are you done talking to His Kingship? Mr. Yuki, I know that expression… You screwed up again, didn’t you?”

“Ooh, you’re right, Nell. I’ve seen that look before too. And you’re here to tell us you’d like to do something about it, right? Understood, my lord. We’ll wait here. En, take care of him for us.”

“Yup…I will. Master, I’m going with you.”

“R-Right! We’ll be back in a flash!”

My wives had figured out the gist within seconds of seeing my face. After saying those parting words to them, I hefted En, back in her greatsword form, onto my shoulder, busted out my wings, and flew up into the sky— *Whoa!*

For a second, I almost lost my balance, so I hurriedly did some attitude control to keep myself in the air. I’d completely forgotten that I had three pairs of wings now. That likely explained why I’d accelerated with such force, like nothing before. It felt like I’d acquired an additional booster. Though I *really* wanted to experiment, I decided to save it for later.

Fly, you fool! This isn’t the time for jokes! You can bet your ass no one’s gonna be laughing if the therianthropes’ homeland is destroyed!

◇◇◇

“Squad five, fall back a pace! Seven, move forward! Keep yer eyes peeled, don’t rush in, ’n’ ’bove all else, don’t lose yer cool! Stay calm ’n’ handle it!”

The deployed troops were hard at work following Beast Lord Vardroi’s orders. Shouts, blood spatters, and the screams of monsters. The heat of battle and the hustle and bustle of many people mixed together.

After that, the therianthropes quickly succeeded in establishing a defensive line, preventing the monsters from invading their homeland. For now, things seemed to be going well, with only a few monsters and no casualties. But in reality, the situation was incredibly tense.

There were too many of them. The number of monsters was so high that the soldiers were spread thin and wide, reducing their defense to almost nothing. The front line had already been breached several times, but each time, the Beast Lord himself led his men to put out the fires. If even one more unexpected event occurred, the entire front line would collapse. Things were

in a dangerous state.

In the first place, the therianthropes didn't have much of a standing army. Why? Because of their lifestyle. Although the dwarves and some other races were completely homogenous, this wasn't the case for the beastfolk, who were divided into several species like the demons. The only thing they had in common was their basic humanoid appearance. Aside from that, they possessed a mix of beast traits, meaning each subspecies' habitat differed slightly.

In other words, they didn't live in one place. Instead, they were scattered across their nation, where they formed their own settlements to lead comfortable lives. The city where Vardroi, the Beast Lord, lived was the largest settlement among them, and undoubtedly served as their homeland's capital. However, compared to other races' capitals, its population was much smaller.

If necessary, they could gather warriors from the surrounding areas and mobilize enough military power to fight against other countries. But it was peacetime now, and there simply weren't enough of them to deal with the monsters appearing one after another. Determining that the capital's military strength alone wasn't enough, they had sent a request for reinforcements to the nearest dwarven city. So the question was, could they hold out until then?

Moreover, one thing bothered Vardroi. The fear he sensed from the monsters. *Are they fleein' from something?* They were much too agitated. No matter how he thought about it, an earthquake just couldn't be the only cause.

A huge reason they were barely managing to hold out was that the monsters were focused entirely on escape and thus weren't interested in actively attacking. But if left alone, they would enter the capital, so they couldn't be ignored. Fortunately, their preoccupation with fleeing drastically reduced the strain on his troops.

Yet the problem still remained of such a tremendous number of monsters fleeing for their lives. Whatever appeared at this point might just prove to be the final nail in their coffin. *I might've screwed the pooch on this.* The Beast Lord didn't say it aloud in front of his subordinates, but in his heart, he regretted it. Despite having suspected that something was amiss, he had still underestimated the situation. Somewhere along the line,

he'd just assumed all this was a consequence of the earthquake.

So their trials and tribulations continued.

"Hhhiiiiisssssss..."

A huge, quadrupedal monster appeared, thrashing through the forest as it unleashed that reptilian growl. A salamander, a type of demi-dragon. Categorized as Disaster-level, the creature possessed power far beyond that of any race of mankind. Its very presence seemed to shake not only his subordinates but also the surrounding monsters.

He knew about this monster. It was, fundamentally, a gentle demi-dragon that fed mainly on mana, so it didn't require physical food, which was why it didn't attack other living things. Salamanders rarely left the areas they designated as their territories. Records showed that this particular specimen had been living in a corner of the volcanic region near the dwarven domain for roughly four hundred years. There, some even revered it as a guardian deity. That monster had now left its territory and come all the way to this place, looking extremely agitated and frightened. *Did it run away too?*

"Tch... Squad one, follow me! We hafta deal with that monster! Squad nine, fill in the gaps left by the first! Two 'n' three, send one of yer men each to assist the ninth!"

The Beast Lord barked orders, responding to the rapidly changing situation. Squad one was made up of the finest therianthropes. It was the unit that Vardroi trusted the most, and the one that trusted Vardroi the most. The captain who led them spoke, looking a little flustered and confused.

"But, Lord Vardroi, that monster is the guardian deity—"

"You think I don't know that? But now it's come to this, 'n' we ain't got another choice. We hafta do it. Sorry to make ya draw the short straw, but I need ya all by my side till the very end."

"Sir, yes, sir! Our lives were always yours, my lord."

"Heh. Like hell I'm in the market for filthy, scruffy men. Beautiful women, though? Well, that's a different story, innit?"

"Such a cruel thing to say to subordinates willing to risk death for you. I think I might just take this up with your wife and daughter."

"Nah, nah, nah, I'm just statin' facts, mac. And the fact is, I'd rather the honeys line up for me than the johns."

"I'm afraid you'll have to give in to the inevitable, sir, because unfortunately for you, more men flock to the Beast Lord than

women. So it would be in your best interests to cherish your wife."

"What, you tellin' me yer a spy for my missus?"

"Actually, yes. I've been tasked by Her Ladyship to monitor you and update her accordingly."

"Ya gotta be kiddin' me. Can't a man have some peace once in a while?"

Prepared for this mission to be a death sentence, Vardroi and squad one's captain purposely joked with and rallied each other. They stood side by side, weapons at the ready, and faced the onslaught of violence—but their resolve was needless.

"I'm counting on you, spirits! Help the beastfolk and eliminate the monsters! En, Magic Edge!"

Figures that looked like humanoids encased in fire appeared first. The shapes vaguely reminiscent of women whirled all over the battlefield and began eliminating monsters one after the other. Next came a slash. It gouged into the forest, digging into the ground and slicing through the surrounding monsters before disappearing. And finally, *it*.

For a moment, Vardroi didn't know what "it" was.

Power. A mass of power. Its presence was so great that it upstaged Disaster-level monsters capable of destroying an ordinary city.

Overwhelmed, his thoughts went blank even though he was his people's commander. Then, a few seconds later, he finally understood what "it" was.

"Demon Lord Yuki..."

"Beast Lord! Been a while! Sorry, but be a pal and don't attack the spirits I summoned, the burning female ones! They'll disappear on their own after defeating the monsters, okay?!"

With those words, Demon Lord Yuki swung the giant sword he was carrying on his shoulder. *Zaien, if memory serves right.* Simultaneously, blood spurted out of a huge slash gaping open on the salamander's body. A horrid shriek tore through the air.

"Jeez, what's *with* you? You're stupid tough... Ah, a demi-dragon. I bet you could survive in the Demonic Forest."

Before Yuki delivered the final blow ever so casually, Vardroi rushed to stop him.

"Wait, Demon Lord! That there monster's a guardian deity. It's normally gentle 'n' ain't prone to hurtin' mankind, so if ya can, I'd appreciate ya not killin' it."

He knew the request was an arrogant one, considering they'd been planning to defeat it. Even so, he begged the demon lord, because if anyone could stave off the unnecessary tragedy, it was him.

"Oh yeah? Well, today's your lucky day, demi-dragon, so calm your tits."

"Hhhiiiiisssssss."

"Ay yo, you deaf? I said. Calm. *Down*."

Then, with a flinch, the salamander stepped back and slowly sank to the ground. The demi-dragon had yielded.



“There, good boy. This is the perfect time for you to help me. Drive off the monsters here. Come on, I’ll heal your wounds. Oh, and don’t hurt the beastfolk.”

“Hhhiiissss.”

Demon Lord Yuki sprinkled liquid from a vial he extracted out of nowhere onto the salamander, and its wounds vanished. *I think…that was an elixir.* Having recovered, the creature ran ahead to carry out the man’s instructions, routing the other monsters.

“Oookay, Beast Lord, I’ma go and take care of the monsters too! If you have any injured folks, heal them with this!”

He took out a dozen more vials, shoved them toward Vardroi, and flew off again without waiting for a reply.

Finally, just half an hour after he had appeared, the anomaly was sorted out.

◇◇◇

“Phew… I guess that’s that.”

After making a serious effort, flying around the therianthropes’ country and eliminating monsters, I let out a sigh of relief when Maps no longer showed any hostile blips. My estimate was that the fighting had gone on for thirty minutes or so. It would’ve taken longer if I’d been alone, but thanks to my spirit magic, I’d gotten done in a jiff.

Unlike when I was in the Demonic Forest, it was perfect to have spirits that acted and attacked on their own in complicated battle situations like this where allies were thrown into the mix. For better or worse, I specialize in one-shot kills, so if I were to have swung En with all my might in these circumstances, there was a good chance I’d have taken out all the beastmen.

With the magic I had now, I felt like I could probably form a one-man army using just spirit magic.

“Thanks, spirits. You really saved our bacon.”

I thanked the spirits floating toward me in the form I’d named “Ifrita,” and they spun around innocently before disappearing into space.

“And thank *you* as always, En.”

“Of…course. I’m your sword, Master.”

My work here done, I stroked the head of my sword girl, who was now back in her human form. A monster came lumbering

toward us a moment later. The demi-dragon that the Beast Lord had referred to as a guardian deity.

"Appreciate your help too. Sorry for getting you involved in all this. I won't do anything, so you can head back to your home in peace. Live well."

When I said that, the creature roared at me and lumbered back the way it came.

"Master...I think you have a talent for monster-taming."

"Ha ha, weeell, as I am now, I'm pretty sure I can make most monsters submit to me."

Yeah, very possible.

I had no doubt that the trigger for this strange phenomenon was the so-called magical eruption in the volcano. But that wasn't the only thing. Me showing up right afterward had clinched it. From the looks of it, the monsters had probably sensed my presence and fled their homes.

The phenomenon was similar to whenever Lefi appeared. All the wild creatures disappeared from the vicinity. Being anywhere near an overwhelming superbeing terrified them into running away. That was why she usually did her best to suppress any trace of herself—to minimize the impact. In her case, though, there were still times when monsters sensed her and escaped. As for me...this probably meant I'd also started emanating a similar kind of aura.

"I guess I'll have to learn how to hide my presence too..."

"Are...we playing ninja?"

En tilted her head curiously at me.

"Huh? What? Ooh, I just had an idea. En, what does my presence feel like right now?"

"Mm... Like it's been flaring ever since we were in the volcano."

"'Flaring,' huh? Nope, can't have that. I wanna become a top-tier ninja and learn to use the art of concealment."

While I did possess the Stealth ability, that was...a bit different. Not only did it conceal my presence, but it also made me invisible to others. Though technically speaking, that was exactly what a concealment technique was.

Then there was Lefi, always able to suppress her presence without using such skills. Based on my observations, it was probably second nature to her at this point, like swinging her arms and moving her legs. So maybe even I could do it without an ability.

“Hmm…the art of concealment. I’d like to learn that too. Then I could be number one at hide-and-seek. With the wraith sisters around, it’s hard to be the best at it.”

“Yeah, those girls can float, so they can hide in all sorts of ways.”

When the wraith triplets played hide-and-seek, they possessed dolls to gain physical bodies, but since they could just float around, they had endless hiding places. In our home, we played the game by making full use of three-dimensional space, like the tops of trees or sculptures in the garden.

“Actually…Iluna is also very good at hiding. Although she can’t transform like Shii, she can blend her magic into the scenery and make herself harder to find. There are times I don’t notice her even when I should be able to see her. That’s why I’m training to see magic—to counter her.”

“Wow…”

Iluna very much excelled at using magic. Maybe because that old man, the Spirit Emperor, had taught her to use spirit magic, she was most likely better at manipulating magic when it required a sensitive touch. Since both Lefi and Leila agreed that she “has the potential to become a peerless magic user,” she had to be really talented. Well, even if she lacked that kind of talent, I’d be happy as long as she enjoyed life.

But anyway, I digress. En’s revelation surprised me, honestly. Were these girls really utilizing such high-level tactics to play hide-and-seek? I’d expect nothing less from my high-spec little-girl army. For now, though, we’d put the question of my daughters’ excellence aside so I could focus on what was currently on my mind.

I went back to what En had just said about Iluna blending her magical energy into the scenery. That probably meant changing the quality of her magic. Lefi could match the wavelength of other people’s magic and “lend” them her own. Now that I was familiar with magic, I knew how incredible her technique actually was. Definitely not a feat that everyone could pull off. Still, did that mean that if I could match my magic to the wavelength of magic present in the air, it was possible to suppress my presence?

While “presence” was a very sensory word, in this world, it actually existed. Magic always circulated within the bodies of ordinary living things, and they also had the ability to sense that

magic. In other words, we perceived the magic of others as a "presence." If you could assimilate the quality of this magic with the magic that existed in nature—that thing called "mana"—then maybe you could deceive others' perceptions.

Hmm. This is gonna require a high degree of skill, but I might as well give it a shot. At this rate, the monsters wouldn't calm down.

"Okay. Let's do this."

I closed my eyes and concentrated. I sensed the magical power around me. The mana in the air. I churned the magical power inside my body and transformed it…

Transformed it…

…

……

……..

Yeah, no, I can't do it. Far from suppressing my presence, I'd just be blindly releasing magical energy, which would have the opposite effect. I've never been particularly adept at this kind of intricate work, and if I could do it overnight, it wouldn't be so hard in the first place. Even though my Dexterity stat should've been super high, and even after my latest evolution, I was still clumsy.

"Hmm… I'll have to work on controlling my magic. That's my homework for the future."

"Then…when we go home, let's play pretend ninja together?"

"Sounds like a plan. You ladies can teach me what it means to be a ninja. Nin-nin."

"Nin…nin."

Whoops, this is not *the time or the place to be talking about stuff like this.*

Just as I started walking with En to report that we were done, a group of beastmen came running toward us from afar, coincidentally already heading in our direction. It was Beast Lord Vardroi and his men.

"Beast Lord! Came to pick us up, didja? Anybody hurt? Hopefully no one died?"

"Nah, we're all right as rain. A few injured, but nothin' those potions couldn't handle. I had the nearby roads checked, 'n' no damage so far. I owe ya big time, mate."

I shook my head when Vardroi thanked me profusely.

"No, actually, you don't, since this whole thing was mostly my fault. I'm sorry for causing you trouble."

“Eh? Whaddya mean?”

The Beast Lord seemed puzzled by my apology.

“I went to the dwarves’ homeland to take care of some business, and the volcano erupted with magical power, which affected me. I think that scared the monsters into flight, so this is less helping you guys and more cleaning up my own mess.”

“I…wasn’t expectin’ an explanation like that. Then what about the earthquake a few hours ago? That yer doin’ too?”

“Yeah. So if there’s any damage, don’t hesitate to let me know. I’d rather not be stuck with a guilty conscience.”

Like, seriously.

“Ah… Now I understand why the magic inside ya’s completely different from before. Hmm… See, much as I’d like to tell ya there’s no worries, I’m in kind of a pickle myself. How ’bout this? Can me ’n’ my people use the corpses of the monsters we took out?”

He made the suggestion as he thought through things out loud. I nodded enthusiastically.

“Yeah, of course. Feel free to turn them all into materials, meat, or whatever you need.”

“Then that’ll square us up. And…can a fella ask ya for one more favor?”

“Sure. The least I can do is hear you out after all the trouble I caused.”

Then, he gave me a very manly grin.

“Drop in proper-like later, hear? I see your wives ain’t here, so you must’ve flown in alone, yeah? We still gotta clean up, ’n’ we’d rather not welcome ya ’n’ yers all helter-skelter like this.”

Though his words caught me by surprise for a moment, I couldn’t help but laugh as I replied.

“All right, deal. I left my wives behind in the dwarves’ city, sooo…I’ll come back here in three or four days. For now, I’ll just head back there and leave you guys to it.”

“Heard. Be ready to paint the town red, boy!”

And so, I left the therianthropes’ territory.

But jeez… I still couldn’t believe I was the Supreme Ruler. I really needed to find out once and for all what I could and couldn’t do.

◇ ◇ ◇

“So, yeah, I went ahead of the dwarves to the therianthropes and drove away the monsters. And lemme tell ya, I was sweatin’ bullets the whole time...”

Back in the dwarven capital, I explained the situation to Nell and Lew. After everything had wrapped up, I’d run into the Dwarf King and his peeps along the way and let them know everything was over, so we’d returned together. They’d checked for injuries and damage on the road back, but nothing serious so far, which was a real relief.

“Haah, I see. Goodness gracious, Mr. Yuki, you just can’t help causing trouble wherever you go, can you?”

“Mrs. Nell, might you kindly refrain from discussing me like I’m some unruly problem child?”

“Too bad for you, you *are* a problem child, my lord. You’ll make things easier for all of us if you just accept that fact.”

Oh yeah? Is that how this goes? Really?

“It’s exactly as Lew says, Mr. Yuki. First, you need to get an accurate read of the present situation. That means looking at yourself in the proverbial mirror and accepting what you see there, warts and all. In my opinion, it all starts from there.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Therapist. Got any more helpful advice?”

I chuckled ruefully before continuing.

“Anyway, back to what I was saying. So I’m basically leaking aura left and right. Considering I culled a good chunk of the monster population in the area, we should be fine for the rest of our trip, but I really wanna learn how to suppress my presence as soon as possible.”

“Ohhh, now that you mention it... We’re so used to you that it’s hard to notice the difference, but yes, definitely leaking.”

“Huh? Is he really? Hmm... I can’t actually tell. My beloved lord’s scent is still the same, then there’s— Uh, n-no, never mind. Forget I said anything.”

Lew blushed fiercely, having just realized what she’d blurted out, and averted her gaze from mine. *Ugh, stooop. Now I’m gonna blush too.*

“Gosh, Lew, how are you so darn cute?!”

With that, Nell glomped onto her.

“N-Nell, it’s too hot for this! Which reminds me! I’ve thought this for a while now, but you have this bad habit of just randomly hugging people too much.”

“Oh, hush! Nothing wrong with a little hug here and there!

Here's a free lesson, Lew. You know people? Like us? Well, people are creatures who feel at ease when they feel another's warmth!"

"I already know that, but have *you* heard of a thing called 'time and place'?! Y-You can't just ignore the fact that others are watching!"

"Alas, I cannot contain the surge of emotions inside me! For I am the hero who defends freedom!"

"Gosh, do you even know how much you're acting more and more like my lord?!"

I clutched my stomach as I started laughing hysterically at the sight of my wives bickering energetically. *You two really are besties, huh? And your husband couldn't be happier.*

Lew sighed in exasperation a few minutes later, having decided that Nell wouldn't be letting go no matter what she said. So with her still clinging on, she spoke.

"In any case, suppressing your aura is a really important task for you, huh? Especially since you go out so much, my lord. How do you handle that, Nell?"

"Mm, I'm not nearly as strong as him or Lefi, so monsters don't exactly run away from me when they see me. But like Mr. Yuki mentioned a while ago during one of our random chats, we holy knights are different from regular soldiers and more along the lines of special forces, which means we train in various ways to avoid enemies detecting our magical energy signatures."

Though Nell was the hero, officially, she was a knight with the Holy Order of Faldienne. As much as I wanted to ask her more about the methods she'd mentioned, I decided to table it. Not like I could do anything about my issue right away. But it was good info to have for future reference.

"I truly think your best course of action here would be to ask Lefi. I think she's always killing her presence, so she has to be much more knowledgeable on the subject than any of us. Having said that, we're also already used to her aura, so we likely can't even tell the difference between when she's doing it and when she's not anymore."

Lew nodded vigorously in agreement with Nell's remarks.

"People adapt so easily, huh? Despite being the world's strongest living thing, now that we're close, I only think of her as someone dependable. I can't even dredge up a hint of fear."

"Tee hee. You're so right. If she heard us talking like this now, I can imagine her getting riled up and saying something like 'I-I

am of dragonkind, the world's most powerful creatures! Fear me!'"

"Aha ha ha ha! She definitely would, and all while blushing. It's not even hard to picture it."

"Yeah, she's way too easy to read."

While the three of us chatted, En toddled over to us. She gripped a mining kit (for children) and a bag in her hands.

"How's it going, kiddo? Get a good haul?"

"Huge...haul. So many souvenirs."

She proudly opened the bag and showed the contents to us.

"This...is for Iluna. This is for Shii. These are for the wraith sisters, and all this is for the ladies. Lastly, these are for the pets. I chose them based on color and shine."

"Ooh, these are lovely, En! Everyone's going to be delighted."

"Wooow. You're amazing, En. You managed to maintain their shapes so beautifully... I'm so clumsy, I always shatter them left and right when I dig. What's your secret?"

"Um... If you listen to the stones breathe, you can figure out how to strike so that they come off cleanly."

"'L-Listen to the stones breathe,' huh? Hmm, I think that's too far out of my league."

We were currently in one of the tunnels known as Gem Shafts inside the volcano in the dwarves' domain. This was a different Gem Shaft from the one we'd passed through a while ago on our way to the Shrine of the End at the center of the volcano. But here, too, the entirety of the passage wall sparkled with colorful, gemlike light, creating a fantastical sight.

That said, it turned out that these weren't real gems. It was a rare mineral that had the unique characteristic of glowing in seven colors when imbued with magical power, and it could be found in any mine, so it was commonly called "rainbow ore." However, it was rare to find it in such high concentrations. The magical power stored in this volcano was so incredible that it caused ordinary rocks and soil to transform into rainbow ore. In this particular Gem Shaft, you could try mining your own rainbow ore. Any that you dug up would continue to glow as long as magic remained inside, and even if it disappeared, it would glow again once you charged it with magic. No wonder it made for such a great, popular little souvenir.

We'd all been merrily mining away together until a little while ago, but us three adults had gotten a bit tired, so we'd finished

first and decided to take a break. En was the kind of girl who never compromised on stuff like this and easily immersed herself into her own world. Since Iluna and Shii were still children, they always wanted to do things with us. En, on the other hand, was much more independent. If she wanted to do something, she'd just do it quietly on her own. You could say she was a hands-off kid. But times like these always made me realize that she had the heart of an artisan.

By the way, I'd already bought other souvenirs too. Ones that weren't rainbow ore. Mostly a boatload of the junk food dwarves were known for, the kind that gave you a sense of guilty pleasure. I'd tossed them into Inventory. Iluna and Shii would probably be super excited. As for Lefi and Leila, they'd probably make faces when they saw them. And honestly? I wanted to see those faces. Contrary to appearance, both Lefi and Leila had normal food preferences. Sweets notwithstanding.

"All...that mining made me hungry."

"All right, how 'bout we eat here, then? The timing is perfect too. En, there's a tap over there, so wash your hands after returning your mining kit. Oh yeah, what do you wanna eat?"

"Meat...!"

"Aye, aye, Cap'n. I just realized that dwarven cuisine is pretty heavy on meat. Anyway, how about you two?"

"Weeell, we've been eating so much rich food here, so I'm sort of in the mood for something light and fresh. Perhaps vegetable stir-fry?"

"Ah, I think we should have something like that here. Veggie stir-fry sounds good to me too. Aaand...ham! I wanna eat ham, my lord! The thick-cut kind! Oh, and alcohol!"

"Seconded on the alcohol! And snacks to go with it!"

"As you wish, ladies. Excuse me!"

While En went off to wash her hands, I called out to one of the hectic-looking servers to place our order. The place we were in right now was a huge cave with a restaurant inside. Pillars and scaffolding made from wood formed the second floor and walls of the tavern, creating a very atmospheric dining area. The fantastically elaborate design definitely wouldn't be out of place in Bisneyland. It almost felt like a whip-wielding archaeologist would drop by any moment.

As I looked around the establishment, it wasn't hard to see why the customers—local dwarves and lots of beastfolk tourists

alike—were having the time of their lives. When we'd first come here, a few people had stared at us in surprise, but now, no one paid us any attention. They'd probably just been startled by the power radiating from me. *Sorry, folks.*

A little while later, the server brought us our food, and En came back at almost the same time.

"Ooh… The food's here already. Looks so good."

"It sure does! Make sure you stuff yourselves, ladies! But first, a toast to the dwarven city!"

"Cheers!" Lew and Nell said in unison.

"Cheers…"

With a clink of our glasses, we chatted excitedly about all sorts of things in this world sparkling in the colors of the rainbow.

◇ ◇ ◇

The next day, I faced Dodah in front of the main gate connecting the capital to the outside world.

"Sorry for all the trouble, Dwarf King."

"Not at all, laddie. I'll not be forgettin' these last few days in a hurry, that's fer sure."

He grinned cheerfully at me.

"And b'cause o' yer visit, the duty passed down ta us fer generations has finally been fulfilled. *Ye* are the mon the first Dwarf King sought. Ye have my thanks, Demon Lord."

"No, I'm the one who should be thanking you, after everything you showed someone like me."

We shook hands firmly.

"I'm thinkin' when next we meet, it'll be at some formal event or another. Give my regards ta the beastfolk, will ye?"

"On it. See you again, hopefully sooner rather than later. I had a blast here in your home."

After saying our goodbyes to the Dwarf King, my family and I boarded the coach headed for the therianthropes' land. Despite the craziness of our time in the dwarves' domain, we had fun. And now, it was off to another adventure, this time with the beastfolk. While I didn't plan on staying there too long on account of my effect as the Supreme Ruler, I was very much looking forward to the visit.

◇◇◇

“Um, um, h-hello!”

“Hello…”

The nervous little girl with animal ears greeted En, who was stoic as usual, and continued.

“I… I-I’m Annie Gallad, Beast Lord Vardroi Gallad’s daughter! May I know your name too?”

“It’s…Zaien. But everybody calls me ‘En,’ so you can call me that instead.”

“Miss En! Nice to meet you! Your clothes are so unique and pretty! Is that how clothes look where you come from?”

The little beast girl, Annie, stared with deep curiosity at En’s kimono. En shook her head in response.

“Nope…just me. Master prepared them for me.”

“Oh, really? Wait, ‘Master’? Not ‘Papa’?”

“Well…he’s that too. Then again, I’m his katana, so it’s complicated.”

“‘Kuh-tah-nuh’? S-So your family is complicated, huh? D-Does that mean life is difficult for you every day, Miss En?”

“Huh…? No, not really. Every day, I play lots and learn lots, so life is fun. Sometimes I fight monsters, though.”

“D-Do you really?!”

“Yup… That’s my job. I’ve fought a lot until now. It can be tough, but it’s also super worth it.”

“I can’t believe you already have experience on the battlefield at such a young age, Miss En. Papa was right when he said all kinds of amazing children exist in this world…”

I snorted with laughter because the two little girls definitely weren’t on the same page.

“En, when you’re talking to other kids, it might help if you elaborate a bit more. Otherwise, they’ll misunderstand you, ya know.”

“Hmm…hmm. Difficult, difficult. I thought I was talking a lot too.”

Everyone in our family understood everything she wanted to say because they were used to her, but En had always been pretty reserved. No doubt she spoke way more now than when we’d first “met,” since back then she’d only said a word or two. Even so, it was clear she still wasn’t used to talking by the way she was struggling to converse with this child. *One step at a time,*

kiddo.

Right now, we were in the guest house of the beastfolk's capital. The moment we'd arrived, the Beast Lord's staff had ushered us in here, where he and his family had welcomed us. Annie, who seemed to be around the same age as En, was his only daughter. The same one he'd mentioned before in the demon world.

Oh yeah, as for why my wives weren't part of our conversation. Well, they were busy talking it up with the Beast Lord's wife. Not girl talk, but wife talk. About what their husbands were like, their husband's hobbies, and so on. The Beast Lord and I were wary of approaching them, so we'd chosen to take refuge with the little ones. We felt a mysterious sympathy for each other since this kind of thing was common for everyone regardless of race. Because, despite not saying anything at all, I suspected he and I were thinking the same thing.

"Oh! Um, um, you're Mr. Demon Lord Yuki, yes?! Papa—I mean, my father has told me so much about you! Including how much you helped him, so thank you very much for that!"

I answered his daughter with a chuckle when she did her best to bow her head deeply.

"You're very welcome, young lady. But your dad and I are brothers in arms, y'know. And since we fought with our backs pressed together, there's no question of who helped who or who owed who."

The Beast Lord's expression changed at my words. It was hard to describe.

"I can't say I ain't chuffed to hear ya call us brothers in arms, but considerin' my efforts don't come nowhere close to yours in that war, I ain't got the confidence to stand side by side with ya."

"Nah, you don't have to be so humble, man. Annie, here's a little secret your daddy might not have told you. See, when this huuuge, suuuper scary skeleton monster showed up outta nowhere, your dad and the rest of our friends charged at it fearlessly. One wrong step and they would've been done for. That's the kind of enemy it was, and they were so brave to do it."

"No way! Because at home, Papa can never win against Mama..."

His daughter looked a bit impressed. And her words gave me plenty of insight into the Beast Lord's family.

"Never mind who exactly beat the stuffin' outta that skeleton

monster, eh? Well, Annie, my girl, ya ain't wrong about your mama beatin' me, but that's only 'cause she's strong. Compared to her, the skeleton monster ain't worth quakin' in yer boots."

"Ohhh, I see. Mama's strong, huh... What about you, Miss En's papa?"

"Yeah, it's pretty much the same for me. I'm outclassed by my wives too, and they always get mad at me for doing dumb, selfish stuff. But that's what it means to be a man, Annie. Right, Beast Lord?"

"Can't say I disagree with ya."

"Goodness. Spouting off nonsense as usual, I see. As your wife, I only tell you what you need to hear. As if I'm scarier than some skeleton monster. The nerve of you."

"Precisely! Besides, Mr. Yuki, us getting mad at you is you simply reaping what you sow."

"Aha ha ha... Another thing you should know, Annie, is that men tend to be reckless, so as women, we have to support them. That's what it means to be a wife."

Thus did the trio of wives join our conversation.

The Beast Lord's wife's name was Fanola Gallad. She wasn't a leonid therianthrope but a vulpid one. A beautiful woman with the ears and tail of a fox. Annie had those same traits, which she'd clearly inherited from her mother.

"Oh, really? I guess beast boys *are* rowdy, a little mean, and reckless... But you're saying grown-up men are the same too?"

"When it comes to males, adults or children, they don't change much. Once you grow up, Annie, you'll understand what I mean by that."

"Tee hee, Lew's right, Annie. You're so cute, and that means the boys will try to make themselves look cool in front of you. Some of them may even tease you just to get your attention."

"Grr... Fellas gettin' near my girl? I'll hafta order my subordinates to investigate each 'n' every one..."

"Dear, they won't appreciate being used for such trivial tasks, I can tell you that right now. Oh, and do stop saying such embarrassing things in front of our guests."

"B-But, darlin'..."

The Beast Lord's pathetic expression contrasted sharply with his wife's exasperated one.

I totally get ya, man. I totally do. My little girls were cuties too, so I wouldn't be surprised if weirdos and freaks tried to cozy up

to them. Sure, things were fine now since they didn't have a reason to leave the dungeon without me, but I needed to keep a wary eye out regardless.

"Mr. Yuki, I can certainly see you doing the same when Iluna and the other girls grow up. I bet you just thought something along the lines of, 'They're pretty little things who'll attract the wrong sort, so I have to be on my guard.' Am I right?"

Holy balls, woman, how the heck did you do that? Are you reading my mind?

"Aha! That dumbstruck look tells me you're right on the mark, Nell. You can't fool us, my lord. Let me just say one thing—treasuring someone and being overprotective are two different things. Okay?"

"Okay, okay, okay."

"Excellent advice, Lew. Dear, you should take her words to heart as well, hm? Whether you like it or not, any action you take will have an impact because you *are* the leader of the therianthropes. You mustn't forget that."

"Yeah, yeah..."

At the same exact time, the Beast Lord and I glanced at each other in silent commiseration and smiled ruefully.

So we passed the time enjoying each other's company. A while later, one of Vardroi's subordinates approached, informing him of more visitors.

"My lord, the werewolves have arrived."

"Let 'em in."

Wait, does that mean what I think it does...

A moment later, two people I knew very well entered the hall.

"Father! Mother!"

"Tee hee, Lew. Our reunion came much sooner than you expected, hm?"

"Beast Lord, my wife and I thank you for inviting us on this occasion."

"Ah, don't go gettin' all stuffy on me. 'Sides, your daughter 'n' her man traveled a ways. I'd be an ungrateful git if I *didn't* invite ya."

Lew's parents were the ones who'd walked in.

Huh. What a stand-up guy.

"Thanks, Beast Lord. Appreciate you looking out for us."

"Bah, all's I did was invite 'em. Nothin' to it. 'Sides, if you see

me ’n’ mine treatin’ the werewolves like family, that just means you’ll think better of me. Ain’t that right?”

I smiled ruefully at his frankness before greeting Lew’s parents.

“You two look well.”

“Tee hee, I hear you’ve been quite busy yourself, Yuki. Case in point, the turmoil of a few days prior. As a therianthrope myself, I thank you for your part in saving this city.”

“Ahhh, yeah, about that… This is awkward to explain, but the truth is, the whole thing was my fault. So if anything, I need to apologize for all the trouble I caused.”

When I responded to Rosiela Groll, Lew’s mother, her father, Belgrus, questioned me with an inscrutable expression.

“Mayhap this absurd presence is the reason?”

Shiiit. Pops figured it out, huh?

“Yeah. I can’t tell you the details, but once I took care of some major business in the dwarves’ domain, let’s just say I evolved as a result. So to be honest, in terms of my race, I’m not a demon lord anymore.”

Instead of Lew’s father, the Beast Lord interjected, his voice betraying keen interest.

“That right? Then what are ya now?”

“Supreme Ruler. Having said that, I still plan on doing things officially as a demon lord, plus I really like being one, so you can just keep calling me that like you have been. Not to mention the fact that demon lords refer to dungeon masters, and that part hasn’t changed.”

This time, dad remarked, looking astonished.

“Bloody hell, man. How far do you plan to go?”

“Well, if you really wanna put the screws on me, until the world is a place my daughters can walk around without any fear? I’d like to send them to school once they’re a little older. But we all know how deep-rooted the race problem is. So I want the power to do something about that.”

That was my current goal. While I understood that having power didn’t necessarily mean I had the solution to everything, ultimately, in this world, physical power translated to political power. Those hostile creatures called monsters existed, and politics couldn’t eliminate them, so in a way, it was inevitable that the people here put their faith in raw power.

“Hmm… The problem of race, eh? There’s no denyin’ that the

world's taken a step forward, but I can't say it's safe yet either. That's where us leaders gotta step in 'n' do somethin' about it, no matter how tough the goin' gets. Which is why I want the reborn Reauxgard Empire under your rule to be the place where different races can come together to deepen their friendships."

"The airships give us a huge advantage in that. Thanks to them, the distance between countries has decreased dramatically."

"The airships... Then you have journeyed on one of those vessels, my lord?"

"Yeah, with the dwarves. Ya know what I thought when I was up there, Belgrus? 'So this is the world them with wings see.' Imagine bein' moved almost to tears at this age."

The Beast Lord seemed like he was enjoying himself while recalling his experience. I couldn't help but smile at that.

"I felt the exact same way the first time I flew in the sky. It'd be great if airships spread all over the world and led to more travel routes. Even though I can fly on my own, it gets tricky to go anywhere when I wanna take my family with me. So I'm personally grateful for the tech."

"Damned if I ain't more determined to open up an air route here to our land. We got more monsters than we need 'n' the forest is thick, so building a depot's gonna be a challenge. But for now, the route to the dwarves'll be enough."

"The dwarves' skill never ceases to amaze me. Just hearing the specifications, I was astounded that they could build a depot-cum-hangar in such a short time. Within the year, they shall likely be able to manufacture their own aerial vessels."

"Knowin' 'em, I'd hafta agree. Their passion for that thing called 'technology' is the real deal, 'n' they may even have an improved version already. But if they go too far, they'll find 'emselves bang up against the interests of the Ellane Allied Federation 'n' cause unnecessary friction. I'll hafta talk to the dwarves about it then."

"Well, they *are* blunt, and they *are* prone to miss such social subtleties."

"Ha ha! Then I guess I wasn't wrong myself in my impression of them, huh? Anyway, glad to see that the therianthropes and dwarves have such a good relationship."

While we men talked, the Beast Lord's wife came over to us.

"Dear, now that all our guests have arrived, we need to make

dinner. Since you're the one who said 'we'll all have more fun with just us,' none of your staff is here. I understand that men love their little political chats, but kindly save it for later."

"Uh, r-right ya are, lovely. I'll hop to it."

Clearly no match for his wife, the Beast Lord cleared his throat and turned back to us.

"All right, guys 'n' dolls. I'm grateful to all of ya for makin' the trek to us. Dinner'll be ready in a flash. It ain't nothin' fancy, though. Just a barbecue in the garden. Belgrus, Rosiela, both of ya are our guests today too. We'd love it if ya'd think of yourselves that way."

Lew's parents inclined their heads in thanks at his words.

A barbecue, huh? Excellent. He had to have planned this with me in mind. I might've officially been an emperor, but he knew I wouldn't want to be entertained with all the stuffiness that entailed, especially since I much preferred eating and having a good time with everyone. No formal titles here, just two families enjoying each other's company. Heck, maybe Lew's parents had told him about me beforehand.

"Huzzah! A barbecue!"

"Yup... Barbecues are great. Annie, your papa understands that."

"Tee hee hee! That's my papa!"

En nodded, exuding a know-it-all air, while Annie giggled proudly.

The Beast Lord chuckled softly, then spoke.

"Let's enjoy dinner!"

◇ ◇ ◇

The barbecue in the courtyard of the state guest house lasted about three hours. It was fun. We sat at the same table, eating delicious food and laughing. Each of us had our own positions, but at this moment, none of that existed. We were just good friends. *Booze tastes even better at times like this.*

"Haah, that was delicious... Eating food like this and having fun with everyone is the best."

"You're so right, Nell. I don't normally drink, but today's alcohol was especially tasty."

I had one arm around Nell and the other around Lew. Their voices were filled with happiness as we walked. Both of them

were a bit flushed from the drinking, and they leaned against me. It was already late at night. The stars speckled the sky and insects chirped somewhere.

With dinner over, the Beast Lord and his wife had returned home, and Lew's parents had bedded down for the night before us in their own guest room in an annex nearby on the same grounds as the guest house. That meant freedom for all of us, which was why we were strolling through the courtyard. As for En, my tired little girl had gone back to her greatsword form and now slept in Inventory. So right now, it was just me and my wives.

Nell was in a good mood, resting her head on my shoulder with a brilliant smile on her face. Tail waving, Lew twined her fingers tightly into mine. *Life can't get any better than this.* The afterglow of a fun dinner, and the fact that two of my most precious people were right next to me. Words weren't enough to describe this bliss. Maybe "happiness"... But no, even that was lacking. It was impossible to describe the feeling enveloping my whole body.

"You sure are chipper, Mr. Yuki."

"Wasn't that fun, my lord?"

"Yup. Spending time with you guys is seriously the best. Let's keep doing this every day. Make lots of great memories together."

"Goodness. You're so unfair. You can't just be so direct."

"Nell, we call that...a surprise attack."

Both of them giggled bashfully, and neither left my side on the walk back to our room.

Epilogue: Going Home

The day after the Beast Lord's welcome party, we enjoyed sightseeing in the area, with Lew acting as our guide. According to her, beastfolk lived in scattered settlements all across the country, and the werewolf clan's was located some distance away. This particular region under the Beast Lord's direct control was considered the capital city of their territory.

Speaking of the werewolves' home, she'd had this to say about it: "It's small, about a quarter of the size of this city. We basically don't have any tourist attractions, so it's suuuper boring. I'm not joking. It's just a town where people live." She'd delivered that scathing diatribe with a dead-serious expression.

But I still wanted to see it because that's where Lew was born and raised. Unfortunately, adding it to our trip would delay our return home by another week, so I decided to give up on the idea for the time being. We'd go the next time we weren't so busy, or if Lew just had a hankering for a true homecoming. As things stood, we'd already been gone too long.

And so, our visit to the dwarves and beastfolk ended.

"Honeys, I'm hooome!"

"We're back!" Lew and Nell chimed simultaneously.

"We're...home."

We were back in the dungeon after activating our return devices, and those who'd stayed at home welcomed us.

"Yay! Welcome back!"

"Welcome back!"

Iluna and Shii pounced on us first, then Lefi approached.

"Welcome back. Based on what I see... Mm, yes, based on what I see, I assume the journey was well worth it, hm?"

"Welcome back, everyone. Oh, what's this? Master Yuki, did you perhaps evolve again?"

"Dang, that easy to tell, huh? Yeah, a lot happened, sooo... First things first, Lefi, how are you feeling?"

She understood what I actually meant because she smiled shyly at me.

"Fine, fine, I am just fine. No significant changes to report. Same as ever."

“Oh. Okay. Good, good. And uhhh…I’m home, baby.”

Feeling strangely embarrassed, I pressed my hand to her belly and said those words. Tenderness now mixed with the shyness in Lefi’s smile.

Special Story: Safe House

“Oookay! Let’s do this!”

I looked down from the highest balcony in my demon lord castle. Castle Ruan Phionelle, which Lefi had named. The same castle I’d started building in an attempt to recreate Amor Londo. It was still incomplete since I just kept adding on to it. Lately, I hadn’t been able to work on it much because I’d been busy, but continuing construction on it was basically one of my hobbies at this point. I was free today, though, so I’d decided to take my time with it.

“Hmm… Where to start is the question.”

Looking at it from up here, the outermost parts were the least finished. While the exteriors of the outer buildings were complete, a lot of them were empty on the inside, making them look like papier-mâché figures. I’d be lucky if I could get it done in the next, say, decade or so.

On the other hand, the most finished part of the castle was near the center. The main entrance, which I’d put a lot of effort into creating, was built pretty well all the way to the real throne room. And not to pat myself on the back, but I was really pleased with the result.

By the way, my favorite part was the courtyard. My kids often played hide-and-seek there, so I’d designed several blind spots for easy hiding and also made it a bit mazelike. It was important to approach stuff like this with a playful spirit, you know!

Of course, I’d taken safety into consideration as much as possible. In case of the unexpected, I’d placed first aid kits everywhere, and I kept bandages, disinfectant, dressings, super potions, and super mana potions on hand at all times. I’d also thoroughly lectured the kids about where everything was. Since children were totally fine with pulling dangerous stunts like they were normal, I had to take as many precautions as possible.

That said, my girls were more responsible than me, meaning so far, they hadn’t needed any of the emergency supplies. Plus, Shii took care of any minor injuries like scrapes with her healing magic. Actually, the only one who even used the stuff was me when I hurt myself messing around with Lefi. *Yeaaah…*

Anyway. Back to the topic at hand. Although they were all deactivated because of the danger they posed, there were numerous traps and defensive mechanisms installed. If I activated them all at once, we'd be able to defend ourselves against an attack by any army. Despite the expense, I'd tested the traps in advance on monsters in the western area of the Demonic Forest. They were powerful enough to incapacitate them with a few hits, so it should've been possible for them to kill most opponents. The key words being "*most* opponents."

If something out of the ordinary like Lefi showed up, or even a hundred of the monsters from the western area, all these protective measures would be pointless. I wanted to at least prep the place from the meadow area onward so that I could repel whatever came our way... *Guess I'll just have to grind it out little by little.*

Even though I had defenses effective enough to drive off any country's military, I couldn't say that our safety was a hundred percent guaranteed, which just went to show how strong and resilient the creatures in this world were. Come to think of it, that might've been one of the reasons why this world hadn't developed that much despite its long history. Magical technology for combat was advanced, but it was an undeniable fact that the same couldn't be said for lifestyle tech, considering the comparatively lower standard of living. Thanks to the dungeon, we'd been able to live a comfortable life. Except we were definitely a very special case.

The environment in which mankind lived was so harsh that they had no time to invent things to enrich their daily lives. Instead of doing that, people probably thought it'd be better to research fighting techniques in order to increase safety. After all, this was a world where living things like Lefi existed, capable of destroying several countries on their own. So this outcome was only natural.

Just as I was thinking about the harshness of this world, the wraith triplets appeared out of nowhere, slipping through the wall.

"Oh, snap, it's you guys."

When I talked to them, Rei, the eldest, beamed at me as if she were saying, "Mooorning!" Next, Rui, the middle sister, raised a hand like she was saying, "Yooo!" As for the youngest, Roh, she tilted her head curiously, as if asking me, "Whatcha doin'?"

“Weeell, I’m in the mood to do more work on the castle, so I’m just trying to think up plans. Actually, speaking of, is there anything you three want added to the dungeon?”

Rei answered me first. “A funhouse!” Rui’s answer was “A candy house!” Roh went last with “A world no one knows and has yet to see.” Setting aside the first two, Miss Roh sure did like saying the darndest things, huh?

“Uhhh, g-got it. I’ll keep that in mind… Then here’s another question. Do you think the dungeon needs anything more in terms of defense?”

Their expressions grew a little serious as they fell into thought. Seemed they were actually considering my question as dungeon monsters. A few minutes later, Rei kicked things off by telling me we needed more traps. Rui’s answer was troops. Roh said somewhere to escape to in case of emergency.

“Hmm… You’re all right.”

Especially Roh’s suggestion. That was one I’d probably have to think about sooner rather than later. I didn’t want to involve my family in any kind of battle, but if things got really out of hand, asking Lefi for help was an option. In fact, when the Spirit Emperor visited our home for the first time, I hadn’t known whether he was friend or foe, so I had actually asked her for help. Because I’d known that if shit went sideways, there’d be nothing I could do except die.

In the future, there was a nonzero chance that an overwhelmingly powerful individual like him might appear, and there was no guarantee that they’d be friendly like him. Would I have to ask Lefi for help every time that happened? *I’d hate that.* In that case, then, it was in my best interest to create a place to escape to if someone showed up that my pets and I couldn’t defeat no matter how hard we tried. *I need to actually bring this idea to life.* This world was dangerous. I needed to take all the measures I could to ensure our safety.

“Thanks, girls. I’ll think long and hard about your suggestions.”

When I thanked them, they squealed with joy, then floated away to their next destination, wherever that was.

I’d been thinking only about expanding the castle, but now… *Looks like I need a safe house.* I could move the dungeon core around anywhere as long as it stayed in the dungeon’s territory, so if things got dangerous here, I could take it there. Yeah, Roh’d

definitely given me some seriously good advice. I decided to build a few more safe houses in the future, but for today, I'd try building one first.

As for the location, as far away from the Demonic Forest as possible seemed smart. That left me with a few possibilities. The phantom ship dungeon, the beach whose location I didn't actually know but where I'd hosted the party with Lew's family, and...the Reauxgard Empire.

I opened the Maps function to look at the full map of my dungeon's territory. *The best place to escape to, huh... Oh, this looks good.* My gaze settled on an uninhabited island a short distance off the coast of Reauxgard. From what I could see, no monsters inhabited the island, and though it wasn't large enough for people to live on, it'd certainly work as a temporary refuge. The empire was located on the complete opposite side of the continent from the Demonic Forest, making it the perfect location to escape to if something were to happen here. *All righty, let's go check out the site right now.*

I returned to the real throne room and called out to Lefi, who was inside.

"Lefi! I'm heading to Reauxgard. Probably won't be back before nightfall!"

"Understood. What will you do for lunch and dinner?"

"I'll manage on my own for lunch, but I'll make it in time for dinner!"

"Then I suggest you take some sandwiches with you. There should be a few in the fridge, at least enough to tide you over for lunch."

"Roger that!"

After some quick prep, I left my house.

◇ ◇ ◇

So here I was in the Reauxgard Empire. I'd snuck in, since the emperor—me—paying a visit meant people would make a fuss. A while ago, when I'd surveyed this area, I'd installed more of my special doors connected by spatial magic. Aside from the very first one, set up in the imperial castle, I hadn't told anyone their locations. Only I was privy to that info. There were soldiers stationed at the main door, meaning they'd know right away when I showed up. I didn't wanna deal with that hassle, ergo me

sneaking around through one of my other doors.

While these thoughts ran through my head, I activated my Stealth ability and flew up into the sky, checking Maps as I searched for my target island. A good chunk of the coastline here was part of the empire's dungeon, probably to guard against maritime attacks. But as long as I remained within the dungeon's territory, I'd be able to notice any hostiles immediately.

"Aha! There it is!"

I continued flying along the coast for about an hour. By boat, it would've taken thirty minutes to reach the island from the mainland. In the middle was a small, rocky mountain covered in greenery with a cave at the edge, likely carved out by the waves. You could see through to the other side. Tropical trees scattered on the pristine, white beach spread out around the mountain added a nice touch. *Wow, this island is pretty nice!*

After landing, I began to explore. The place really was charming. It felt like pirates might've hidden treasure here or there. The rocky mountain was a bit steep, though. Lefi and I could fly up it, but not the others, so I'd need to add some stairs to make it accessible. The weather was just right, cooler than the Demonic Forest. As for anything alive, no signs, just like I'd suspected.

This is it. This is the spot. The focal point will be... Hmm, this cave. I decided to go with a "pirate's cove" theme. A pirate's secret hideout. In that case, best to make it out of wood. I wanted to make it look like a dilapidated ship converted into a hut. Maybe I could bring some parts over from the phantom ship dungeon. Then I'd stack the huts in layers to create a sort of spooky, haphazard atmosphere, and secure the whole using the dungeon's functions so that it didn't collapse. As for light, sticking to the pirate's cove theme, lanterns would be good. That sort of faint light floated in the dim darkness.

Nice, I'm getting a general idea of how I want it to look. All that was left now was to tweak the terrain a bit to make it more comfortable to live in and safe. *Oh, hey, we have a beautiful sandy beach, so might as well take advantage of that.*

I needed to think about the safe house's defenses while we were away too. This island was very close to the Reauxgard Empire, so outlaws like pirates coming and settling here would be a pain in the ass. *So what if...I just made the whole island*

invisible? I'd never used it before, but I was sure the dungeon had a feature like that. The locals might find it strange that an island suddenly disappeared, but this was my country, my territory now. *So I do what I want.* Though it wasn't gonna hurt to give the government a heads-up later and let them know I'd helped myself to an unused island.

Oh yeah, pirates would want a bar, right? Then I'll make the main plaza over there, and…

◇ ◇ ◇

At first glance, it was impossible to tell from the outside what lay inside the cave. The answer? The remains of a broken ship. What was once just wreckage had now been outfitted with windows and doors in the gaps left by the busted boards, turning it into a livable home. I'd added more huts above, and faint lantern light illuminated the messy but somehow still charming cove, creating a thrilling air. Personally, I thought it was the definition of a pirate's hideout. As I stared at the sight, there was only one thing I could say.

"I was supposed to build a safe house…"

What even *was* a safe house anyway? To each their own. Though it definitely *looked* like a hideout. Never mind that today's original plan had been to continue construction on the castle.

Anyway, it was a genuinely nice place— All right, to be honest, I was brimming with satisfaction at what I'd accomplished here. I'd built what I'd wanted to, exactly the way I'd wanted to.

Frankly, I would've liked to use it as a vacation home. I wanted it to be like the inn in the meadow area and have it used every day. Not to toot my own horn, but I liked to think I'd made something phenomenal. *I bet the kids are gonna be so stoked to go exploring.*

Except there wasn't much here yet in terms of stuff. I'd added lots of props to create the ambience, but there were no daily necessities, so nobody could live here as it was. Since this was technically a safe house, I needed to stock it with a month's worth of food and household essentials.

And while I'd built a toilet, there was no bath. Major oversight on my part. If we used this place like normal, we could just go to the bath at the inn, but adding one here for abnormal occasions

seemed like a good idea.

The light from the lanterns definitely made it feel more atmospheric, but it was a bit dim. Though this level of dimness was fine outside, I for sure needed a better light source inside the rooms. At night, it was so dark that it almost hurt to use your eyes to see. In places like this, practicality had to trump ambience.

Wait, when did it get so dark? I hadn't noticed at all, so when I looked up at the sky, I saw the sun setting into the sea, staining everything red. *Hmm…this is perfect timing, actually. Since I went to all this trouble, I might as well invite everyone over for dinner!*

◇ ◇ ◇

"Wooow! Amazing! This is what you were making today, Yukiki?"

"Master! This place super-duper cooool!"

"Like…a secret hideout."

"Yup, I sure did. I tried my best to make it pirate-y."

"Pirates! Ooh, yes, this is perfect for pirates! Now we *have* to play pretend pirates! Yukiki, can we go exploring?!"

"Sure, but don't go too far. It's dinnertime soon, plus it's dangerous to walk around here in the dark. We can explore the whole island tomorrow."

"Okay! We are now officially members of the Pirate Expedition! And our job is to investigate the unknown secrets lying asleep on this island!"

"Aye, aye, Cap-tain! Your wish our command!"

"Hmm…hmm, hmm. I'm hungry, but I want to go exploring too."

"EnEn, the more you move, the better food tastes!"

"She right! Hunger is best spice!"

"Okay…I'll go. Everything shall kneel before curiosity."

The wraith triplets nodded enthusiastically after En's declaration. So, as the little-girl gang excitedly began exploring the vicinity, everyone in the adult gang had their own remark to make.

"Hmm. I'm not nearly as thrilled as the girls, but I quite like the atmosphere here. Perhaps I enjoy places like this more than I realized."

"It is indeed stylish. Yuki, I believe you may have an

unexpected talent for creating places such as this.”

“No ‘may’ about it, my lord definitely does! Anyone who says this isn’t amazing is just being mean and sarcastic.”

“Bwa ha ha ha! Well, I *am* the Creative Demon Lord, after all! Then again, I *do* know a little about a lot, which lets me make all sorts of things. I’m not a trailblazer, so that gives me an advantage.”

The land of a certain mouse. The pirate movies set in the Caribbean. And the manga about pirates aiming to get their hands on one treasure. With that knowledge, combined with the power of the dungeon, I could build whatever I wanted, just like in sandbox-type games.

“I firmly believe that leveraging what you know is one type of talent. I would also very much like to discuss with you the story behind the construction of this structure, Master Yuki.”

“Next time.”

Because when you laser focus on something, Miss Leila, I have no idea how many hours it’ll take before you’re satisfied. I didn’t even wanna think about how much time I’d spent telling her about Earth.

“All right, ladies, let’s get cooking while the kids are playing. Before En starves to death.”

“Aha ha ha. En is always so dramatic right before meal times, hm? Though I suppose we should get a move on.”

“Leila, pray tell what is on the menu for tonight?”

“Beef stew. However, perhaps we should adhere to the pirate motif and add bone-in meat?”

“Great idea! Okay, I’ll start grilling right away. Shouldn’t take that long!”

“Then we’ll handle the prep here, Mr. Yuki. Lefi, Lew, won’t you help me?”

“Of course.”

“You got it!”

Chattering excitedly, we started making dinner.

Afterword

Hello, this is Ryuyu! Thank you very much for buying volume 12!

All right, so. This volume starts with problems remaining in the aftermath of the war. I wanted to write about the kinds of issues that would definitely come up if a war broke out between different races, so I did. The fact of the matter is, human emotions aren't so straightforward. It's impossible for everyone's thoughts and feelings to align, and in a war that involves death, it's even more difficult to compromise. I'd like to become good at writing such realistic emotions.

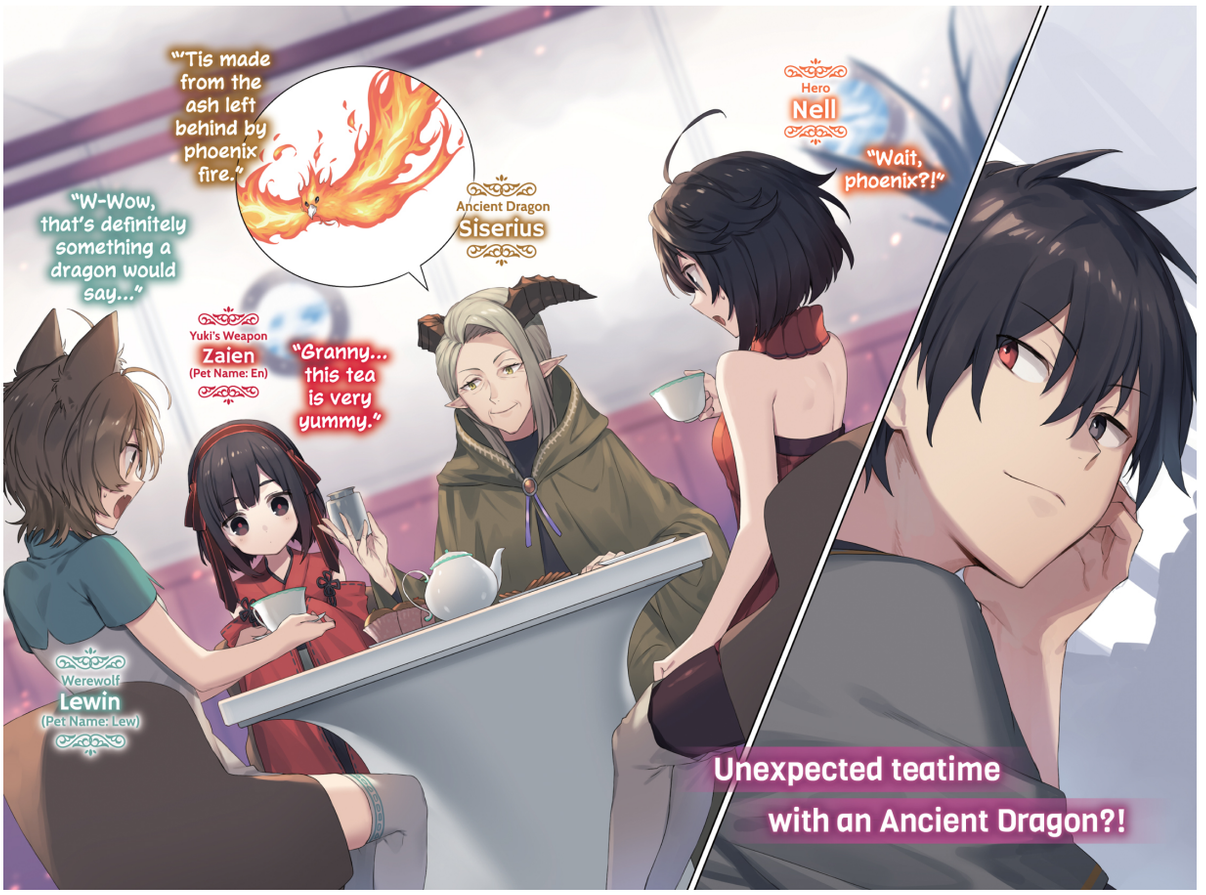
And then there's the story of the gods. This time, I revealed one of this world's biggest secrets. To be honest, I hadn't thought about the setting around it until Yuki's conversation about dungeons with Shendra, the former emperor of the Reauxgard Empire, in the previous volume. There seem to be similarities between Yuki's world and dungeons. If that's the case, some secret must exist. So, what kind is it? From this thought, the foundation of this world and the story of the gods were born. The God Spear he obtained in the Dragon Hamlet must also then be related to this. This meant that the dwarves, who are blacksmiths, must also play a part, and that's where the story for their domain came from.

The next thing I'd like to write about would be...the secret of the Demonic Forest. Why is it such a secluded, remote place? Why are the monsters so ridiculously strong? These mysteries and more still remain, to the point that even the author himself is curious about them. So look forward to me expanding the world even more!

Finally, I'd like to end with acknowledgments. To my editor, Daburyu, and to Note Tono for helping me put this work together. To everyone else involved, and to the readers who read this story: thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

See you again somewhere in the world. Adios!

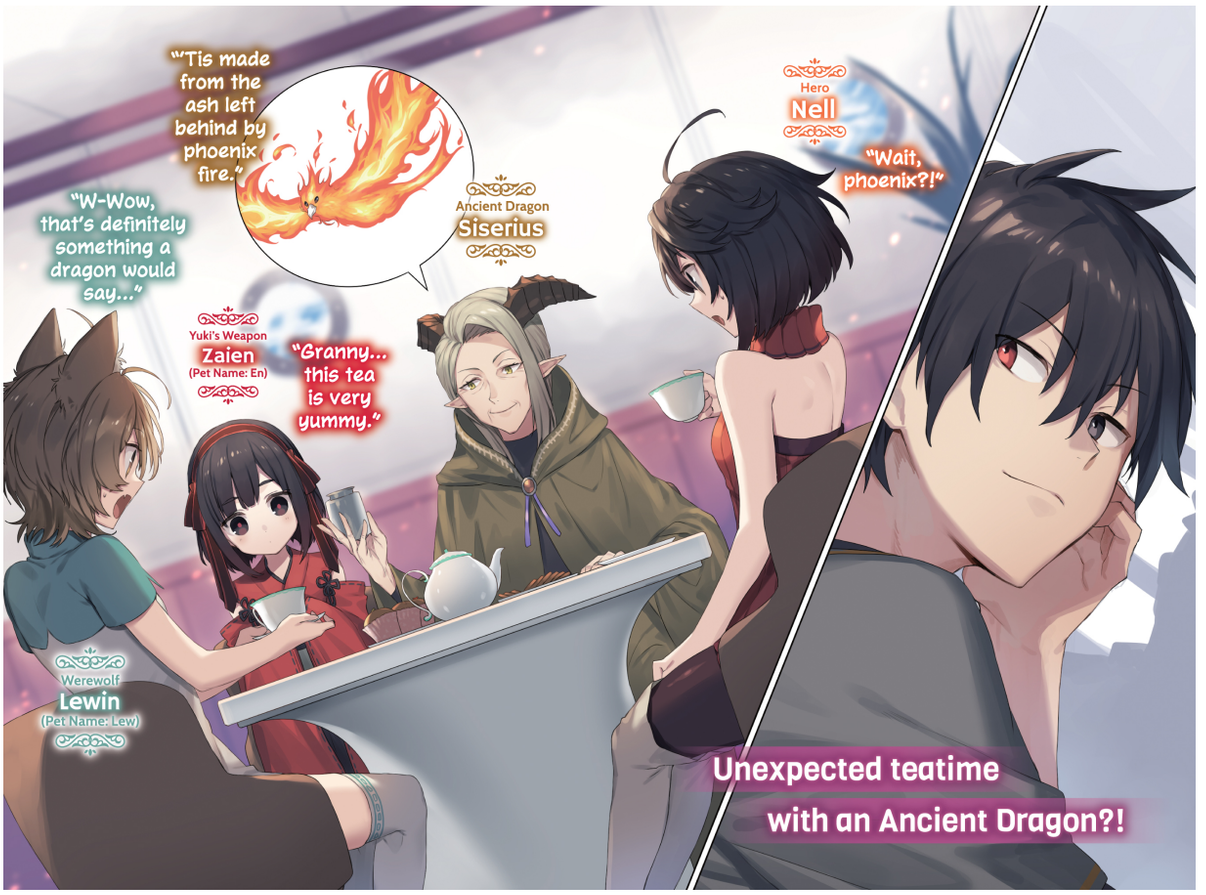

The Young Man
Reborn in Another World
As a Demon Lord
Yuki
Lefi springs into action
to rescue Yuki,
who's been kidnapped!
Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My DUNGEON
12
Ancient Dragon
Lefisios
(Pet Name: Lefi)


"'Tis made from the ash left behind by phoenix fire."
"W-Wow, that's definitely something a dragon would say..."
Ancient Dragon
Siserius
Hero
Nell
"Wait, phoenix?!"
Yuki's Weapon
Zaien
(Pet Name: En)
"Granny... this tea is very yummy."
Werewolf
Lewin
(Pet Name: Lew)
Unexpected teatime with an Ancient Dragon?!


"You're the God Spear?"


Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My DUNGEON
12
Author: Ryuyu
Illustrator: Daburyu


The Young Man
Reborn in Another World
As a Demon Lord
Yuki
Lefi springs into action
to rescue Yuki,
who's been kidnapped!
Now I'm a
DEMON LORD!
Happily Ever After with
Monster Girls
in My DUNGEON
12
Ancient Dragon
Lefisios
(Pet Name: Lefi)


"'Tis made from the ash left behind by phoenix fire."
"W-Wow, that's definitely something a dragon would say..."
Ancient Dragon
Siserius
Yuki's Weapon
Zaien
(Pet Name: En)
"Granny... this tea is very yummy."
Werewolf
Lewin
(Pet Name: Lew)
Hero
Nell
"Wait, phoenix?!"
Unexpected teatime with an Ancient Dragon?!


"You're the God Spear?"

Table of Contents

Cover

Prologue: Strengthening Bonds, Bit by Bit

Chapter 1: Though the Dead Remain Silent, the Living Nevertheless Hear Their Voices

Side Story 1: A Ruler's Anguish

Chapter 2: A Month of Strengthening

Chapter 3: A Name to Pass Down

Side Story 2: The Dungeon Around That Time

Chapter 4: The God of Iron

Epilogue: Going Home

Special Story: Safe House

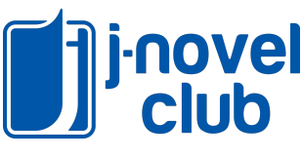
Afterword

Color Illustrations

Bonus High Resolution Illustrations

About J-Novel Club

Copyright



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!
Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters of series like these by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:
J-Novel Club Membership

Copyright

Now I’m a Demon Lord! Happily Ever After with Monster Girls in My Dungeon: Volume 12
by Ryuyu

Translated by Kashi Kamitoma
Edited by Adam Haffen

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

MAO NI NATTANODE, DUNGEON TSUKUTTE JINGAI MUSUME TO HONOBONO SURU Vol. 12

Copyright © Ryuyu, Daburyu 2021

First published in Japan in 2021 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo
English translation rights arranged with KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo

All rights reserved.

In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author’s intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC
j-novel.club
The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.
Ebook edition 1.0: March 2025
Premium E-Book for cbg