

CHAPTER 5

CHARYBDIS

The fight was about to begin.

We were at the end of the gravel road leading toward the Dwarven Kingdom, near the midway point between the capitals of Dwargon and Tempest. We rendezvoused with Geld and his construction team there, waiting for the moment to come.

It was about time for Charybdis to appear.

Vester had contacted King Gazel to explain the situation. We didn’t even have to mention our pact; Gazel immediately deployed his knights for us.

As he put it: “Hmph. What kind of swordsman would I be if I didn’t help my younger fellow student in a pinch?”

He really loved playing the role of the dojo big bro with me. It made me fear for the Dwarven Kingdom’s future—but if he was helping us, it was all good.

The team of one hundred knights he quickly put together had already gone on ahead. The plan was for them to strike at Charybdis from behind as we advanced from the front, in a classic pincer attack. We’d be relying on them quite a bit this time.

An additional four hundred knights were also preparing to step in, just in case this first attack ended in failure. It’d be nice if this plan of ours worked, but we needed to consider what would happen if it didn’t. Gazel was no fool; I was sure he’d be using this attack to gather intel on the creature for himself. I didn’t mind, since I was planning to defeat it right here and therefore didn’t need to worry about things after that. That’d make life easier for us.

Beyond that, all we had to do was wait for the plan to unfold.

We used the time to have Treyni (who had joined us on-site) tell us more about Charybdis.

I knew it was this super-powerful monster already, but listening to her story, she made it sound even more hazardous than that. It was no exaggeration to say that it was as strong as a demon lord. Being called a calamity monster, one would expect it to be a calamity-level threat, but not necessarily here. Fuze was apparently telling the truth—this is more of a disaster-class menace.

Why not just call it that, then? Well, there was a good reason for that. The term disaster was normally reserved for demon lords, which Charybdis wasn’t. So why wasn’t it classified as a demon lord? Simple: It was just a monster that wreaked havoc wherever it went. It took no intelligent action, neither working in groups nor deliberately seeking to destroy the human race, and some wondered if it had any true intelligence at all. A real terror of a monster, but on that point, it was also quite different from a demon lord.

She called Charybdis a spiritual life-form, whatever that was. That term meant it could resurrect itself if defeated in one body by moving over to a new one. That sounded a little familiar to me—in fact, it sounded a lot like how Veldora worked.

“This Charybdis was born a very, very long time ago, running through cycles of death and rebirth. It is the cruel, brutal ruler of the skies. One could even call it the heaven-sent child of Veldora the Storm Dragon, ruler and guardian of the forest.”

Huh? Did Treyni say something important there? Because it sounded kind of important. The child of Veldora? Was my guess correct, after all?

“Wait a sec,” I hurriedly interrupted. “What do you mean, ‘the heaven-sent child of Veldora’?”

Treyni explained. “Charybdis is a monster created by the accumulated piles of magicules that leaked out from Veldora.”

Which meant it was the same as I was. We were sort of like what the human race would call siblings. That, in turn, suggested one possible reason why Charybdis was so doggedly honing in on my position. I was related, in a way, to Veldora, so it was gunning for me first.

Perhaps it’s already noticed that Veldora “exists,” in a way, inside me. Maybe I’m overthinking it, but I suppose I’d better stay on my guard.

After our discussion with Treyni, we went over the details of our strategy one more time.

The thing we had to watch out for the most with Charybdis was its unique Magic Interference ability. Using this made any magicules within a thousand-foot radius of the monster go haywire—it could use its own powerful magic to interfere with the very way magicules worked.

“Even the high-level wind magic at my command had no effect on Charybdis,” Treyni recounted. “Under Magic Interference, we believe the effects of all magic are greatly reduced. What’s more, the biggest difficulty lies in how it annuls any sort of flight-based magic. Try to make contact with it, and you’ll lose your magic and crash to the ground. Losing the advantage of height makes it a very difficult enemy to fight.”

This was exactly why we needed an aerial offense that wasn’t dependent on magic. Even if you had wings, though, could those be canceled like magic, too?

Understood. The principles of flight differ for creatures like winged horses and dragonewts. Their wings contain the power to control gravity, lightening their overall bodily weight and letting them adjust the flow of power to propel themselves forward. This method of flight is unrelated to the presence, or lack thereof, of magicules.

Judging by the Sage’s answer, my wings shouldn’t be affected, either. I did find it a bit strange that having these wings alone let me fly. Turns out it had nothing to do with physical strength. I didn’t have to flap my wings a bunch to stay aloft, not that it mattered at the moment.

This brought up another question, though.

“I see… So flight magic works by taking advantage of magicule resistance around you. But does that mean Benimaru’s Airflight wouldn’t work, either?”

Airflight was one of the ogre mages’ Battlewill arts, powered by the user’s magical aura. It provided basically the same benefits as regular flight magic, but given that fundamental similarity and what I had just secretly learned from the Sage, I figured Magic Interference must affect it.

“Indeed, I believe it is just as you say. A very keen insight, Sir Rimuru.”

I appreciated the compliment, but it wasn’t the answer I hoped for.

“Geh. Seriously? This guy’s no slouch. So I guess flame broiling it with ranged attacks will be pretty tough.”

“It seems likely, my brother. If magicule-driven attacks won’t work on it, that puts rather large restrictions on our offense.”

Benimaru and his friends, meanwhile, were already debating how they were going to fight.

“Heh-heh-heh… Aren’t you guys forgetting something important? Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten who I am! Some big ol’ fish isn’t gonna make me break a sweat. I’ll give ’im one heck of a beating!”

It was Milim, who had changed into battle gear while I wasn’t paying attention. She stuck her small chest forward, trying to look as defiant as possible.

Can we go with that?! I was all ready to welcome her to the force.

But Shion had to go and turn her down. “I’m afraid we can’t allow that. It’ll put you in a bind, Sir Rimuru, and this is an issue for our town to handle.”

Why would it put me in a bind?

Just as I was thinking that, Shuna butted in. “She’s right. It’d be a mistake to rely on her for everything, just because she’s our friend. But if Sir Rimuru is in serious trouble, we will gladly ask for her support then.”

Um, I’m kind of in serious trouble right now, guys. Not that I could say that out loud to them. The others were all nodding; they were keen to defend their home by themselves as well. I wouldn’t get away with relying on Milim from the start.

“Ha…ha-ha. You heard them, Milim. Just trust in me, okay?”

I hated to turn her down, but I did. Way to go, man. You barely trust in yourself. I kept the thought a secret.

“Wh-what?! And here I thought my time had finally come to shine, too…”

Milim hung her head in disappointment. She was ready for action, changing her clothes for it and everything, so the shock of being refused must have been intense. She stole a few glances at me, looking ready to cry, but I couldn’t do anything for her. It was a disappointment for me, too.

So that’s what was on our plate, then. It was us against Charybdis.

Our discussions continued. Another major problem was that the megalodons that served Charybdis most likely had Magic Interference at their disposal, too. Our long-range attacks were already heavily restricted, and trying to get closer would fail once our flight skills were blocked. Practically speaking, we had very few means of defeating Charybdis or its megalodons.

Ultimately, we decided to just try fighting it and see what happened. There was little point debating any further at this juncture, so instead we would try out whatever attacks we thought could work.

Eventually, my Magic Sense picked up a group of fourteen monsters approaching us. It wasn’t long before we could see them.

Even from afar, the eerie sight was astounding. Giant sharks, over sixty feet in length, were gracefully swimming across the sky. Their bodies were protected by solid, stiff dragon scales that would assuredly deflect most garden-variety attacks. It was shaped like a shark, but at the core, it was a completely different monster.

With them was another, even more bizarre sight—the gigantic dragon accompanying the thirteen sharks.

Its size was enormous, making the megalodons look tiny by comparison. Maybe three or so times their size? Its total length had to be over 150 feet or so. There was a single large eyeball on the bottom of its wedged, sharklike head; on the top was a pair of solid-looking horns that appeared as if they could gouge their way through solid stone, or anything else for that matter.

By comparison, its limbs looked like mere decoration, tacked on to its shark-shaped torso—but the two pairs of wings on its back, one larger than the other, looked almost exactly like Veldora’s.

Charybdis exuded a weird, ominous sort of beauty.

And with that, hostilities began.

The Pegasus Knights were currently traveling here as fast as they could. Doreth, one of Treyni’s other sisters, used the elemental magic Wind Protect and the legion magic Army Move to boost their speed. A Thought Communication message confirmed that they would arrive earlier than planned.

In the meantime, we decided to engage the foe. Once the Pegasus Knights showed up and it became a free-for-all, we wouldn’t be able to use any large-scale magic. When we made contact with Charybdis, we wanted to strike.

“Eat this! Hellflare!!”

Benimaru kicked things off by choosing his biggest, strongest wide-range flame attack. Always something classic about using your most powerful move the moment you meet your enemy…

Maybe I was overthinking it, but the black dome this move produced, over three hundred feet in radius, was still only big enough to encase Charybdis and one megalodon. I mean, these dudes were way too huge. At 150 or so feet in length, they looked like they were pretty close to us, but they were actually still far away. A six-hundred-foot diameter was pretty big, but to these giants, it must’ve felt cramped, if anything.

And the results?

“You’re kidding me! I put everything I had into that…”

Benimaru’s frustrated muttering was understandable. Charybdis continued to leisurely soar through the air. Its megalodon companion had fallen to earth, mostly burned up by the attack, but Charybdis itself was the same as before. Some of the scales that burned off were replaced by new ones, but that was all. Between its naturally high defense and the effects of Magic Interference, it had successfully resisted Hellflare. It hadn’t even fully incinerated the megalodons, indicating exactly how effective Magic Interference was.

I wasn’t too shocked by this—I was expecting this—but it made me realize again that this foe was going to be a huge pain in the ass. But we all kept our cool. Our plan was to expect this, so we moved on.

“All right. Let’s follow the plan: Break them up and take each one out.”

Our priority now was to buy some time for the Pegasus Knights and wipe up those meddlesome megalodons. Heeding my order, we all spread out to our positions.

I had transformed into a human, too, so I could handle whatever came my way. There were twelve megalodons left. Paring their numbers down looked like it’d be a tough row to hoe.

Each one was an A-ranked monster, but despite their speed, they didn’t have all that much power. They weren’t exactly technical fighters, either—like Charybdis, they lacked intelligence and thus didn’t seem like they required that much caution.

If a megalodon fought that knight spider Gobta dispatched, for example, the spider wouldn’t last a moment—it’d get crushed by those jaws. If it fought Gobta, though, he’d be able to dodge and run all over the place.

To sum up, those sharks were offensive and defensive powerhouses, but their speed in battle wasn’t that much of a threat. Based on its speed—an integral element of any battle—the megalodon wasn’t that astonishing of a monster.

Of course, a single strike from one could still easily be lethal. You didn’t want to approach one with a halfhearted effort, and my forces knew that well.

Geld and his team were the next to launch an attack after Benimaru. I had my command post set up on a slightly elevated hill, so I could see the action unfold below me.

This force under Geld’s command was an elite one, all high orcs ranked B or higher. Anyone ranked below that would potentially get in the way here, so we had them handle the town evacuation instead. They numbered less than a hundred but still took a leading role in our strategy.

Using the trees as cover, the force began trying to entice the megalodons to come closer so they could strike. This, sadly, did not work well. We were anticipating that the sharks wouldn’t be able to move very much surrounded by trees…but with their powerful bodies, they could simply raze any trunks that stood in the way like so much dried kindling.

Following that, the megalodons unleashed a blitzkrieg attack. This involved bashing into the enemy, using scales sharpened like blades to slice into them—you could call it Blade Charge or something similar, if you were inclined to give it a name.

The elites under Geld’s command took evasive maneuvers, but the sharks were just too big. Even though its speed should’ve made it avoidable, a gigantic shark capable of swimming freely through the air made evasion difficult. Now the orcs were the ones caught in a forest prison with the trees getting in their way.

Thanks to everyone being geared for defense like Geld was, there were no apparent deaths. Several dozen of them, however, were seriously hurt, unable to continue in battle. The remaining fighters lying low in the forest were clearly shocked by this—and when faced with the megalodons’ punishing strikes, I couldn’t blame them.

I could hear a scream of rage.

“You’ll pay for hurting my friends!”

It was Geld.

As he shouted, he faced a megalodon in front of him, halting its charge. His entire body was covered in armor, which protected him from the sharp, bladelike scales. Using his ponderous strength, he stopped the shark in its tracks.

“Now! Get ’im!”

The moment the order was made, a horde of high orc fighters took action. They moved slowly, but the damage from their battle axes was heavy. Little by little, cuts and slashes appeared on the megalodon’s body.

But sadly, none were lethal. The sheer size of it meant this barrage of attacks was too little, too late.

The megalodon shook its frame. That was all it took to send several dozen fighters flying. Geld’s face grew stern, harnessing his hatred to apply pressure to the shark’s head. It thrashed around more in response.

It was Geld’s otherworldly strength against the megalodon’s violent rage, and it proved to be an even match. Then fortune smiled upon Geld.

“I will assist you!”

I heard another scream, and a flash of light descended from the sky to land squarely on the megalodon. The creature died right there, never aware of what happened to it.

Gabil had appeared.

His force was functioning as a hit-and-run unit here, and when he saw Geld was in danger, he immediately stepped in to bail him out. Realizing Geld had the megalodon pinned down, he fired off an attack fueled by all his strength—and with his rank of A, that was nothing to sniff at. Even a sixty-foot-long shark couldn’t withstand that kind of force.

And Geld’s good fortune didn’t end there. The dragonewts under Gabil’s command were using the Full Potions they had manufactured to quickly heal the wounded. The potion flowed freely on the battlefield, restoring even the serious cases to perfect health.

“Gwa-ha-ha-ha! Thanks to you restraining that monster, Sir Geld, dealing the final blow could hardly have been easier!”

“Thanks, Sir Gabil. Would you like to keep fighting together with us?”

“Ooh! That sounds like fun. If we can help you out, I would gladly take the opportunity!”

Now Geld and Gabil were a tag team. Their respective forces worked together as well, allowing them to keep up the vicious onslaught against the megalodons without worrying too much about injury. This battle would deepen the bonds between them, no doubt.

Before long, they had succeeded in slaying two more of them.

Lethal combat was breaking out elsewhere as Geld commenced his attack.

Gobta, following Hakuro’s orders, was using his Case Cannon to strike at megalodons. It packed a powerful punch, but there was no way that a bullet an inch wide could strike a lethal blow on these guys. It had opened a gash in the megalodon’s stomach, about half a yard in width, but all that did was add fuel to its anger.

“Hey, uh, I dunno if this is gonna work!”

“Hoh-hoh-hoh! Of course it won’t. I lured it over here so I could have all of you defeat it.”

“Gahh! You’re just bullying me, old man!”

Nobody bothered trying to stop Gobta from yelling bloody murder at him.

What transpired next was a game of tag in the forest. Just as Hakuro declared, he intended to have the goblin riders defeat this megalodon for him. The riders were now surrounding it, ready to stake their lives on this game. Each, in turn, would take a stab with their spears, then edge away. When the shark targeted one, another would attack in their place.

They were all frantic. They weren’t quite as speedy as the shark, but their opponent was enormous. Being able to maneuver more nimbly in the forest gave Gobta’s team a slight advantage.

In a battle under those conditions, even a tiny error could be life-threatening. But they continued with the near-suicidal attack, using High Potions to clear up any wounds.

“If worse comes to worst, we have Full Potions. As long as you aren’t instantly killed, you’ll be fine!” Hakuro’s voice might have been friendly, grandfatherly in a way, but his instructions belied his demon-instructor persona.

“Whoa! Are you serious, old man?”

Only Gobta had the presence of mind to lodge a complaint. The others were too busy attacking and dodging.

“Come on! The bait needs to fully grab its attention! Attackers, don’t think about anything else—just put all your power into pummeling your foe! But don’t forget to fall back after your attack. If you do forget, well, it’ll be a painless death, at least. Hoh-hoh-hoh!”

The very definition of a demon, Hakuro offered Gobta’s riders no mercy in their training.

They numbered only twenty, each taking turns baiting and attacking the shark, and they had divided into five teams that engaged it in a set order. Each one of them toyed with the megalodon, one after the other, although they had to watch out since it wouldn’t always change its target for them. The basic procedure: attack, dodge, move, heal, and prepare for the next strike.

Having no defense on hand, the bait had to devote themselves fully to grabbing the shark’s attention, then dodging. It was the most dangerous of the jobs, and if the megalodon didn’t focus on a new target, it’d have to keep on baiting. The time between the goblins’ attack and the megalodon adjusting its target provided the most dangerous moments of the entire battle.

But Gobta’s goblin riders worked in perfect order, carrying out their shifting roles with no confusion.

“Impressive,” I said.

“Yes. Sir Hakuro taught them well,” Shuna replied.

“He certainly has,” Benimaru agreed. “Growing younger has only added further polish to his demon-instructor ways.”

“Wow! I wish I could play with ’em, too!”

Milim, meanwhile, apparently had the wrong idea about this whole battle. Better not think about it. If I play her game, I lose by default.

“Hey, c’mon, do you think I could—”

“No.”

She was tugging at my clothing, begging for a chance. I had to play bad cop with her.

I wish she wouldn’t look at me like that. I’m about ready to cry myself, here.

Up in the sky, things were getting pretty explosive.

Soei was there, and like Benimaru, he was only capable of using Airflight—and he wasn’t particularly great at it, either. Despite that—and I don’t know how he managed it—he was grappling with a megalodon in midair.

The secret behind it was actually simple. Soka and her four dragonewt guards were positioned above the shark, casting their shadows over its body. Soei could then use Shadow Motion to make a beeline for them. Magic Interference only interfered with magicules in midair, so Shadow Motion didn’t seem to be affected.

I gotta hand it to Soei—the moment he spotted that loophole, he immediately made use of it. But he was just getting started.

Now Soka’s team of five was hovering over a single megalodon. This was indicated by the way both the “real” Soei and four of his Replication-conjured clones were each latched on to a different shark.

“Monster Puppet String!!”

Soei’s four clones each launched the skill at once. It was a secret move, letting the caster fully control monsters that lacked intelligence. Special bewitching string was used to tap into the neural network that carried messages from the brain, replacing them with fabricated orders instead. This immediately placed four megalodons under Soei’s control—using the dead bodies of other animals just came back to bite these guys.

Controlling each of his replicated bodies, Soei had the megalodons attack one another. They split into two pairs, feasting upon each other’s flesh.

“Take those four out when the time is right,” he shouted to the dragonewts above, using the fifth megalodon he was personally riding to head for Charybdis. It was such a brilliant, dazzling display that you almost forgot those sharks were supposed to be A rank.

It looked like Soei was on a whole new level now, much like Benimaru. I’m sure he was putting his all into this fight, but he made it seem incredibly effortless. He couldn’t have been much different in strength from Geld—where did that clear difference come from? Despite the chaos all around me, I couldn’t help but wonder.

As for Soka’s team:

“Understood, Sir Soei. Leave the rest to us.”

Soka gave him a quick salute, steeling her gaze at the megalodons.

“Don’t let up! I refuse to let you do anything to disappoint Sir Soei!”

Her voice was cold as she addressed her team. Toka, Saika, Nanso, and Hokuso looked just as grim and resolute.

I knew Hakuro was a demon instructor. But what about Soei? In a relatively short time, this group of five had grown astonishingly coolheaded. What kind of education did it take to instill that in them?

After a little bit, when the megalodon-on-megalodon fighting grew more intense, the four dragonewts under Soka began their attack. Soka stayed high above, giving out orders for the others to follow.

It worked. Despite the difference in rank, they were bringing the sharks down.

Soei wasn’t the only one pulling off impressive feats today.

And thus, Soka’s team bagged four confirmed shark kills for themselves.

Even more impressive were Shion and Ranga. They must’ve formed a team when I wasn’t paying attention.

“This time, no matter what, I’ve just got to stand out!”

“Mm. Yes. I am in agreement with that opinion.”

So Shion jumped on the back of Ranga, now at his default huge size. He was expecting this, and once she was on, he started running—and jumped right off my command post on the hill, sprinting straight into the air.

Wait. Into the air?

Looking closely, Ranga was running in midair, making a few powerful leaps as he did, as if there were invisible footholds to stand on. And there were, in a way. He was using the extra skill Control Wind to create them. Pretty skillful feat, there. Maybe you could call it Windwalker or something. But anyway, it meant that Ranga could run even faster in midair than he could on the ground.

This art used magicules, however, which meant that Magic Interference could affect it. No matter how sturdy Ranga’s footholds were, a megalodon’s interference might be enough to shatter them…or so I thought.

As I watched, trying to figure out what he was doing, Ranga showed off some truly amazing moves. In a moment, he was in the air above a megalodon and jumping off, gaining speed as he practically dive-bombed the enemy directly below him.

At his full size, Ranga was a good fifteen feet or so in length. Not much compared to a megalodon, but still, that’s a lot of mass. And now Ranga was approaching the shark, combining his own leaping skills with the pull of gravity to gain more speed than running alone could accomplish. But this wasn’t simply a ramming attack. Shion was still riding him, and her large sword was out.

Despite being parallel with the ground below, Shion couldn’t have looked more serene. And the moment that Ranga and the megalodon crossed paths, she brought her sword down, the light-purple glow it emitted arcing across the air. She had used her aura to expand and strengthen the sword, extending it to over three times its normal size. Like a guillotine blade thundering down from above, the demon sword descended…and neatly removed the megalodon’s head.

“Behold! Decapitating Demon Blade!”

Decapitating Demon Blade was the name of the skill. Instead of unleashing pure aura like Ogresword Cannon, it simply formed it into a set shape for use. But thanks to working with Ranga to gain as much speed as she possibly could for the strike, the tip of the extended sword flickered faster than the speed of sound, cleaving right through the megalodon’s head.

It was a simple, yet absolutely heroic move, I thought, and in that way it befitted Shion well. After that, now that the shark’s Magic Interference was gone, Ranga shot some lightning down to burn the body, and that was that.

Shion and Ranga used the same tactics to take out two more of the sharks.

“Fighting these huge, tactless brutes is no fun at all. I grow tired of it. I’d like to target their leader, but what do you think, Ranga?”



“Shion, that opinion speaks to my own heart as well. Let us go and see what this foe’s strength truly is.”

“That’s the spirit, Ranga. Let’s do it!”

Their excuses made, the two of them sprinted toward Charybdis.

There were, at first, thirteen megalodons, each an A-ranked monster. Of the two remaining survivors, one was already dead, slashed to ribbons by Hakuro’s barrage of strikes. We had lost nobody on our side to death or injury. Things were going well, and I breathed an internal sigh of relief over it.

“Ah, how disappointing. Your mobility and ability to avoid danger have improved, but your offense is still woefully lacking. You couldn’t even defeat a single one of them… Once this battle is over, I will need to toughen up your training.”

“Whoa! Come on, gramps! If you toughen it up any further, I’m gonna die! Like, really, really die!”

“Did you just call me gramps?”

“Aghh?!”

I heard a pained scream from Gobta, and then all was quiet. I wasn’t sure what had happened. Maybe some passing megalodon bit him or something, huh? So I guess we now have one casualty. I’m sure he’s not dead, though, so I’ll just believe that he’s still all right.

—And as I was thinking all this nonsense, new developments began to unfold. Soei was controlling the final megalodon like a well-trained mount, making it sink its teeth mercilessly into Charybdis. It was latched on to the great dragon now, looking like a work of surrealist art.

The megalodon was still alive, but it was no longer any sort of threat. That just left Charybdis to tackle.

Paying no further mind to the megalodon, Soei flew over to Charybdis.

“Whoa, you think Soei’s gonna be all right?”

“Sir Rimuru, there is nothing to worry about. Soei is second only to me in terms of real strength. This is the perfect chance to test out Charybdis’s powers.”

Benimaru heard me muttering to myself and cheerfully replied. He didn’t sound worried at all, implying just how much he believed in Soei.

“Besides, we have that pair in the battle, too.” He pointed to Shion and Ranga.

They were both on the dragon’s back. Presumably they had climbed up to a pretty high altitude to avoid Magic Interference, then dive-bombed down on it. Looking at Charybdis, though… The sheer size of it was mind-blowing. Being over 150 feet long was a threat in and of itself. Simply dropping a mass that size on a city from above would result in unimaginable damage.

Understood. Based on an estimate of its size, from a height of—

That’s fine, Great Sage. Thanks, but I don’t need to crunch the numbers. It’d just depress me to hear it anyway. If you’re gonna be that way, how about giving me some easy way to beat this guy?

Radio silence, huh? The Sage had this incredibly bad habit of going mum exactly when I needed it the most. Or maybe it was just pouting at me.

Anyway.

Before my eyes, Soei, Shion, and Ranga had commenced their attack on Charybdis.

Things have been going well so far. Maybe…

But despite my wishes, it wasn’t that easy. The sheer size was a true menace, and now that was clearer than ever. All three launched attacks, but none worked at all. They were up against a 150-foot-long frame; anything they could throw at it was little more than peeling a layer off an onion. And more importantly, none of it could reach its magic-controlling neural network.

Charybdis, technically speaking, was not a living thing. It was a monster with a pretty twisted ecology, and thus it had no internal organs or anything. Picture it as using the flesh of lesser dragons to construct an armor of meat surrounding it.

This was to be expected, and it was also a given that no half-baked attack would be enough to stab through it.

“So it’s come to this. My magic had virtually no effect from outside of a thousand feet…but if a close-range approach like that fails as well, there is nothing we can do. Magic doesn’t work, and now we know that physical attacks are just as meaningless,” an anxious Treyni said.

“See, this is why I told you to leave it to me…”

Even at a time like this, Milim was still wheedling incessantly. I had no time for her at the moment.

According to Treyni, even Aerial Blade—the strongest elemental magic spell she had at her disposal—was reduced to only about a tenth of its natural power. Far from the deciding blow it was meant to be. It did deal some damage, but as she put it, the wounds immediately healed themselves.

Plus, after the attack had continued for a while, it suddenly flew into a violent rage—the pain receptors must’ve taken their time transmitting their message to its brain.

“It suddenly sped up and attempted to ram me. Each of the scales on its body slashed at us, like small individual swords. The light rays from its eye scattered the nearby magicules. To beings like ourselves, which create their corporeal forms through magicules, it was a very difficult attack to deal with.”

She recounted the situation for us.

I had this explained to me at the meeting hall, but seeing it in person made the sheer ferocity easy to understand. Run-of-the-mill attacks were meaningless against this monster.

“…Oh no!” Treyni suddenly shouted.

“Its single eye flashed red for a moment. That might be a sign that Charybdis is preparing to attack,” Benimaru explained.

Uh, I saw it, too, guys, okay? I was just, you know, taking a more laid-back approach to assessing it. Besides, Shion had just summoned her full aura to bust out an Ogresword Cannon, so I was kind of distracted by that. Maybe that’s what pissed Charybdis off, but regardless of the reason, it looked dangerous. I decided to send a Thought Communication their way.

Did you hear that? It might be hatching something, so keep your guard up!

Yes, Sir Rimuru!

Understood.

I hear you, my master!

I nodded at the replies. I’m sure they didn’t need that “keep your guard up” reminder, but hey, just in case.

But my message turned out to be an incredibly good idea. Just a moment later, Soei and the others were exposed to a truly massive attack. A deafening sound akin to fingernails on glass filled the air, itself enough to make it feel like your very soul was being contaminated. It was the sound of the scales that covered Charybdis’s body grating against one another. And then…

“My heavens! I had no idea it possessed an attack like that…”

“This…is bad. It can’t be evaded.”

The tension was clear in Treyni’s and Benimaru’s voices. From every inch of its own body, Charybdis was unleashing a calamity, one that would spread death and destruction wherever it went.

And in the midst of it…

“Hohh! So this is Tempest Scale, the attack that made Charybdis feared as a tyrant! Never seen that before!”

That was Milim. Having nothing else to do, she was offering color commentary to me now. The name of it doesn’t matter. And if you knew about that, I really wish you could’ve told us…

I almost asked her what she knew, but I stopped myself. Now was no time for a long-winded explanation, and the attack was pretty self-evident anyway.

Right now, I was more worried for Shion and our other allies. It had happened right after I warned them to stay on guard, so Soei, Shion, and Ranga were just barely able to take evasive action. But they were being threatened by Charybdis’s overwhelming supply of scales—hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands—being shot out in all directions like high-caliber bullets. They varied in size, but even the tiniest were several inches in diameter. Take one unguarded, and it’d no doubt be even more disastrous for you than a sword slash.

There were tens of thousands of them raining down at incredible speed. There was no place to run. The so-called Tempest Scale worked at a far broader range than even Hellflare, which was capable of mowing down entire landscapes.

“Ngh, I can’t dodge them all. Ranga and I have Shadow Motion, but…”

“Dodge them? What a childish thing to suggest. This won’t be enough to kill me!” Shion snickered at Soei’s assessment.

Her eyes were bloodshot, and I was pretty sure she had lost all sense of reason. She was brandishing her sword at Charybdis, not even bothering to protect herself against the storm of scales. She was obviously in danger.

Soei and Ranga met in the air once more.

“…Soei, you should flee. I will serve as a shield for Shion.”

Fully stretching out his legs, Ranga leaped away from their foe’s Magic Interference radius, then used the extra skill Control Wind to turn back toward Charybdis. The first wave of scales had already reached him, cutting through skin. Just as he promised, he intended to shield Shion with his own body.

“Are you crazy, Ranga? You need to go!” Shion shouted, regaining her senses.

“Heh-heh-heh… I imagine that Sir Rimuru, too, would select the option that gave him the greatest chance of survival. But with a body this size, I cannot find shadows suitable enough for me to use Shadow Motion with. You go alone, Soei.”

Shadow Motion often seemed like an all-powerful skill, but even it had its limitations. In the air, with only stable and temporary footholds available, it simply wasn’t available to Ranga. Hearing this made even Soei hesitate for a bit.

“…The greatest chance of survival, eh? Then I’m staying here. But don’t worry. I’ll make the real me retreat before I die.”

“Ha! How Soei-like of you. In that case, may we all live to see another day!” Shion laughed, voice loud and clear.

Faced with the terrifying Tempest Scale, not one dared to give up on themselves. It could be called reckless, but to me, I couldn’t have asked for anything else.

They were all ready for this.

“You people really are a bunch of idiots, you know that? You could at least count on me now, of all times.”

I decided now was the time to speak.

“““?!”””

All three froze in surprise. I flew in front of them, raising my left arm against the advancing scales.

“““Sir Rimuru!!”””

I could hear them shouting my name, a mixture of shock and joy in their voices. I didn’t respond, head faced forward to handle what must be done.

Which was…

“Consume them all, Glutton!!”

With my call, the insatiable Glutton within me stirred. The results unfolded in a single moment. I imagine not too many knew what had happened. The wall of innumerable scales that loomed over them just a moment ago had now neatly disappeared.

“A…astounding. Well done, Sir Rimuru…”

It was Soei who found his voice first. And really, I was just as surprised as he was.

I flew up there since, hey, if it’s a long-range attack, I could just eat it all up.

…Okay, that’s a lie. The Great Sage actually tipped me off. All I did was take it at its word and step up to protect my friends. Using Shadow Motion to appear in front of them, I just barely made it in time to follow the Sage’s advice and unleash Glutton.



The effect was awe-inspiring. All the scales that hurtled through the air between us and Charybdis were fully consumed. This skill was even more off the charts than I had thought—and well done on the Sage’s part, too, for making the timely suggestion.

Not that I needed to tell it that.

Instead, now seemed like a good time to look a little cool around everyone else. “Leave the rest to me. You three go back down and rest,” I declared, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“B-but… We can still help you…”

I stopped Soei before he could continue. “Look! It’s already regenerating its scales. That wasn’t a single-use skill—it’s something it can launch again and again. I don’t know if I can protect you all from a second round of that. We should be glad that we made Charybdis attack us at all, really—if we didn’t know about those scales and left the Pegasus Knights to handle it, the casualty list would’ve been huge. You can be proud of yourselves today, people!”

Soei retreated back, apparently convinced.

“I wish you good luck!”

“Be careful, Sir Rimuru.”

“You may summon me at any time, master.”

Ranga carried them off after they all said their farewells. Now, then. I just gave them that big-hero act, but being faced with this huge freak, I wasn’t exactly feeling serene. No point whining about it now, though. I’ll just have to do what I can.

It was time to face off against Charybdis.

I wasn’t kidding, though; we were really lucky we got to see Charybdis’s Tempest Scale before the Pegasus Knights showed up. The scales that didn’t quite fall in range of Glutton were causing serious damage in virtually all directions. If we took the brunt of that shot, defense just wouldn’t be possible. We’d all be mincemeat.

None of our forces took a direct hit from the scales, thankfully, but the nearby forest had been heavily damaged—or really, violently reshaped. The amount of power behind it was just ridiculous.

Well, better do my job, then. The first question to tackle was how many seconds I had until another Tempest Scale barrage came along. I could already see the Pegasus Knight reinforcements off in the distance. They were stopped, apparently just as awed by that last attack as we were. Presumably someone would explain what’s up while I was engaged with Charybdis.

It was my job to keep that dragon engaged with me and reveal as many of its attacks as possible. After that, we could keep ourselves at a safe margin and gradually chip away at the guy together. It’d be a marathon, but we’ll just have to slog through it.

Now I was starting to regret turning down Milim’s offer. Really, I wouldn’t mind if we swapped positions right now. But that’d look so lame. I should give this the ol’ college try, at least—if we just can’t do it, I’ll think about it then.

So our mission to conquer Charybdis was now fully under way. To kick things off, I fired a bolt of magic fire, one of my new moves. The moment it struck Charybdis, a searing Dark Flame burned and wrinkled its skin. Just as I thought—it worked.

A regular old spout of fire would’ve been snuffed out by its magic resistance. Dark Flame would’ve been no different, its magical energy dissipating the moment it made contact. To get around that, I’d either have to make physical contact with it and attack, or—as I did now—cover my magic with something else until it made contact.

That’s why I tried loading a magical bolt with Dark Flame and shooting it. The result was a success, making Charybdis writhe in pain from the intense heat… Or at least, act a little irritated, maybe? It’s so big that I wasn’t sure that bolt did much damage at all. Can’t give up now, though. Enough of them, and the damage is bound to pile up over time.

So I kept attacking, spurring myself forward. I tried a few different moves, gauging the dragon’s response. It seemed like Dark Flame and Dark Thunder both worked well against it. Fire-based attacks worked across a broader range of its body, and the lightning seemed to affect its magical neural network a little.

Along with that useful info, however, I learned a few things I wish I didn’t have to.

“Uh…hang on. This guy has Ultraspeed Regeneration, doesn’t it?”

I whispered it out loud, even though I knew nobody would respond.

Understood. Judging from the recovery speed of its physical structure, it is not incorrect to assume the individual “Charybdis” possesses the extra skill Ultraspeed Regeneration.

Oh, wait, someone did respond. Or I should say, I learned something at that moment that I fervently wished wasn’t true.

Basically, Ultraspeed Regeneration was what made Charybdis’s scales grow back at such high speed. Once that process wrapped up, I was sure there’d be another Tempest Scale blast—even quicker than before, if it didn’t bother aiming at the storm this time. Perhaps as soon as three minutes—but if I could damage parts of it enough, maybe it wouldn’t be able to release scales from those sections of its body.

Confirming this, I used Thought Communication to let everyone else know. Then, with a now-ample amount of info in hand, I figured out how I would get the Pegasus Knights involved.

The battle continued…for over ten hours after that.

Milim had grown so bored with sitting on the sidelines that she fell asleep, but I was fighting for my life. We had to damage Charybdis quicker than it could heal itself, or else we’d never get anywhere. All of us plunged ourselves into this desperate struggle, drinking mighty swigs of healing potion with abandon as we fought.

I’d say we were about 30 percent of the way, maybe? We were all in on the effort. Anyone who could fly was up there, along with Ranga and Soei via Shadow Motion, while Benimaru and the dryad sisters lobbed magical attacks from afar and Shuna and the rest provided support healing and protection. Beams of searing light and sharply honed scales zipped to and fro across the battlefield, magic and skills flying past the other. It was an incredible, yet terrifying spectacle to see.

All of us were working together and giving it our all, and we were not quite a third of the way there. We were all keeping a safe distance, so none of us had dropped out yet. I think there might have been one dropout, actually, but maybe I was just imagining it. But even the most well trained among us were gonna have trouble keeping this pace up forever. We weren’t going to be afforded a single mistake—lose focus, and not only you, but our entire strategy would go up in smoke.

It seemed hopeless. But nobody in our army dared to give up. And just as I was racking my brain, figuring out what I should do:

“Gnh. Grnhhh…aahhh… Y-you… Mi…”

Hmm? Did I just hear something?

“Curse youuu…uuu, Mi—Mili… Milim!!”

Huh?! Milim? Did it say Milim just now? I immediately had the Great Sage perform an analysis.

Understood. A small, slight presence of life is confirmed to be within the body that Charybdis is occupying. It is believed that the damage it has taken has led to biological distortion, perhaps because it did not fully assimilate with the body’s magical core. In addition—

I listened to the details.

According to the Sage, Charybdis used the bodies of other magic-born in order to create its own physical form. These bodies would normally disappear and be assimilated, but if the magic-born involved held strong enough feelings or anger or disgust, the assimilation might not fully complete itself.

And now its rage was aimed at Milim, not me. Hmm? Wait a minute. So did this monster head straight for our town because some magic-born out there had a bone to pick with Milim?

Oh, great.

This didn’t have anything to do with us! And here I thought it was picking up some kind of magic waves from Veldora inside me. Talk about overthinking.

And…hang on. So it’s no problem at all if I shove this on Milim’s shoulders, then?

The shocking truth hit me.

The moment I woke her up, I sent Milim a Thought Communication.

Hey, uh, Milim, I think this guy’s got a score to settle with ya, after all…

Ooh, I heard it. Looks like Charybdis is using Phobio, the Black Leopard Fang, as its core body. You know, the guy who was here before?

Despite being a long distance away, Milim had still picked up on Charybdis’s thought waves, using her Dragon’s Eye to accurately discover its identity. Its analytical abilities were ahead of even the Great Sage’s, but I should have expected nothing less from her, I guess.

I suppose you’re right. And here I was keeping you idle because I thought this was our guest to handle.

Ooh, does that mean I can tackle it, maybe?! she excitedly asked, not bothering to wait for my full explanation.

Just as I expected, she pounced on the offer. Nice. I knew she was champing at the bit for this from the start, but still. Gotta hand it to her; I’m impressed she had the patience to wait for so long.

Okay. You take my place. Sorry I got between you and your friend here, I guess.

I made sure to emphasize that. This was Milim’s guest, not mine. Now I could take Charybdis, this unfathomably hideous calamity of a monster, and palm it off on Milim.

Oh, and one more thing:

Also, uh, Phobio was working for Carillon, wasn’t he? You think you could maybe spit him out of that thing while you take the monster out? I’d like to rescue him alive, if possible…

This was important. I knew it was a pretty crazy thing to ask, faced with a monster like Charybdis and all, but I had a feeling Milim was up to the task. Plus, if she killed a servant of the demon lord Carillon, that’d just create new problems for us. I had another motivation, too, but that one was so pie in the sky—I could save it for later. For now, I just wanted Phobio safe.

Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! You got it! That’ll be a cinch for me. I’ve learned how to hold back my power a little lately, too. Lemme show you how good I’ve gotten at it!

Milim gladly accepted, relishing the chance to boast about herself. She’d learned how to hold back, though…? Like she had any idea what that meant. For some reason, that made me a bit concerned. I opted not to voice that concern, though, as I let her take care of the rest.

And now that that was squared away, the rest would happen pretty quickly.

“Okay, guys! Retreat from the area immediately!”

“What are you talking about, Sir Rimuru? We have hardly given up yet.”

“Please, just do what I say! Believe in me! You all have to get out of here!”

My shouting was enough to make Dolph, captain of the Pegasus Knights, call out the order to retreat, albeit grudgingly. We were in a state of total exhaustion, it was true. Things would gradually get worse for us like this. Perhaps he figured my strategy was to wait for the remaining knight corps to show up before reengaging.

“It’s all yours now! Good luck!” And with that, Dolph sent his cavalry back. My own friends didn’t voice any such objections, of course; they had picked up on enough of my Thought Communication to get the picture.

And so, once I was sure everyone except me was gone, I sent the signal.

Okay, Milim! All set here!

“You got it!”

She had already flown into the air, not bothering to wait for the signal. Her dragon wings were stretched high behind her, a self-contented smile on her face. In another moment, she was next to me.

“Gnh. Grrrhhhhh! Mili— Milimmmmm!!”

Noticing her presence, Charybdis arched its body and glared straight at us. It was already too late.

“Well, here we go! Here’s what ‘holding back’ looks like for me! Drago Buster!!”

A fantastic stream of bluish-white light rushed from Milim’s outstretched arms.

It was a light of destruction that made everything disappear.

…?! Cannot analyze. Collecting data… Failed.

The Great Sage within me sounded a bit surprised. Maybe I was just imagining it, but still. It failed to identify the exact nature of Milim’s attack, but the results were pretty obvious.

The sight before me was forcing me to rethink the meaning of the term holding back. Several streams of the white light had pooled together, crashing right through Charybdis’s body. It began to eat away at it, giving the dragon no time for Ultraspeed Regeneration to work. The 150-foot-long frame was no match for it, and in the blink of an eye, it disappeared.

All I can say is, thank heavens this was an airborne target. If it was on land, it would’ve reshaped the entire geography of this forest. That was the sheer enormity of the attack. We had spent the past X number of hours gradually whittling away at it, taking out 30 percent of its energy, and now it was destroyed beyond repair in the space of several seconds.

Truly, Milim’s strength could only be described as beyond imagination.

Charybdis was gone, and a little piece of its body fell to the ground. Or not a piece, actually—this was Phobio, that magic-born it was built around. Milim kept her promise. She called it holding back; I would call it a masterpiece of work.

I flew over to the magic-born, grabbing him before he smashed against the ground. He was alive, if barely, which meant I got what I wanted. I decided to get to work immediately, preferring if nobody else had to see this.

Analyzing Phobio’s status, I found that he and Charybdis were 90 percent fused with each other. Without quick action, the beast would just resurrect itself again. That’s why I needed to do this.



“What are you doing with him?”

“Just watch,” I said, dodging the question as I began. “We can’t let Phobio go free, right? I figured we better take care of him right now. Fully.”

The task at hand involved fully separating Phobio from Charybdis. My Deviant unique skill allowed me to synthesize and separate things, and it’d be the latter that I’d use for this job. However, just doing that alone would cause Charybdis, a spiritual life-form, to float away out of my hands. That’s where my other unique skill, Glutton, would come in.

Even with my Sage and all, I wasn’t able to fully combine unique skills together. Under its control, however, I could run them in parallel to one another. It would be a delicate sequence, a bit like performing surgery, but I was capable of it. If I screwed it up, I’d have to take Phobio’s life as well, so this could have repercussions on my relationship with Carillon. I really wanted this to work, if I could help it.

I focused on the job, devoting all my strength to it. First, I separated a little; then I consumed the bit I took off. The Sage took care of controlling the two disparate skills for me, so I had to do the actual job all by myself.

The battle against Charybdis was starting to seem like someone else’s problem by now—and I knew the reason why. It was Milim. She had dozens of times more magical energy than I did; a demon lord with untold amounts of power. Having her around meant I wasn’t nervous at all about facing Charybdis. I knew in my mind that we were all in mortal danger, but in one corner of my brain, I was spoiled by the fact that I could always call on Milim for help. There was no real sense of danger to me.

This, on the other hand, was different. I couldn’t leave this job to anyone else. Mess it up, and it could be the spark that touched off a whole other crisis. That was why I didn’t want anyone else watching—I wanted to take full responsibility for whatever happened.

Of course, I had Milim right next to me, curiously taking in the proceedings, but…

Report. The magical core of the individual Charybdis has successfully been separated from the individual Phobio. Consuming the magical core of the individual Charybdis… Successful. Analyzing core… Partially failed. Isolating and continuing to analyze. The following skills have been obtained—

Success. It felt like that took forever, but I had completed it before everyone who evacuated out for Milim’s attack had come back.

A torrent of information streamed into my head. I didn’t like the “partially failed” bit of the Sage’s report, but now that everyone was back, I filed that concern away for later. Given that it was isolated or whatever, I was pretty sure there was nothing dangerous about it.

All I had left to do was give some healing potion to the weakened Phobio before I forgot. I gave him a swig of my very own, handmade Full Potion, quickly stabilizing his physical condition.

Now to wait for him to awaken.

Thus Charybdis, the threat that landed on our doorstep, was fully slain.

“Would you be able to explain to us what happened?”

That was the first thing knight captain Dolph said when he saw me.

Hmm. Yeah. I guess you’d want an explanation, wouldn’t you?

“Well, um… You know. This girl here, she’s actually the demon lord Milim, so…”

“Ha-ha-ha, you certainly enjoy your jokes, Sir Rimuru.”

His eyes weren’t laughing.

“But if you had a magical weapon capable of outputting so much force, I wish you could have informed us of that in advance! We’ll be expecting a more official explanation later on.”

He was clearly miffed at me, and I could understand why. I didn’t have much excuse, really.

“Still, whatever you did managed to eliminate Charybdis, a being that could have been a true disaster to all living races. It is a stroke of good luck, indeed. If you will excuse me, then, I need to report to His Majesty.”

He relaxed his scowl a bit and bowed.

“Thanks for all your help. I will provide my own explanation to King Gazel shortly.” I returned the gesture.

I meant that. This was a demon lord–class monster, and the dwarves didn’t hesitate to step up against it. Without their support, I probably wouldn’t have even noticed that Phobio was the magic-born driving its rage. Chances are that I would’ve asked Milim to kill it anyway, but then she wouldn’t have “held back”—she would’ve atomized it all the way, and I wouldn’t have lifted a finger to stop her, no doubt.

It was that small sliver of extra time that helped us notice the ever-so-slight discrepancy between Phobio and Charybdis.

“Provide your thanks to His Majesty, not to me. Also, if I may speak only for myself…” Dolph came a bit closer, lowering his voice. “If you are going to report to the king, could I ask you to travel to Dwargon to make the report personally? His Majesty is still rather distressed about how your last visit turned out. The exile and refusal of board he sentenced you to has already been lifted, so…”

This was probably less Dolph’s personal invitation and more his interpretation of Gazel’s feelings, I imagined.

“All right. In that case, tell King Gazel that I would love to be extended an official invitation. I look forward to visiting again and giving my report.”

“Excellent! I am sure His Majesty will be overjoyed. Kaijin, Garm, and the rest are also welcome to return at any time. They could join you, if they chose to.”

Dolph was already excited about the idea. I’m sure Kaijin and the gang would like to visit home sometime. Taking them along could be nice, and I’m sure that’s the whole reason Dolph brought this up with me. He might have that gruff military veneer, but I guess he really looked out for others, too.

After that and a few other small pleasantries, the Pegasus Knights were busily hurrying their way back home. I felt truly grateful, from the bottom of my heart, that none were hurt.

With the danger past, I went back into slime form. But just as we were about to head home…

“Ngh… Where—where am I? What happened to me…?”

I heard confused muttering.

Phobio had awoken. It put Benimaru and Shion on their guard, but Phobio wouldn’t have had any energy to fight right now. His wounds were fully healed, but his magic power was exhausted. Plus, with Charybdis fully extracted and eliminated from him, he was back to “merely” being a high-level magic-born—nobody we couldn’t take, if it came to that.

“Hey there. You up? Do you remember what you did?”

I spoke slowly to the bleary-eyed Phobio, who was gradually regaining consciousness at the sound of my words. Then he jumped up and, incredibly suddenly, prostrated himself before me and Milim. Guess he remembered.

“I—I am sorry! I mean, I deeply apologize to you! I’ve done something horrible to you, Lady Milim…and I’ve put so much trouble upon all of you a second time!”

The pallid magic-born before me was a lot more impulsive with his emotions than I had thought. It seemed unnatural, in a way, someone like that causing so much chaos.

I was just about to ask what drove him to do all this when Treyni asked an even more pointed question.

“How…did you know where Charybdis was sealed away? Because I highly doubt you merely stumbled upon it.”

That was a good point. This was a proud magic-born; if revenge against Milim was what he wanted, I bet he figured he could do that by his own hand. But pursuing revenge to the point that he instilled Charybdis into his own body? That seemed quite unusual, and I had been wondering about that for a while.

“Well…”

To his credit, he didn’t hide any of it and fully explained what happened to him—the request he made to the two masked agents of the Moderate Jesters.

“A pair of strange-looking masked clowns? But that location is secret—only we knew where it was, and it was the hero herself who told us. A formidable foe, indeed, if they were able to track it down… And masked, you say?”

This seemed to trouble Treyni in particular. She seemed to know them.

“Was one of the masks asymmetrical, perhaps? Drawn to look like they were making fun of you?”

“N-no. There was a girl whose mask made it look like she was crying, and then a fat man with an angry mask. They called themselves Teare and Footman.”

Not the guy Treyni knew, then. But…wow, mysterious masked magic-born, huh?

…Wait a sec.

“Hey, I think Benimaru said there was one there during the attack on their homeland…”

“Yes. I just thought of that myself. A rotund magic-born wearing a mask of anger. That was one of the people controlling the orcs!”

So that was it. The figure who pitted me against Benimaru and the other ogres in the first place.

“Indeed. One of the orc generals working away from my command was accompanied by a high-level magic-born bodyguard, hired by Gelmud. That man’s name was Footman,” Geld added.

Then—

“And come to think of it, when Sir Laplace rescued me, he said he was in Gelmud’s employ as well… He said he was the vice president of the Moderate Jesters, which he described as a jacks-of-all-trades group. And the mask he had on… It was just as Treyni described. Asymmetrical—and with an arrogant expression on it!”

Gabil dropped the bombshell.

Events from across the land were suddenly being connected together.

“…I see. The man was called Laplace, you say?”

“And…Footman? I will be certain to remember that.”

Treyni’s eyes were filled with a dangerous light, and Benimaru wore a defiant smile.

I was surprised to hear that Treyni had made contact with these guys as well. Given her penchant for popping in and out of existence all over the place, they must have crossed paths somewhere. And while Footman had not personally interacted with the ogres back there, he was certainly a major factor behind the destruction of their homeland. They were not fully our enemies, perhaps, but they certainly had something against us all.

The Moderate Jesters. A mysterious band of jacks-of-all-trades. They sounded like trouble, so I decided to ask Milim if she knew anything.

“Mmm? I’ve never heard of that group before, no. Nobody said anything about using guys like those to cause strife among races or anything. How interesting! I wish I could’ve gotten to meet them.”

Milim, at least, had heard nothing from her demon lord cohorts. She didn’t know many details about the whole orc lord operation, I suppose. Gelmud was the main man behind all that, apparently—Milim just got the outlines of it, not the little details like hiring a bunch of jokers to help push things along.

“Maybe it was Clayman scheming behind the scenes with this, not Gelmud. He had the connections for that,” she indifferently continued.

“Clayman? Who’s that?”

“Mm? One of the demon lords. He just loves dirty little schemes like that.”

Geez. She was exposing him like it was no big deal, but what the heck? The guy was still just a suspect; we didn’t know if he was the real criminal here yet—but as Milim put it, Clayman was the kind of guy who’d arrange something like that. Not because Gelmud wasn’t up to the task, but because Clayman was always trying to set it up so he’d have an advantage over the other demon lords.

The orc lord operation was devised by three of those lords, who assigned the job to Gelmud in order to keep things balanced among themselves. If any of them was gonna try to game the system, as Milim described it, it was definitely Clayman. I didn’t have much to comment about on that point, so I filed the fact away in the back of my mind.

I had thought this whole affair was over, but there were still plainly some issues left to tackle.

“Something does bother me. This Laplace… He said he was not among the monster tribes.” After Milim was done speaking, Treyni offered another observation.

In this world, a monster tribe could still be defined as pretty much anyone who was hostile against the human races. Saying you weren’t a monster was another way of saying you were allied with humans and so on. Assuming you weren’t lying. But if they had no quarrel with the human race, that seemed feasible enough to me—there were bound to be other magic-born who took my approach.

Or… Hang on.

“He said he wasn’t magic?” I asked Treyni.

“Yes, Sir Rimuru. He might have supporters in human society.”

Aha. Yeah, this was rough. A major issue, in fact. But I had no way of confirming it. Without any evidence, debating over it was useless. So I resolved to keep an eye out for this weird group and wrapped up my interrogation of Phobio.

We now had a fairly ample amount of info to work with. Putting it all together, one truth became clear about this incident: These Moderate Jester guys liked approaching their targets with claims of offering help. It allowed the Jesters to achieve their goals without dirtying their own hands.

With the orc lord, they attempted to set off a war among monster races. This time, they wanted to have Charybdis fight us—or Milim, at least. It sounded to me like Phobio had simply been taken advantage of. The real mastermind was someone else.

“Sounds like they used and abused you, huh? Try to be a bit more careful about taking fishy offers like this in the future, all right?”

Phobio wasn’t exactly free of fault here, but given that the real culprit was elsewhere, it didn’t seem right to punish him. I didn’t want to stir up added trouble, besides. If he swore he wouldn’t bother us anymore, I was glad to let him go free.

“…Huh?”

He was still prostrate before us.

“I, er, I don’t deserve to be forgiven. I accepted this offer at my own discretion. It had nothing to do with Lord Carillon, so please, allow me to pay for this with my life…”

It was weird, seeing him act so bold and brave while bent over in front of us.

“N-no, really, I have no reason to kill you. Right, Milim?”

“Mm-hmm! Of course! I wanted to give you a wallop, sure, but I’m all grown-up now. I’m not angry at all, so consider yourself forgiven!”

A wallop, huh…? Doesn’t sound all that grown-up to me. But oh well.

“See? And if she forgives you, I wouldn’t worry about any of us.”

“…But I let my anger take control of me…”

“Mm-hmm. And probably… That guy with the angry mask? He was probably using those emotions of yours.”

Phobio looked up at my observation. “Come to think of it…that bastard said he was attracted to me by my feelings of anger and disgust…”

His face was astonished as it dawned on him. I was just giving him a bit of a lecture, but maybe I was more on target than I thought.

“Yeah. See? So don’t worry about it.”

“He’s right. And you’re fine with that, too, aren’t you, Carillon?”

Huh? Carillon?

As if to answer my question, a man appeared from the underbrush. He had an attractively rough, unpolished look, sporting a well-tailored but well-worn outfit. His short blond hair stood on end, his sharp eyes only adding to the intense atmosphere he presented.

“Heh. You noticed, huh, Milim?”

“Of course.”

“Yeah, of course,” he replied.

Between the name Carillon and the obvious friendliness they shared, I could guess the identity of this wild-looking man projecting his inner strength in the quiet. He was nowhere near as large as Charybdis, but he presented exactly that sort of overpowering aura—if not more of one, like he’d blow you away with a thought.

So this is Carillon the demon lord, huh?

“Hey. The name’s Carillon. Thanks for helpin’ this guy out without killing him.”

Thus the demon lord Carillon greeted me, looking me straight in the eye.

The air grew suddenly tense.

I had no words to overcome the daunting aura of strength that overwhelmed me. Once again, I recalled how the term demon lord wasn’t just for show. But as the leader of this land, I couldn’t let myself be cowed like this.

“I wasn’t expecting the man himself to show up. My name is Rimuru Tempest, the leader of Tempest, our nation of monsters here in the forest,” I declared, summoning all the courage I could.

“Pfft! A single magic-born person, establishing a new nation? Perhaps I woulda believed it in the past, but in this world, you’d have to be suicidal. I was told the orc lord killed our mystery magic-born, but I guess that report wasn’t too true, huh? You’re the masked magic-born that killed Gelmud, aren’t you?”

You look at this slime, and that’s the conclusion you reach? That was the only thing I could think. But Milim was here, and maybe he got to witness the battle against Charybdis as well.

“Yep. You’re right.” I transformed into a human. “So are you here to get back at me for that, or…?”

I doubted it, but I asked anyway. Carillon grinned at the question.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha! Funny. No wonder Milim likes you.”

The laughter instantly dispelled all the tension. But once he was done guffawing to himself, Carillon’s face stiffened. Then, he did something none of us was expecting. He admitted he was wrong.

“Well, sorry one of my men went berserk on you. Guess I neglected to supervise him well enough, and I hope you’ll forgive me for that.”

He didn’t bow his head or anything, but he did apologize in the only way he could. Plus:

“You could say I owe you one now, I s’pose. Lemme know if you have anything I can help ya with.”

Really, he couldn’t have been more sincere with us. Carillon, this demon lord who was far more powerful than myself, was acting in good faith with someone like me. I suppose it just proves how incredibly, deeply broad-minded he was. He owes me one, huh? If that’s how he sees it, I can think of something…

“In that case, it’d be nice if you could sign a nonaggression treaty with us.”

“…Is that all you need? All right. By my name as demon lord—or should I say, as the Beast Master Carillon of the Beast Kingdom of Eurazania—I swear I’ll never turn our blades on any of you. That assumes, of course, you promise the same to us.”

He accepted it easily—another sign of his incredible capabilities. I found it quite admirable.

Since we were already flustered enough, we agreed to send envoys later on to work out the details.

I didn’t know how much I could trust in this pact; given how impulsive Phobio turned out to be, could his master Carillon be much the same way? It should mean that he wouldn’t butt in on our affairs for a while, at least.

If I could learn more about Eurazania, maybe we could open diplomatic relations with them, too. That’d be the best thing.

And that pretty much wrapped up the day. Carillon let his fists do the talking with Phobio, putting him near the brink of death once more, but we all have our funny traits like that, I suppose. He lent his limp subordinate a shoulder as the two of them shuffled away and teleported themselves back home.

It was time for us to return home, too. The day had its ups and downs, but things were finally starting to settle down a bit.

