

CHAPTER 7

RESCUED SOULS

We changed locations to the Dwelling of the Spirits, located in the deepest part of the labyrinth. No matter how this turned out, my only role in it was keeping the kids safe. We had Ramiris on our side, and for all her weirdness, she was still the ex–Spirit Queen. She was quite a far cry from the stately noblewoman Treyni described her as, but I was sure it’d all work out. Probably.

It turned out Ramiris knew about Treyni, because the fairy’s mind was passed down with every incarnation of her body. “Oh, she’s still doing good?” she asked. “She was such a cute little spirit, back in the day!” She theorized that when she was demoted to fairy, Treyni was impacted by the fallout and became a dryad. It sounded like a true enough story to me.

As a fairy, Ramiris gave birth to a replicated version of herself whenever her rising magical force reached its limit. This was a new Ramiris of sorts, one who retained all the thoughts of the previous one. Apparently, through this process, the grown children could retain more magic force than their parents—but until fully matured, the child was actually weaker.

This made her the only demon lord with a family tree, one filled with a constant cycle of evolution and retrogression. There was no need for this generational nonsense in the past, but post-demotion, she wound up reborn as a fairy, which (as she whined about at length) was not as useful a body to work with.

Ramiris was still a child at the moment, which was part of why I was so anxious about entrusting her with so much…but it beat nothing.

We reached our destination as we talked this over. On the other side of the door was a large, seemingly empty chamber. This was the Oracle Chamber, connected directly to the Dwelling itself. A corridor of light extended from it, about three feet wide and sixty or so feet long. At the far end of this was a round platform, around fifteen feet in diameter. I don’t know what it was made of, but it appeared to be floating in thin air.

“All right, so listen—I want you to go up on that platform and call for the elementals!”

“What should we say, exactly?”

“Oh, anything’s fine. Like, ‘Help me!’ or ‘Let’s play a game!’ or whatever. If you capture the interest of a spirit, it’ll come over, and you’ll have succeeded.”

“They’ll…come for us?”

“Of course they will! You’ll join us up there, right, Mr. Rimuru?”

“Yeah, will you?”

They were getting butterflies now, no doubt. Well, that’s fine. If worse comes to worst, I’ll make the resulting demon or whatever bow to my will. Mu-ha-ha.

“…Hey, did you just make a really eeeeeevil face?”

Ramiris was sharper than I thought. I ignored the question and spurred the children forward.

“It’ll be all right, okay? We’ll figure it out!”

I needed to go up there, too, just in case no elementals showed up.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be up there with you.”

“…Um, sure? That works for me. You can have as many people as you want up there, but it’s a pretty tight space, okay? I’ll be there, too, so maybe one kid at a time.”

Makes sense. No need for more than one spirit at a go, either. We may need to negotiate, depending on how this goes. I’d like to avoid letting my skills do the talking.

“Right! We’ll each go in order, then. Who’s first?”

We worked out who would go when. Gail, the oldest, would be first up, followed by Alice, Kenya, Ryota, and Chloe last. It took a while to argue it out, but that was what we came up with.

The air in the room was serene. There was no sound and only a dim light. It reminded me of the inside of Veldora’s cave, the way it was bursting with natural energy. Our footsteps seemed to echo forever.

“Mr. Rimuru, if anything happens to me…take care of those guys, okay?”

Sheesh, Gail, you don’t have to be so serious. Chill out. I said nothing as I patted him on the head.

We were at the disc-shaped platform now. It felt very much like we were floating in space. I set a foot out to walk forward but hurriedly stopped. I couldn’t see any floor in front of me, but Magic Sense told me one was there. Was this transparent glass? Some kind of acrylic?

I walked forward, surprised. “It’s fine,” I told Gail, who was clearly scared. “There’s a platform here. No matter what happens, I’ll help you out.” It was enough to coax him on.

Slowly, carefully, we headed for the center of the disc.

“Okay,” Ramiris cheerfully shouted, “you’re in position! I can’t wait to see what’s gonna come out!”

I gave Gail another pat. He closed his eyes and began to pray, taking a knee as he offered what tribute he could to the gods. I crossed my arms and watched.

A little time passed. Eventually, little particles of light began to float down from the heavens, like a light snow. I couldn’t feel any sense of strength or will from it. Gail failed to notice any of this and continued praying.

His prayer had been answered not by a high-level elemental but by low-level ones with no sense of self. Fragments of natural energy. Sort of like magicules, but not really.

If you piled enough of these together, would they gain free will and become a high-level spirit? Or even if they didn’t will it, they might still spread out, form into a whole again, and turn into some kind of elemental.

Despite the small spirits in the air, we saw no further changes. It seemed no high-level creature was there to answer Gail’s call. I knew this wasn’t going to be easy. There was no guarantee a great spirit was even present, no matter how much you begged for one.

So we’d just create a new one! If these small spirits were pieces from a bigger one that Gail had snipped off for himself…then gathering them together should make it evolve into a full elemental.

Question. Would you like to use Glutton to consume these and synthesize a spirit?

Yes

No

“Keep praying, Gail!”

I wasted no time consuming the spirits.

“Wh-whoa! What’re you doing up there?!”

“Just shut up and watch me. I’ve got an idea.”

Keeping my mind tranquil, I launched the Great Sage. It accepted my request and began crunching the numbers at high speed, instantly providing the best response and beginning the synthesis.

Report. The unique skill Deviant has completed synthesizing a high-level spirit. Its element is earth. Analyzing Ifrit’s self-will data and creating an auxiliary pseudo-personality… Successful… Adding. Would you like to synthesize the pseudo-high-level spirit (earth) with Gail Gibson?

Yes

No

I placed a hand on Gail’s head and thought Yes.

With that order, the pseudo-high-level spirit (earth) the Great Sage created safely merged with Gail, beginning to serve its purpose. I ran Analyze and Assess on him, hopes high. The rampant energy running out of control within him had neatly subsided; the pseudo-spirit had brought it perfectly under control.

It seemed to go very well. Soon, he’d be able to control that berserk energy to some extent—and as he grew, he’d gradually gain new abilities.

This worked! I mentally shook hands with the Sage, not that it cared very much about how I pictured it.

“Okay, it’s all over. Great job!”

This had all happened in the space of several seconds. Gail, still nervously praying, didn’t seem to feel any different. He looked up at me blankly. Then he gave me a strong nod.

“It’s all right now. The destruction’s all gone, I promise!”

Tears began to form in his eyes. He might act all tough, but a kid’s a kid. The sheer sense of relief made it impossible to hold back, I’m sure.

“Thank you, Mr. Rimuru!!”

“Hey, no problem. It’s my job to keep my students safe.”

I patted him on the head again, kind of hiding my embarrassment as I took him back down. They all cheered joyfully for us. But it wasn’t over. I had to make that work four more times, or else it’d be meaningless.

“It’s too early to celebrate yet, guys. Let’s save that for when we’re all cured!”

They nodded at this, but the concern was starting to clear from their eyes, replaced with the color of hope.

Time for number two.

Next up was Alice. Climbing that narrow pathway was too scary for her, so I decided to carry her up myself. She and Chloe had been talking to each other about something—some final words of encouragement? I dropped the thought from my mind as I picked her up and took her to the platform.

Hopefully this works again… No, I know it will. As we watched, Alice closed her eyes as if in prayer, clutching at her skirt hard with both hands. The same thing happened as it did with Gail—a few moments, and those particles of light came streaming down once more. Ramiris looked at me, debating whether to say something, but I ignored it. This was the second time, and I was starting to get used to it.

Report. The unique skill Deviant has completed synthesizing a high-level spirit. Its element is air. Creating pseudo-high-level spirit (air)… Successful. Also, through analysis and assessment of the air element, Shadow Motion has evolved into Spatial Motion. Would you like to synthesize the pseudo-high-level spirit (air) with Alice Rondo?

Yes

No

Looks like Alice attracted an air elemental. Consuming, analyzing, and assessing it also enhanced one of my own skills. That was an unexpected event. Spatial Motion sounded pretty useful, so I was all for this.

The synthesis process finished up without incident. I picked her up off the floor.

“You did great, Alice! It’s all right now!”

She gave me a happy smile, then kissed me on the cheek. Talk about precocious. Getting affection from a nine-year-old made me…happy, yeah, but also unhappy. Well, okay, happier than anything. I’m a gentleman, not a perv; let’s set the record straight.

“Thanks a bunch!”

I patted her head as I took her back down. She immediately started chatting and carrying on with Chloe again. Nice to see they’re good friends, at least.

Now I was back on the disc, with Kenya this time. I was starting to feel more confident. Everything was going great. Three more kids.

I was thinking I’d have to force through a summon, whip whatever spirit showed up, and cram ’em inside each one, but it looked like that wouldn’t even be necessary. It might’ve actually helped, though, because synthesizing all these low-level elementals took up a hell of a lot more magic force than I thought. Still, just three left. Gotta hold out.

The moment Kenya began to pray, light began raining down on the platform, even before he could close his eyes. I felt a pressure upon me like none before in this chamber. Whoa! This guy’s on a whole other level!

—In another few moments, there it was, on the altar in front of us: a single spirit. A boy, it looked like?

“Hey there! How’re you doing? ’Cause I’m doing fine. I figured I’d come on down for some fun today!”

Kind of an informal way to greet us. But there was no doubting this was a high-level spirit.

“Ah, aahhhhhhh!! What’re you here breaking into my house for?!” Ramiris pressed closer to this boy spirit, looking up into his face. Guess they knew each other.

“Um, he is…?” I asked. Before Ramiris could introduce us, the boy answered.

“Oh yeah! Hey! I’m a light elemental! Unlike that evil fairy who let the monsters take her down, I’m a totally pure bastion of light!”

Kenya had summoned a high-level light elemental. That kid had talent. We talked for a while, and as the elemental put it, Kenya had the right attributes he was looking for…

“…So yeah, I figured I’d c’mon down and help Ken here out!”

Light and dark elementals were typically classified as the highest of the high, as top level as spirits got…but having this chill kid here hanging with us certainly made that difficult to picture.

They were also tasked with the important role of selecting Heroes and granting them their protection. It was those Heroic elements inside a person’s body that allowed them to serve either a light or dark elemental.

As Milim put it, simply calling yourself a Hero was considered both forbidden and extremely arrogant. Maybe Masayuki, that Hero I heard about in Englesia, went through an “approval process” like this. Or did he? It didn’t seem that way to me. I had a hunch he was just trying to look cool…

…but now was no time to be thinking about that. I hadn’t even met the dude; no point worrying about him.

“So I’ll keep Ken here safe until he’s grown. And between you ’n’ me, he might even wind up becomin’ a Hero someday!”

That observation snapped me out of my reverie. Kenya, a Hero? Wow. Another big surprise. But as I stood there flabbergasted, the light elemental helped himself and whizzed right into Kenya’s body. So quickly and easily, the magic within him grew tranquil.

“Mr. Rimuru…?”

“Mm? Oh, um, you’re fine. Just like I planned it!”

Like you planned what, exactly?!

I couldn’t help but scold myself over that. But it’d be silly to dwell on. Hey, these things happen with elemental summoning. Just gotta accept it and move on.

Kenya seemed a little dubious, but even he could tell his body was better now. So he accepted it, asking no more questions, then walked back down and told everyone what happened. That kid really has it together.

So Ryota’s up next, I guess. Since he was a bit of a wimp, I couldn’t help but wonder what kind of spirit he’d summon.

He made it up the walkway by himself, albeit quivering a little, so he certainly seemed ready enough for this. This being number four, we were now used to the routine, and I had him start to pray without further comment.

Let’s see what happens.

This time, the light just didn’t seem to wanna come out for us. Growing impatient, I began to consider whether I should summon a high-level spirit for him. But just then, balls of blue and green light began to fall from above, tracing a spiral in the heavens.

I guess two forces were fighting over which one would reach out to him, but neither were high-level, so I immediately consumed them without further deliberation. Time was of the essence. Starting up Analyze and Assess, I found their elements were water and wind. Which would be a better fit for Ryota? Let’s ask the Sage.

Report. The unique skill Deviant has completed synthesizing two high-level spirits. Their elements are water and wind. Creating pseudo-high-level spirit (water/wind)… Successful. Also, analysis and assessment of all five elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and air successful. Obtaining Quantum Control… Failed. Would you like to synthesize the pseudo-high-level spirit (water/wind) with Ryota Sekiguchi?

Yes

No

Thinking Yes, I executed the synthesis.

Pseudo-high-level spirit (water/wind) meant this had two elements, although the amount of magical energy was the same as Gail’s and Alice’s. Kenya had actually seen his energy boosted, but thanks to the light elemental’s power, it was being controlled perfectly, so it was no problem for him.

Regardless of the results, Ryota was now all fixed up, and that just left the last one. I gotta say, though… I had pretended to not hear that, but what the heck was Quantum Control? That sounded like one mean skill. I couldn’t even guess at what I could use it for.

I would think Maybe I can do this or It’d be nice if I could do that, then gain effects that sort of did it—and those were my skills, in a way. Whenever I wanted some result, the Sage would make it happen in real space for me. But I had to be able to picture it. If I didn’t understand something myself, the Sage had nothing to work with. Maybe that was why the skill evolve failed.

On the other hand, if I really wanted something, that meant I always had a chance of making it happen. Hmm.

Chloe, the final child, was a bit scared as well, so I lifted her up onto the disc. She seemed to appreciate it. I couldn’t believe she was scared at first, actually.

“Y-you know what, Mr. Rimuru?” she whispered in my ear, cheeks blushing hard. “I… I looooooove you!!”

Well, me too. But I wish you could’ve said that at least eight years from now—and preferably more like ten. Or like, how ’bout telling me that back when I was still a living human being? Man, poor me. A single loner, unable to find a partner before I passed on. But that led directly to me obtaining the Great Sage, the unique skill to end all unique skills. So we’re…even, maybe? I had my doubts.

Either way, that was cute of her. Children can be so honest like that. It’s too late for me now, but I guess it’s true—you need to enjoy love while you’re still in school. Don’t let those middle-school nerves get in the way.

But this was not the time to talk about this; Chloe’s sudden confession threw me off my game a little. So what kind of spirit would be greeting her? This is it. Brace yourself.

Just like all the others, Chloe began to pray.

—That’s when things changed.

How should I put it? I suppose it was something like the sky falling down.

With an intense gust of air pressure and a strikingly vivid aura, a beautiful woman appeared. Her hair was long, shiny, and a darkish shade of silver, radiating light throughout the chamber. The energy—the sheer force of existence—was like no elemental spirit I knew. But she didn’t have a physical form…?

Received. This is a spiritual body, the same form of existence as a high-level elemental. Unusually high energy levels detected… Maximum limit not calculable.

There it was again. Not calculable. The second time, after Milim.

As the Great Sage explained, there were three types of topological forms in the world: astral bodies, the weakest form that surrounds the soul; spiritual bodies, which can form a base upon which to build one’s internal force; and material bodies, those directly connected with this world. The human body is the combination of all three forms.

A high-level elemental is nothing more than a mass of energy that gains sentience. In other words, it uses the “heart” protected by its astral body to control its spiritual one, you could say.

This also applied to draconic races like Veldora, but in his case, he not only had a spiritual body, but he had a material one made from matter in the local area that he could freely control. High-level elementals didn’t have that kind of power, so when they left the spiritual world, their energy would disperse, and they would disappear. This is the fate that awaited any type of spirit-based life-form in the physical world, including angels and demons.

To keep their energy from fading away, they must either find a physical receptacle to form a pact with or a way to physically incarnate themselves. That, in essence, was what made the material body so important in this world.

This silvery-haired woman who appeared before us was clearly not human. She was something like a high-level spirit but with more energy than even the Sage could reckon. She did not, however, have a material body and would normally fade away before too much longer—but the Dwelling of the Spirits was so laden with energy, she didn’t have to worry about that. Her sheer force made even high-level spirits look like pushovers.

She eyed me up and down. Then, out of nowhere, she hugged me and gave me a kiss. Unfortunately, I didn’t feel it, her being all ghostlike and everything. A major shame. With a beauty like this, even if she’s just a ghost— Wait, that’s not the problem! What the heck is she?!

The pretty woman with the dark-silver hair looked at me, disappointed, then reached out to touch Chloe’s body. Before she could—

“Stop!! You can’t do that! I’m not gonna let you do what you want with her!!”

Ramiris, who had been simply watching everything until now, suddenly spoke up. Spreading both hands in the air, she went into an attack stance. The relaxed expression on her face was gone; now she was dead serious.

“Hey! What’re you talking about?”

“Shut up! That woman’s bad news! Can’t you tell?!”

“How should I know?! What’s so bad about her?”

Even as we yelled at each other, the woman kept moving—and instilling herself within Chloe. There was simply no time to stop her; even Ramiris, as prepared as she was for battle, could do nothing.

“Aaaaaaah! It’s too late. I’m outta here! Don’t blame me for anything that happens!”

Ramiris had her cheeks puffed out in obvious annoyance. In a panic, I ran Analyze and Assess on Chloe—but all that energy there a moment ago was now completely gone. I didn’t see the problem. Her body was stable now, and the threat of magicules going out of control was no more. Simply…gone. She blinked a few times in confusion, equally surprised.

“…What was that just now?”

Ramiris didn’t try to answer. Chloe’s eyes fully opened; she turned to me, then to her, then to me again. She didn’t know what was going on, and I sure as hell didn’t.

I asked the fairy once more. “I don’t know!” she whined. “I don’t know a lot of the details, either, but that woman was probably born in the future. Something kind of like an elemental from the future? I can’t really believe it, but finding a home inside that kid maybe ensures it has someplace…for herself to be born…? Ahhhhhh, I just don’t know!! But you saw how much power she had. If something like that gets born in the future, I think it’s gonna be baaaaaaad news. Maybe she…she’s…being protected by the great spirit of time…?”

Hmmmm. Hearing all this only made it more confusing. I was clueless, so I decided to stop trying to make sense of it. I’m a results-oriented man, and everything turned out all right. If Chloe was okay, it was all good. Who cares about the future? That stuff wasn’t set in stone anyway.

“Well, isn’t that great, Chloe? Everything went just as planned! Now you aren’t in any danger, either!”

I picked her up.

“Did it really go as planned?”

Urg. Hit me where it hurts, why don’t you? Kenya was a lot more cooperative when I tried that on him.

“Y-yeah. Yeah! Of course!”

Chloe finally rewarded me with a smile. Ramiris sighed in resignation as she watched us.

“Well, all right. The moment she went into that girl, it was all out of my hands anyway…” She turned her back to us.

“Hey, what’s the big deal?” I asked as we went back down to the others. “That last one was kind of a surprise, but we’re all doing just fine. One way or the other, it was a big success for everyone involved. So thanks. You helped save these kids’ lives!”

Once they were all back together, I had them all give their thanks to Ramiris.

“““Thank you very much!!”””

“Bah! It’s fine, it’s fine!”

She turned red in the face, fanning herself as she flitted around. This is a demon lord? I wonder what’s going on with this world sometimes.

The other fairies flew around the chamber with her, making for a pretty fantastic sight. Even bratty as she was, that demon lord was still pretty cute when she smiled.

It was, it seemed, a little celebratory dance for the children. And it worked, kindling a warm contentment in all our hearts. Soon, a natural smile spread across the children’s faces. I had promised to save them, and at that very moment, I had fulfilled that oath.

With that relief behind us, we decided to head back to the academy.

“Ramiris, I could never repay you enough. Well, see you ’round!”

I turned to leave, but before I could…

“Wait, wait, waaaaaaaaaait!!”

Ramiris sounded half beside herself with panic as she called after me. She sure could make a racket when she felt like it.

“Wait, you,” she wailed as she tugged at my collar, half strangling me (not that I needed to breathe). “Don’t you think you’re forgetting something?”

“Oh, what? What’re you gonna gripe at me about this time?”

“I’m not griping! Remember? The thing you promised!”

The thing? What’s this girl talking about…?

“…Oh?”

“Don’t tell me you forgot already! You said if I helped you, you’d get a new golem for me—”

“Ah!”

“‘Ah’? So you really did forget?!”

“Oh, no, don’t be silly, Ramiris. Who do you think I am, huh? Of course I remembered my promise!”

I did! That bait I dangled in front of her while I gave her the hard sell!

“Well, I helped you out, and I want some help back for it! If positive vibes are all you have for me now, then fine, but you did make a promise, and you’ll live up to it, right? Right?”

I let her whine as I crafted some of the magisteel in my Stomach, molding it like clay. It was a tremendous waste of good material, but I didn’t have anything else to work with. Working from memory to re-create the robot’s humanoid form, I wordlessly handed it over to her.

“Ah, yeah, sorry about that. How about this, then?”

It was the magisteel robot I promised her—a golem.

“Hey, wait a…!”

It was just under a foot tall, much like Ramiris herself. Taking it like a little girl with a doll, she wavered in the air, finding it too unwieldy to carry.

“Right, so that’s that!”

My promise fulfilled, I set off to leave—only to be stopped by Ramiris wailing like that same little girl.

“Are you seriously going to break your promise?!”

“What? I gave you that golem you wanted.”

“No, no, no! Not this… I mean, it does look pretty neat, but not this! You broke my Elemental Colossus, and I don’t have anything to guard this place anymore! Until you make me something that can protect me, I’m never gonna let you out of here!”

She was in tears by the end of it, threatening me with a life spent forever lost in the labyrinth.

“Oh, no worries about that. I just learned Spatial Motion, so I can get out of here anytime I want.”

I was definitely not expecting this end result, but good thing I picked up that skill just now.

“Waaaaaaaahhh! Wait, wait! I mean, really, I’m in big trouble here! I’m still a child, remember? All weak and innocent and stuff? So come on! I’m in deep here! Do something about it!!”

Now the tears were pouring out like raindrops. Being around a demon lord like this was making my head hurt.

Hmm, this was trouble, though. I could just tell her “You deserve everything you got!” and teleport off, but I did kind of destroy her property. Plus, I was withering under the stares these kids were giving me. I guess they thought I was just bullying this weak little fairy.

Why did I have to vaporize that thing into thin air? I mean, honestly speaking, I didn’t think I applied that much force to it. Magisteel was really resistant to magical forces, and it was one of the hardest metals out there. But like any other metal, it had a melting point. One I thought was so high, I kind of overdid it.

The Sage acted like it was no big deal, so I thought it’d be fine, but now look what happened. It was the first time I’d used a shrunken-down version of Hellflare in actual combat, and I failed to adjust it correctly. I won’t be using that very much at all, really, but I better turn it down a little next time.

So how to replace that golem…?

“Oh, man… Look, it’s gonna be hard to reproduce something that big, all right?”

“I don’t need it to be that big! Just something that’s strong enough to protect me! That’s all I need!”

Right. Ramiris was willing to compromise; now we were getting somewhere. I had a fair amount of magisteel left, but I didn’t want to waste a bunch of it in here. The Elemental Colossus was entirely magisteel on the surface, so I’d have to use quite a lot to ever reproduce it. But…hmm. Strength is all she wants, huh? Maybe I could make a human-size mannequin, instill a spirit in it, and… Hang on, didn’t I have some magic along those lines?

Understood. Searched for Creation: Golem magic. It is possible to execute. A golem’s strength is dependent on the strength of its materials and the elemental spirit or demon it is instilled with. Iron, stone, wood, and clay are the most common materials. Its external shape may be changed depending on the image in the caster’s mind. After creating the body form with your materials, the instillation and final forming can begin then. Once your conditions are met, you may activate the process by thinking of it.

That’s the Sage for you. It had discovered creation magic for me, a level above the inscription magic I had before, and instantly retrieved it from the vast archive of magic tomes I had leafed through.

As magic went, it was relatively simple. I learned Summon Demon back at my guild examination, letting me easily conjure up a demon. Let’s go with that—even if I called forth an elemental, I figured it’d be a pain to control. An elemental’s spiritual connection with its caster was very important, but with a demon, as long as you paid the price, it’d do anything for you. Plus, for a protection job like this, I’d need nothing but high-level elementals, or else it wouldn’t work. Nonconscious elementals were no use.

So I decided to instill the golem with a demon. You might think they could rebel against being used like this, but that never really happened. A summoning was a sort of contract, and they never betrayed their summoner—assuming the right circumstances, of course. If you asked for more than you did when you originally forged the pact, it ended right there. That, and if the conditions were too unreasonable, it also automatically canceled the contract. Demons were all business that way, so trust was important. Just because someone was a demon didn’t mean they were all evil, after all.

Anyway, I now had a plan in mind. Let’s make the core body with magisteel, install a demon inside, and craft that golem. I was pretty sure I could build something far stronger than your average run-of-the-mill, A-ranked monster.

“All right. I’ll help you, all right? So stop carrying on like that, Rami. I’m gonna make this crazy-strong guardian for you, so no complaining, okay? In exchange, would you be able to teach me spirit engineering?”

Kaijin and Vester would be interested in that Elemental Colossus as well. We could probably have them work together back in town to reproduce it. That, I wouldn’t mind providing the materials for. In exchange, though, let’s get Ramiris the guardian she needs.

“That’s fine…but you aren’t trying to trick me again, are you…?”

Man, oh man. Her mistrust ran deep. Why couldn’t she just believe in people a little more?

“I’m not trying to trick you. I have some dwarven craftsman in my city, you see, and they were involved with that magic-armor soldier project, too. I thought we might be able to conduct some research over there.”

“I wanna research that, too, Mr. Rimuru!”

“Me too!”

The kids were certainly enthusiastic about it. Hmm. Armored soldiers with human pilots inside? Sounds pretty ambitious.

“Are you gonna make it look like this?” Ramiris asked, thrusting the doll I made at me.

“Well, that’d look pretty cool, don’t you think?”

“Let me ride on it first, Mr. Rimuru!”

“I wanna ride, too!”

Even the reserved Ryota was up for the idea. I’ll definitely have to try to make that happen, I thought as I reached out to take the doll from Ramiris. She whisked it behind her back, handing it over to several servants, who struggled to carry it to parts unknown.

“…Um…”

“That’s mine! You can’t have it back!”

How selfish can you get? First, she wants a guardian from me, then she won’t give me back that doll. A lot of demon lords, I was starting to realize, were really damn self-centered. I won’t name names, but I’m talking really self-centered.

“Well, you will help me with this, right?”

“Sure! So what kind of guardian will you make for me?”

“Hmm? Oh, I was just thinking of a stronger version of the guy I defeated…”

“Really?! Wow! You’re really a super-nice guy, aren’t you?!”

And so, I took on the job of making a new, improved protector for Ramiris’s domain.

Beginning with the prep work, I burped out some magisteel from my Stomach, lining up the pieces. It was some of the finest quality out there, enriched with magicules to make it easy to apply magic to. The children watched, intensely curious.

“Where…? Hey, where did you get all that stuff?! Oh, just…never mind…”

Ramiris gave me a look of utter exasperation. Whatever she thought about it, she kept to herself, so I got straight to work, processing each piece of magisteel I had taken out. If we were gonna make a humanoid figure, it had to have ball joints. That was nonnegotiable for me—and it actually surprised me how much it turned out the way I pictured it.

Carefully, I put together the movable parts, adding a few original elements of my own. I had a friend back on Earth who was really good at assembling and painting anime figurines. I was so jealous of that, given I was just dexterous enough to maybe put together simpler robot models. Now, things are different! With the Great Sage backing me up, I could craft things exactly the way I imagined them in my mind.

The former Spirit Queen was looking at my work with great skepticism, no doubt wondering what the hell I was doing. Along the way, though, she started to get visibly excited.

“W-wow! Wow, this is amazing! Oh, my goodness! You—this, this is incredible! I can’t believe you can make it move so freely like that!”

She couldn’t wait for it—and really, I wasn’t expecting this to be nearly as precise as it turned out to be. The fact that pure magisteel could bend itself to better meet the maker’s intentions helps, no doubt.

Before long, the job was done. It was basically human in shape—slender, a little under six feet, and a facial covering on its head that matched my mask. I felt proud.

“Right! All done! Now I’m gonna summon a demon and put it inside this—but promise me you aren’t gonna do anything bad with it, all right? I’m gonna put a master lock on it to make sure it can refuse anything weird you tell it to do!”

“Okay, okay! No problems there! But I can play with it all I want in here, right?”

“Hmm? Sure, yeah, in the labyrinth. Just don’t be a bother on other people, okay? Also, I’m guessing that this guy’s gonna pack a real punch, so make sure you don’t get hurt, either.”

With Ramiris’s permission, I applied the finishing touches. First, the master lock—a spell with orders from the original maker, outlining a few simple ground rules. Then, the demon. As much trouble as I was going through with this, I was sure the results would be several times stronger than just whipping up a golem with a spell.

Spreading my arms wide, I pretended to chant a spell to that effect. We were still by the altar from before, although I had the children kept away from it in case of danger. Only Ramiris was behind me.

It’d be great if this worked, but if I didn’t apply enough force, the demon might fall out of control. Then I’d have to either make it bend to my will in battle or cancel the whole summon. Let’s just pray that doesn’t happen. All this continual work has pretty well sapped my physical and magical energy, so I’d really like to avoid any more unforeseen snags.

As I cast this pretend spell, a magic circle drew itself on the floor. There was no need to cast anything for it, but I thought it’d help create a little atmosphere. I was trying to call forth a Greater Demon, tougher than a Lesser Demon and around an A-minus in rank. Pretty high for a monster, but I didn’t want some newborn without any sense of self, so I prayed for an older, more intelligent demon as I carried out the summon.

And the results certainly did produce a Greater Demon for us. Its eyes had the spark of wisdom in them, unlike your typical Lesser Demon who’d go into a murderous rage without the caster magically shackling it. The difference was clear in its behavior from the start. It immediately kneeled before me—its head reverentially bowed down.

“You called for me, master?”

Looks like I pulled it off. The Greater Demon was pledging its allegiance.

It was larger and more muscular than its Lesser brethren, its magicule-formed corpus already starting to dissipate over time. Its skin was jet-black, covered in clothing made of a sturdy but torn fabric. Looking at that, I could tell it had been alive for quite a while. Its gender, I couldn’t tell you, although the horns that jutted out both sides of its head looked pretty stately to me.

Do demons have, like, real muscles at all? It probably doesn’t matter. The Greater Demon kneeling before me certainly fulfilled all my conditions anyway.

“Right. I called you here in order to create a golem. I shall grant you this figure of magisteel to serve as your physical body, so I want you to fill it with your spirit. In exchange, I will provide my magical energy. This contract will last for…uh…”

I looked at Ramiris. Hurriedly, she began counting on her fingers. “I—I want a hundred years!” she replied. “I’ll be fully mature in a hundred more years!”

“This contract will last for one hundred years. Once it expires, you may retain this figure as your body if you wish. Well?”

Contracts like these that veered off the beaten path were always risky. If it was something like “Beat up that guy in front of you!” it’d be accepted in an instant. Long-term orders like this were harder for demons to swallow. If I simply wanted this demon to stick by Ramiris’s side, a regular supply of magicules would do the trick, but without that physical corpus to support it, it’d suck up way too much magical energy. Plus, once you summoned one creature, you couldn’t immediately summon another, although there were loopholes around this.

Right now, I wanted this demon to be Ramiris’s guardian, and I had to be sure the contract covered all of that.

“I would wish for nothing else, my master! And I have already received your energy as payment.”

Well, glad it’s up for the job. The contract was complete. Honestly, I wasn’t expecting the magicules I used for the summon to cover the whole tab. It absorbed a ton, sure, but I still had enough inside me to work with.

Good thing I was clever enough to give it more than I thought I needed. No wonder it was so respectful to me. With the right pact, it wasn’t a problem, but if you summoned someone with a measly pittance of magicules and asked the world of the creature, you might wind up killed on the spot. The only way to play it safe was by summoning the right monster and providing a reasonable pact. Something to keep in mind.

Anyway, we now had an agreement. This guy didn’t appear to have a short temper or violent streak; he seemed calm and wise to me. I was just glad I got exactly the kind of demon I ordered. I was sure he wouldn’t have a problem with the master lock, either.

Continuing on, I instilled the magisteel figure with the demon’s magical corpus—incarnating it, you could say. The figure was actually a step down from the Greater Demon size-wise, but it seemed to fit the guy perfectly. It voluntarily did away with its magic-driven body, fully fusing itself with the new metal one. Then it did a few exercises to get used to the thing. No problems, apparently.

I was the one who designed the mask on the figure, but the moment the demon took over, the expression took on a more, dare I say, evil bent. Funny.

“This is wonderful,” it said, the mask now betraying surprise and joy. “I would expect nothing less from you, master. I thought that moving this body would require expending magic force to transform the joints themselves, but with this, I am completely free to move. The perfect body for me to occupy!”

Well, I’m glad it likes it.

I then proceeded with some minor adjustments to satisfy Ramiris and the Greater Demon’s requests. Before long, though, the fairy had its new guardian on watch.

“How does it feel?”

“Yes, it is simply wonderful,” it said, moving its limbs around to get used to them. “Its physical intervention levels are showing very high numbers. Compared to incarnating in a human or magical beast, my offensive strength goes without saying, and my physical defense is simply incomparable. Wonderful! This is truly an astounding body!”

In order to have a physical presence in this world, demons needed to incarnate themselves within something else, usually an animal or monster. A magisteel puppet like this, however, worked just as well. Being pure metal—magisteel, for that matter, the toughest in the world—it would naturally be a defensive powerhouse. There were some rare metals out there with a melting point of over nine hundred degrees, but magisteel topped out at upward of eighteen thousand. Between that and its self-healing abilities, there wasn’t a better metal out there.

All in all, it’d be a Herculean task to break down this guardian with any physical weapon.

After it stretched its new legs out a little, the Greater Demon turned to me.

“I swear upon this body that I will fulfill my role, master. Once my pact to serve as that fairy’s guardian expires in a hundred years, I hope you will let me work under you.”

That’s…rather sudden, isn’t it? And a hundred years from now… I’m not sure I’ll even be alive then. Maybe his loyalties will switch to Ramiris by then; you never know. She is a demon lord, after all.

“Well, sure, if I’m still around…”

“Ha-ha-ha! Don’t be silly. There is no way someone like you, master, will be dead in a century. If you promise me that, I will not demand any further reward.”

How long was my life expectancy here anyway? I hadn’t thought about it much. I guess I’ll die when I die. You never know when some random dude will knife you on the street.

Glad it likes me, though. I guess I’m just naturally attractive to monsters. In which case, it’d be kind of inconvenient not to give it a name. I had about half my magicules left, and judging by previous naming experience, higher-level monsters would take a massive amount. That would certainly include a Greater Demon at A-minus rank—maybe even A in this new incarnation. Named, it’d surpass even that, no doubt.

Ah well.

“Perfect! In that case, from today forward, you may call yourself Beretta. May you remain ever loyal to Ramiris and myself! I want to see your best effort.”

That was a nice bit of inspiration, I thought. Something about the golem’s form reminded me of the beautiful lines of that famous family of firearms. And whoop, there’s that familiar draining feeling again. I barely held out against it this time; the fuel gauge got dangerously close to E. This bum just made off with nearly a third of my magicules… Geez. It’s gonna be a real powerhouse now.

With its new name, Beretta began to evolve. Spreading out from each of its ball joints, its chest, head, hips, arms, and legs connected together, the surface now covered by a skin-like membrane. It looked practically human, although the membrane’s transparent color made the internal structure look all the more fetching. The face remained the same as my mask; the long, jet-black hair was now a radiant shade of silver. It was a sort of demon golem, with a beauty I could only call bizarre.

Once the transformation ended, the body was fully covered—the eyes in the mask glowing red. It was all over. So what kind of skills did it pick up from me?

Beretta stood up, then bowed deeply.

“I am Beretta, the arch-golem, and I am ready to carry out my received orders.”

It was a rather strange figure, with a mask for a face and nothing underneath. A golem of destruction.

It turned to Ramiris, then saluted.

“Lady Ramiris. Your wish is my command. Allow me to protect you.”

She nodded briskly, almost overcome by it all. “Um, umm, yeah!” she stammered, trying to retain some of her dignity. “Sure thing! I’ll be counting on you!”

Welp. That oughtta suffice as an Elemental Colossus replacement. Probably about twice as strong in battle, too.

Now I had kept my promise to Ramiris, even if I got a little carried away and made an even stronger guardian than I meant to.

Once I started making the figure, Ramiris kept yapping to me about how I should do this and add that. It annoyed me so much that I suppose I got a little too heated. Beretta’s magic force helped boost its offense a lot as well, though, so in terms of strength, I was sure she’s satisfied.

I went through the trouble of crafting it, so I’d like to hope it helps her out a bit. Though, to be honest, I didn’t even want to imagine Beretta fighting for keeps in combat.



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The kids wound up falling asleep while I was assembling that golem, finally released from a long period of anxiety and fear. Being freed of all the stress they’d put up with must’ve made them totally at ease; they were sleeping peacefully, with Ranga serving as a pillow. I didn’t need sleep, but with kids, that’s part of the job description. Sleep well and grow up strong.

Let’s wait for them to wake up, I thought as I decided to rest a bit myself.

The next morning, once their energy was restored, I took the kids out of the Dwelling of the Spirits. They all had elementals within them; their lives were no longer in danger. I had answered Shizu’s wish beyond her death, and all our problems were behind us. Now—I thought, at least—I can go back to Tempest in peace.

Upon leaving the maze, I used my new Spatial Motion extra skill to bring the kids back with me to Englesia. Connecting two fields of physical space together required several minutes of work, but it let you revisit any location you’ve been to before, making it pretty helpful. I also picked up the magic ring I dropped off outside as an escape route. I didn’t need it to execute Spatial Motion, so I stored it in my Stomach, as much as I doubted I’d ever use it again.

Once back at the academy, I immediately made contact with Yuuki, reporting on the results of our journey and going in-depth on the children’s futures. I had considered taking them in for good, but I also thought children like them really needed the right learning environment to thrive in. We had this academy here, filled with talented teachers. They could receive both a basic education and magic in the same place.

Thus, we decided they would remain here at the academy to learn. Seeing my magic for themselves must’ve convinced them how useful it was. They did cry, however, when I told them I was leaving. I promised I’d attend all their graduations, and of course, they were eager to welcome me.

Really, they’d be fine now. Their magical energy levels were now restricted to a little above the average, allowing them to live normal lives. Even someone with magical Assessment skills wouldn’t notice what’s going on inside them.

It was a topic I also discussed with Yuuki a bit. “Once a nation’s abandoned a child,” he reasoned, “I doubt they’ll try to take them back again. That’s a violation of international law, and it’d also make them enemies of the Free Guild.”

“You think maybe we could have them earn their adventurer’s cards and become guild members?”

“Hmm… Perhaps we could, yes, if they want to.”

“Sure. They’ll have time to think about it as students.”

“That they will.”

They were still children, but in this world, you were considered grown-up at age fifteen. It wouldn’t be long until they were all that age, qualified to join the Free Guild. They’d get to do whatever they want, living in pure, unrestricted freedom.

Yuuki also pressed me several times on how I solved their problems, but that was a secret. He assumed the children were just normal kids now, and I was fine with that. Their surging magicules were actually being neutralized by elementals, but I didn’t see the need to tell anyone about that. That really could make them the targets of rogue players worldwide, setting off wholly new problems for them.

The children had already been assigned new schedules and teachers. My role in their education was more or less over. They had undergone basic combat training, as well as gotten used to speaking with their pseudo-elementals. In between, we went out on picnics, with Kabal’s team stopping by for fun sometimes.

Potion sales, meanwhile, were going well. When I finally visited Mjöllmile in Blumund, I received a hero’s welcome. He had the profits he wanted, and I was happy with that, too. And every time I came back to Tempest, I saw more and more adventurers taking advantage of our lodging. It was turning into a lively place. I’d better get back for good soon, before some other huge problem reared its ugly head.

—The time had come to go home.

It was the day of my departure.

“You… You’re leaving, Mr. Rimuru?”

“You can’t make him wait any longer, Clo.”

“No, but I… I mean…”

“But…”

Chloe was about to cry. I wasn’t feeling much better myself…but, you know, I could pop on over anytime I want with Spatial Motion. This wasn’t the end.

“Ha-ha-ha! You’re such a crybaby, Chloe. Here, how about something to cheer you up?”

I removed the mask I had on and gave it to her. The Mask of Magic Resistance, a memento of Shizu’s that was broken once before I repaired it. I wasn’t sure what drove me to give it to her; it just seemed like the natural thing to do. She accepted it without hesitation.

“Awwwwww! I wanted it, too…”

“Hee-hee-hee! It’s all mine now!”

It cheered Chloe up, so I was happy. For the crestfallen Alice, meanwhile, I had a school uniform Shuna prepared for her.

“Ah!”

“Are these for us?”

I had outfits for Kenya and Gail—Ryota, too, of course. They looked the same as all the other uniforms in the academy, but they were sewn with sturdier custom cloth. The children all gleefully accepted them.

“Now listen, I want you guys to keep studying, all right? It’s hard to say good-bye like this, but it’s not like I’ll never see you again. Come over to my town once you’re on break, okay?”

“““Okay!”””

The children saw me off, their teary eyes turning into smiles. I left the Englesian capital while the smiles were still fresh on their faces.

It seemed like a short trip to human lands, but it wound up extending for quite a while. It was tough going, but I’d built some bonds I could never replace, not for anything in the world. Getting to interact with children like that again, as a slime, was something I never could’ve dreamed of.

Everything seemed to be going great.

—Or perhaps, a little too great.

In a world like this, negative emotions like jealousy and envy can unknowingly fester in the hearts of your peers. I had intended to be careful in all my actions, lest I become the target of such feelings.

But as they say, garbage in, garbage out. The Great Sage had astounding predictive skills, but if I gave it the wrong questions, it’d give me the wrong answers.

If Tempest grew prosperous, that meant somebody was going to lose out in the backlash. I instinctively knew that, of course, but I didn’t think it would happen at a scale or speed beyond my expectations.

During my time as a slime here, I had my own small ambitions. To live among the humans I looked up to. To make contact with otherworlders. I had made that happen, and now, in my new homeland of Tempest, I was building the foundation for even greater developments. In a way, I had already succeeded, and in another, I had failed.

I was just a regular person; I didn’t understand much about government or politics. About the cold egoism and Machiavellianism that often reigns. Now, fate was making changes at an ever more rapid pace, forcing me to settle upon my future direction.

The days of peace were drawing to a close; days of war were beginning.