

CHAPTER 2

PRELUDE TO CALAMITY

King Edmaris of Farmus winced at the report he was just handed. He had reason to. His kingdom’s situation had just faced dramatic changes for the worse.

It all began when the seal placed on Veldora, the Storm Dragon, vanished from the Forest of Jura. It led to a flurry of requests for monetary and military support from Earl Nidol Migam and the many other nobles with parcels of territory out in the hinterlands. It wasn’t a problem the nation could afford to ignore. Edmaris had ordered measures to be taken at once—but instead of providing what the nobility hoped for, he sought instead to further entrench his authority.

“I suggest that we could lay waste to the monsters only after they ravage one or two of our frontier provinces.”

“That would certainly help prove the battle might of our Knight Corps, yes.”

“Heh-heh-heh… Sacrificing a few of those yappy little Free Guild men won’t hurt our budget at all. You can’t pay a creditor if he ceases to exist.”

“Very true, very true. And what better stage could we set to boost your political strength, Your Highness?”

The losses had been factored into the equation, as it were.

It was the job of a king to guarantee the safety of those who swore loyalty to him and followed his will in protecting their province. King Edmaris believed this. But there was no need to save the likes of Nidol Migam, some greedy knave more preoccupied with filling his own pockets than serving his people. Things had changed dramatically, yes, but Migam had failed to prepare for the future, and this was what he deserved for it.

An act like this may temporarily hurt Farmus’s reputation in other lands, but once their knights proved themselves in combat, it would be a wash. Instead of trying to keep the entire country safe, it was both cheaper and safer to attack only when attacked first. The outer provinces were a shield that protected the Farmus homeland. They were useful tools, easily replaceable if lost. And there was no need to risk one’s neck trying to save a set of tools.

Still…

To Farmus’s central government, which had fully prepared for a monster attack, there was something of a disappointment. A single champion, Yohm, had disrupted the entire plan. This man, rising up from the common people to form his own band, had gone so far as to defeat an orc lord and its entire force—so the rumors had it. And monster-based losses had been down from the usual rate so far this year. The king had no word about Veldora’s disappearance causing the monsters to grow unrulier—if anything, it seemed to be the opposite. That, as well, made the story of this new champion more believable.

“A champion? Ridiculous.”

“Unbelievable. But the Free Guild said that an orc lord had appeared. Perhaps it is not entirely untrue.”

“Indeed. They might not have been a full-fledged force yet, but a brand-new orc lord would have several hundred orc soldiers serving it, perhaps. That would still be enough of a threat to the borderlands, but—”

“Ha! This is pointless. If that’s all it is, I could wipe them out myself! And now this man goes around calling himself a champion…”

The core of the government—the advisers King Edmaris put the weight of his trust upon—had come to a conclusion.

“Well, if it means a threat has been eliminated, then very well. A pity it means our royal knights can’t have their day in the sun, though.”

Folgen, head of the Knight Corps, looked less than happy with the chief royal sorcerer Razen’s statement. For now, though, the topic was settled. He could tell well enough that Razen was simply telling the truth. There was no need to sally into battle just for the fun of it—an opinion King Edmaris seemed to accept.

The next issue to tackle, however, wasn’t one they could afford to watch and wait on. Their tax revenues were falling.

Usually, figuring out the state of the national treasury required careful analysis over at least several years. Here, though, the downward trend was both looming and blindingly obvious over the previous fiscal cycle. Month after month, the figures spoke volumes. After a certain point in time, trade-based revenue simply fell through the floor.

The Kingdom of Farmus, thanks to its geographical location, had a hand in almost every international exchange with the Dwarven Kingdom. It was part of why it served as the front gate, so to speak, for the Western Nations. They had the strength of direct trade with the kingdom; no need for dangerous sea or land routes. The high taxes they levied on the goods they imported from there and sold elsewhere provided enormous profits for them.

But then, one day, the number of adventurers passing into the nation started to dwindle. Previously, Farmus had been rather bustling with adventurers, all bringing a tidy amount of cash to purchase Dwargon-made weapons and armor. The potions Farmus could provide literally saved lives; adventurers could never have enough of them.

After a while, though, the number of itinerant merchants fell alongside the adventurers. They were seeing similar crowds of them from the direction of Englesia still, but the flow from Blumund and other nations neighboring Jura provided far more profit to them—with the lack of any other competition, Farmus was able to sell potions to these merchants at practically usurious prices. And now those people were gone. With all these foreign visitors suddenly disappearing, of course, it didn’t take long for the inns and taverns that served them to suffer.

The numbers were clear as day on paper within a month, so the economy minister hurriedly ordered his department to find the cause. The report that came back was enough to shock the entire cabinet.

“A new town has been established in the Forest of Jura—a town inhabited by monsters.”

The news, provided by a spy sent into the forest, made King Edmaris whisper “It can’t be” the moment he laid eyes upon it. But he remained composed. He was the ruler of a nation, and he needed to project his authority as king.

I cannot believe it…but I must. The most important thing is: How will I connect this to our own profit?

His outstanding intellect pointed itself toward the future.

Before long, Edmaris ordered an emergency meeting among all the provincial lords of his kingdom.

“But, my lord, the merchants are keenly aware of their own self-interests. They are already traveling to this land of monsters, avoiding Farmus entirely.”

“It is said the nation provides a safe route all the way to the Dwarven Kingdom…”

“I heard the same. They have these ‘stations,’ I hear—small guardhouses located every dozen miles or so, each with sentry monsters assigned to them…”

“It is a difficult tale to swallow, but several trustworthy merchants have confirmed it. If a traveler is attacked in the midst of their journey, they can apparently launch these flares provided to them in town to signal the monsters. Help arrives in five minutes or less.”

“What?!”

The ministers and nobility called to the conference seemed ready to leap right out of their chairs as they exchanged the stories. Wild, seemingly unbelievable tales flew out of their mouths. None of them could hide their shock.

The Forest of Jura was teeming with monsters. Thanks to its vast size, only low-threat creatures lived in the borderlands near human civilization. But that wasn’t always the case. You saw the odd B-ranked (or above) monster from time to time. The very idea of building a town smack-dab in the middle of this chaos—and even building links to it from Blumund to Dwargon? How much money, and how much military power, would that take? No one at the conference could begin to imagine. Even outside the forest, they had to expend a hefty chunk of tax revenue defending the border villages and towns. They were the nation’s shield, but every shield needed the occasional upkeep.

And monsters lived in this town? That was unheard of.

The nation was apparently led by one calling itself the head of the Forest of Jura. It did not, however, call itself a demon lord; it even wanted to build friendly relationships with human nations. A monster building a nation-state. It was crazy talk.

King Edmaris raised a hand to silence the room, turning an eye toward one of his ministers.

“The nation,” he said upon the king’s order, “is known as the ‘Jura-Tempest Federation.’ The merchants refer to it simply as ‘Tempest.’ It is led by Rimuru Tempest, a slime who has apparently—”

“A what ?! Are you kidding me?!”

The minister was cut off by a young man with dark hair and dark eyes who stormed up to his feet. Not a single minister or nobleman would dare to exhibit such rudeness before the king—but this man lived in a realm where politeness didn’t pay the bills. If anything, he was in a position to be forgiven for such outbursts.

He was, in other words, a champion of Farmus. An otherworlder. Thus, nobody took offense at his outburst—or, to be more exact, they didn’t voice any complaints if they did. Some of the more powerful nobles clearly looked down on him, but nobody needed the facts spelled out for them. Publicly revealing any enmity would put a dent in one’s own profits.

This was a human weapon, one of the people summoned by Farmus’s triennial “summon ceremonies” and a man gifted in battle skills. His name was Shogo Taguchi, a twenty-year-old Japanese man.

“Enough, Shogo,” chided Chief Sorcerer Razen. “Hear out the report to the end.”

“But a slime ? That’s the lowest of the low. How can some vermin like that become lord of the entire forest? Or—what, is the forest that full of wimps? Are you guys training me day in, day out just to swat a bunch of pathetic little monsters?!”

As part of this “training,” Shogo had managed to seriously injure ten or so of Farmus’s most elite knights just yesterday. Razen smiled bitterly as he recalled the events. This young man, Shogo, undoubtedly wielded tremendous power—but his heart, his mind were too raw and immature to bear it. It had been three years since he was summoned at the age of seventeen, and in Razen’s eyes, his ferocity had risen by the day ever since. If he weren’t being subdued by the controlling magic placed upon him during the summon, he’d be a bomb big enough to raze an entire nation. Lucky for Farmus, then, that the controlling magic was absolute in its force.

“I said, silence .”

“Geh.”

Shogo returned to his seat, humbly following Razen’s trigger word. Anger still burned in his eyes, but Razen was too dignified in his role as head magician to pay it any heed.

“Sir Razen,” a clear voice rang out, “I feel Shogo does not mean any ill will. In our world, slimes are notorious for being about the easiest monster there is to kill—well, it depends on the game, actually, but either way.”

“Ah, Kyoya. If you are in attendance, please help us keep Shogo on his best behavior. We are sharing a room with His Highness. Do not place further shame upon me!”

The man called Kyoya was another otherworlder summoned from Japan. His full name was Kyoya Tachibana, and he had been brought here after being summoned into a small nation a ways from Farmus. This made him the newest face among the kingdom’s otherworlders, and now he shrugged in a show of allegiance and glanced at Shogo. The other young man nodded, fell silent, and turned to hear the conversation. Razen, seeing this, asked the minister to continue.

This town called Tempest was apparently home to a large number of monsters evolved from goblins, orcs, and so on.

In the self-declared neutral Dwarven Kingdom, it wasn’t uncommon to see creatures like hobgoblins, orcs, and kobolds, but that was the exception that proved the rule. An entire settlement of evolved monsters was something far beyond the realm of common sense for them all.

Occasionally, every few years, you’d see the leader of a pack or herd spontaneously evolve into a higher-level creature. Whenever one was found, they were largely hunted down at once before they grew any more powerful. In human eyes, the way Dwargon freely associated with such beasts was virtually heretical.

Here, meanwhile, every townsperson was evolved. You likely wouldn’t see anything similar in history, no matter how many centuries you turned back the clock. But there was no doubting their spy’s report.

With that in mind, suppressing this upstart federation would be everyone’s likely first instinct…but it wouldn’t be so easy this time. These were monsters with demi-human traits; they had access to knowledge and technology, clearing out the forests, building highways, and even using human language to conduct business. That, and the rumors of that “station” system along the road—another spy report. Each one was officially called a “substation,” manned with monsters who worked in shifts day and night.

These substations, as the minister calmly explained, were positioned in relevant spots up and down the highway. They had served as temporary lodging for the crews who built the road before being repurposed for this role—and the monsters stationed inside were tasked with keeping travelers safe.

“Substations?” Shogo sneered. “What are these, cops?”

“Shogo—”

“Yes, Razen. Silence. I get it.”

“No. What are these ‘cops’ you speak of?”

“Huh? Um, you know, a cop…?”

Kyoya snickered at the awkward exchange as he provided Razen a quick rundown of how policing worked on planet Earth.

“Hoh… An organization of sentinels, each charged with their own parcel of land to patrol. I see. But how could a horde of monsters keep this going?”

“Well, maybe there’s an otherworlder like us with them. If he has the right abilities, maybe it’s really easy for this guy to make nice with the monsters.”

“Huh? Who would go through all that trouble, I ask? If this hypothetical otherworlder was that powerful, he would have no problem surviving in this world alone. Why would he go through all the trouble of drawing attention to himself like this?”

“Yeah, that’s a good point.”

Shogo and Kyoya quickly lost interest in the topic, but Razen was still intent upon it, face grave as he thought.

…An otherworlder? Could that be a possibility? Yes, that does sound rather more convincing now…

He nodded back at King Edmaris, noticing the ruler’s eyes upon him. Having a potential otherworlder lurking in the shadows behind this problem nation was a concern, but he wanted to signal his leader that he didn’t see it as a major hindrance to their plan. Razen and his apprentices had summoned far more otherworlders than just Shogo and Kyoya. A possibility was just that—a possibility, one they could weave into their plan of action. No problems to speak of.

Heh-heh… , thought Razen as the minister continued. Even if they do have an otherworlder as a leader, they are nothing compared to Shogo, the greatest weapon in our arsenal…

Farmus was hosting fewer merchants, and that meant the country’s finances were looking grim. Once the minister finished explaining that, he went to the main topic of this emergency meeting—the news that there was a new town in the Forest of Jura, one that adventurers were using as a base to gather monster-derived ingredients.

This town offered potions for sale that were just as good as, if not better than, those manufactured by the dwarves, plus a blacksmith at least capable of performing basic weapons and armor maintenance. Some merchants had even taken up permanent residence, no longer having to travel the world over to sell the items they’d harvested. No wonder the place had become a magnet for adventurers. As far from the forest as it was, there was no longer any reason for them to travel to Farmus’s capital.

And that wasn’t the thorniest issue. The big one—the public reason why the king convened this meeting of nobility—was the stable road link now established between the Dwarven Kingdom and the land of Blumund. A brand-new highway, one patrolled by demi-human monsters who guaranteed its safety as a trade route. It meant that most merchants could now travel directly to Dwargon without having to circle through Farmus.

This they could not afford to ignore. If they let it slide, it could grow into a life-or-death issue for the kingdom. Farmus, after all, had no real manufacturing specialties to speak of. It had no resources under the ground to mine. Having the Dwarven Kingdom next door meant its own industry was still pretty low-level. It grew enough crops to keep its own people from starving, but that wouldn’t be enough.

The whole economy was dependent on the twin supports of tourism and trade. Without those, what could possibly refill the state’s tax coffers?

The minister saluted King Edmaris as he wrapped up his report. The king nodded back, surveyed the nobility assembled before him, and asked a question.

“Well. What now, then?”

There was nobody to answer him.

The same report the king had seen was distributed among the nobility and ministers in the room, outlining the details behind the just-completed briefing. Everyone gathered was a high-level noble official, deeply involved with running the country and extremely well-heeled. People deep in the core of the central government. People who knew what was at stake if their homeland lost its competitive edge and tax revenue.

They had no answer for the king, but their thoughts were the same. If anyone dared to speak their mind, though, they might be forced to take responsibility for it all. None was brave enough to risk that.

The common thought: Attack this town and burn it to the ground.

Farmus was a vast nation. With the resources it had at hand, it could send a maximum of a hundred thousand soldiers into service. But they were dealing with evolved monsters. Regular infantry would be useless. Well-trained knights or experienced mercenaries would need to be deployed. Unlike battles between fellow human nations, this was an annihilation mission—kill or be killed. It was no place for amateurs. It’d just boost the body count and drag down the rest of their forces.

So how many of these hundred thousand soldiers were actually useful in combat like this?

First, there were the five thousand members of the Farmus Royal Knight Corps, the all-powerful army led by Folgen, its captain. Serving the king directly, it was a pack of elites, allowed to move freely under the king’s orders. Each one of them rated a B in battle, and they boasted a reputation as the most powerful fighters among the Western Nations.

Next, there was the Farmus Sorcerer Alliance, a thousand-strong group of royal magic academy graduates led by Razen. Each one of them was an expert in magic, handpicked for their unique gifts in battle-oriented spells.

After that came the Farmus Noble Knight Federation, an elite corps of five thousand composed of specially selected soldiers (including some of the younger nobles) who served the upper levels of nobility directly. They were a force to be reckoned with, even if they were primarily career soldiers with only sparse experience in actual combat.

Finally, there were the six thousand members of the Farmus Mercenary Brigades. This group was normally charged with keeping the peace inside and outside Farmus with a bare minimum of members, but they could be conscripted for emergencies and have their full strength taken advantage of. Their ranks contained a wealth of ambitious young men and women eager to prove themselves in battle and earn a spot in the ordained knight rolls.

These 17,000 fighters were the standing force for the Kingdom of Farmus, ready to roll out at a moment’s notice. It struck quite a presence, more than enough to dominate over any nearby nation.

But the reports said the monster nation had at least ten thousand inhabitants. If they were all in fact evolved, it likely meant they were a C-ranked force or more, and it wouldn’t be amiss to expect some of them to reach B as well. Even if Farmus was still assured victory, they would have to pay in blood for it—perhaps even the blood of the royal knights and sorcerers, the nation’s greatest treasures. Any casualties in their ranks would no doubt lead to questions and accusations later on. Farmus had spent a fortune cultivating these forces; wasting them in needless combat was out of the question, and “because we’re afraid of losing our tax base” wouldn’t be enough of an excuse to mollify the nobles.

Given that the mercenary brigades alone were unlikely to bring them victory, it was a must that Farmus devote all its forces to the effort. Everybody in the room came to that conclusion in an instant. If any one of them suggested war, however, they might be the one left holding the bag for maintaining all those armies—and any losses incurred along the way.

And how were they going to explain this to the Western Nations? Especially Blumund, which reportedly already had relations with this monster land? They’d put up a strong resistance, no doubt. Everyone in the diplomatic ranks was too conscious of that thought, and of the future, to dare speak without good reason.

Nobody wanted to lose access to their own interests, but nobody wanted to lose money, either. They didn’t, but doing nothing would lead to unavoidable losses—it may even tip the nation over the brink, if it was weakened enough. Every one of them thought the same thing: We have to do something. If only someone could get the ball rolling for us…

They needed diplomacy to silence their neighbors. Power to make victory in war an assured result. And, more important than anything, a plan for the adventurers living in the monster town. Farmus had to make sure they wouldn’t be hostile—or convince them to join Farmus’s side, even.

All these problems at hand and no profit to be made from it. Keeping the Forest of Jura’s status quo was difficult enough. If they attacked and destroyed an entire nation of monsters, they couldn’t even claim the land for their own provinces. No wonder they were facing a severe lack of volunteers.

King Edmaris knew precisely what all his nobles were thinking. He had the exact same thoughts. The difference was, he was already taking countermeasures.

The moment he heard the briefing, he already had his closest aides on hand, working out how to react. They discussed how to make the most profit from this. The crux of the issue was how to handle it without affecting the national interest.

“If we leave the monster nation to its own devices,” Razen conjectured, “its presence will become known to the Western Nations. Once it does, it’ll be impossible to make any move against it. If we strike, we must strike now.”

“Ha! Monsters?” Knight Captain Folgen half spat out before realizing he was in the king’s presence and immediately regretting it. “Certainly,” he continued in a more disaffected voice, “evolved monsters are a handful. The knowledge a demi-human has certainly makes one a formidable enemy. They are showing at least rudimentary levels of organization, and they number over ten thousand. In terms of the threat, we could charitably call them calamity-level and even boost them up to a disaster, depending. If the leader of such a monster group was hostile toward mankind…it could even mark the birth of a new demon lord.”

“What?” the king shouted. “If it is really disaster-level, the mere idea of handling this alone is ridiculous!”

Nobody could answer him. Razen merely nodded his apparent agreement with Folgen.

“Do not worry, sire.”

This was Reyhiem speaking, the most powerful religious figure in Farmus. As an archbishop sent by the Western Holy Church, he was (on paper, at least) on an equal position of power as the king himself, given Farmus’s adoption of Luminism as its state religion. That was just a formality, however; in reality, Reyhiem was more of a trusted right-hand man, taking his cues from the king.

“Ah, Reyhiem. Do you have a proposal?”

The bishop flashed a smile that seemed a little too sinister for a member of the clergy. “I do, I do, of course. Regarding this land of monsters, our Church has already identified it as a very dangerous presence. I was contacted earlier by Cardinal Nicolaus Speltus, and he told me we plan to smite this nation, as it poses a clear threat to the heavens above. However, we have almost completely failed to damage them so far, and we’ve even encountered traitors among the human nations… Our Church wants to avoid making the Council our enemy, as he said, and he told me to keep my ears open for any nation willing to offer us assistance.”

“He did! So the Church has already certified them as an enemy of the gods… But they seek the help of other nations?”

King Edmaris’s eyes sparkled. Cardinal Nicolaus Speltus was a close confidant of the pope, the supreme leader of the Holy Empire of Lubelius, the man at the de facto seat of power across all the Western Nations. He was also Bishop Reyhiem’s direct superior, and he was an arrogant, coldhearted man, one occasionally appraised as a “devil under the sage’s mask.” He was a sharp-witted figure, ever ready to take action, enough so to give even King Edmaris pause—and this man had made his decision. Which meant the woman serving him was ready to move. It made the king smile a sincere smile.

“If—and this is just a hypothetical—but if citizens of Farmus were to come to harm in this monster nation, what would happen then?”

“The Western Holy Church would take full responsibility to provide rescue to its followers, I imagine.”

“Ah. Well, well! We are ever the devout followers of the faith, after all.”

“You are; you are. Very true.”

The king and the bishop shared a smile.

“If so,” interrupted Folgen, “I promise we would be delighted to march forward and smite these monsters. I believe the Royal Knight Corps would be enough to annihilate this nation, but I would like to be thoroughly careful. Archbishop, will the Church be able to provide further resources to us?”

Reyhiem, apparently expecting this question, deepened his smile. “We can, Sir Folgen. I understand your concern. Cardinal Nicolaus has already provided his approval to deploy the Temple Knights.”

The Temple Knights was a catchall term for Church-affiliated fighters sent off from its central temple to other nations. Said to number in the tens of thousands, they offered the manpower to back up the immense influence the Church had in the area, the most gifted among them forming the Crusader groups and calling themselves paladins. Farmus’s own Church sites had Temple Knights stationed in them, about three thousand strong—the largest number stationed in any nearby nation.

Even as an archbishop, Reyhiem didn’t have the authority to issue orders to them. Now, though, Cardinal Nicolaus was ready to give the command. They could all be sent into battle in the forest without a single problem coming up.

“You have permission to use the Temple Knights…?” Folgen nodded, satisfied. “The Holy Church must be quite serious about this, indeed.”

The king joined him in smiling as he pondered this. Judging by how the Western Holy Church sees all monsters as the common enemy of mankind, there’s no way they would ever allow this nation to exist. Still, without a just enough cause to stir men’s minds with, they would have trouble filling their armies. And that’s precisely why they want to use us, eh? Heh-heh-heh-heh… Well, the same works vice versa, you know…

If both sides were of the same mind, it would be easiest for them to simply join hands in battle. Such was King Edmaris’s conclusion.

“I would suggest,” Reyhiem said to sum up, “that we take up the advance force at the same time as when the Western Holy Church declares the war to begin. You will enjoy the full glory of serving as the sword of mankind!”

The king was in agreement. Whether it was diplomacy or war power, there was nothing to fear with the Holy Church backing you up.

That left just one problem:

“Now, what bait can we prepare for the nobles to pounce upon?”

They needed to make the noble ranks cough up their soldiers, and they needed something to reward the mercenaries with. A worthy cause and some lofty speeches wouldn’t sway them. It could even antagonize them.

“I imagine glory alone won’t move them,” a scowling Razen intoned. “If we put the Royal Knight Corps, the Sorcerer Alliance, and the Temple Knights within Farmus together, that’s nine thousand troops. That should be enough to assure victory, but…”

With the exception of Reyhiem, everyone in this huddle wanted their approach to be foolproof. But it was Reyhiem who broke their silence once more.

“Oh yes, yes,” he said with a smile. “Cardinal Nicolaus mentioned that in his message as well. As he put it: ‘Monsters are not people. Therefore, the Church has no interest in their lands. Do as you will with them.’”

Monsters aren’t people? Isn’t that obvious? King Edmaris had to keep himself from asking out loud. Once they destroyed the monster nation, it’d be a waste of effort if they couldn’t manage their land afterward. An extremely unattractive proposal. But could they manage it?

Perhaps if they blessed the land and then received the Church’s permission to rule over it? The king had no qualms about ruling over monsters—monster slaves and the like weren’t rare sights. If they were willing to negotiate with and submit to them, he could guarantee them protection under the name of Farmus—assuming they converted and became servants of Luminus. If not, they’d raze the land, enslave the surviving monsters, and annex the entire territory.

There might be certain issues with this if Farmus was dealing with demi-humans like dwarves. Simple evolved monsters, though? Those weren’t people. They could even use magic to enslave them without a second thought.

“I see. Cardinal Nicolaus is a broad-minded man indeed, reading that far ahead in time…”

“He is; he is! And he wishes for nothing more than the continued prosperity of your kingdom, sir.”

King Edmaris gave this a firm nod. Farmus would gain new territory, along with all the natural resources the Forest of Jura had to offer. No one would complain if he left the region’s defense to them. The Council had already recognized monster slaves as perfectly legal.

Best of all, this would earn Farmus new trade routes—routes that’d let them leapfrog right over Blumund and continue their previous lucrative relations with the Dwarven Kingdom. Charging tolls for the highways already built in the forest could even lead to bigger earnings. Giving the nobility flashes of such potential fortune should be enough to make all of them sign on for battle.

And then…I’d love to procure and enslave that monster nation’s engineers for us…

With all apparent problems solved, it was time to see what else was on the table. King Edmaris recalled a certain item that had charmed him not long ago—a bolt of silken cloth. It had been obtained from that monster nation, they said, and it felt more pleasant against the fingers than any fabric he had seen before. Magical fibers and cloth seemed like mere playthings compared to this. Upon further analysis, it was found to be intricately woven with fiber obtained from hellmoth cocoons. Hellmoths were B-ranked dangers, and the idea of using their cocoons was seen as beyond foolhardy… But just look at what you could make from them!

He simply had to learn how this was made then position it as one of Farmus’s showcase exports. This wasn’t the only wonder product from the monsters, either—others were circulating, according to the report. He had already ordered his government to procure as many examples as possible—but why even make that effort? Just exorcise the evil from the monster lands, and it was all there for the taking. It couldn’t be simpler.

King Edmaris found himself struggling to maintain his composure at the thought of all these untold riches. It made him want to burst into a childlike smile. If he had the Western Holy Church’s backing, this battle was now a holy war , one with him as leader and commander. The honor that victory would earn him suddenly took on an even more important meaning. It’d firmly establish him in the world scene, and it’d firmly put even the upper nobles in their place.

He needed to command this holy war, he thought—and once it was over, he’d be able to bask in the reputation of being King of Champions. Folgen, the champion who’d defeated a disaster. Razen, the sage who’d assisted him. They’d all have their glory. And with Cardinal Nicolaus looking on, Reyhiem could even get on the fast track to the next cardinalship.

Everyone had much to gain from this battle. And while the Western Holy Church would take their “alms” in return, it was a small price to pay for all the fortunes they’d be amassing. And—hell—any of the nobles who excelled in battle could be granted monster lands as tribute. The king wanted their industry and their technology; the land didn’t really matter to him. As long as he retained the right to charge tariffs and tolls, he didn’t mind sharing the leftovers a little. Compared to the small ransom he paid to defend the frontier lands, it’d be a huge money saver.

In short, King Edmaris wanted exclusive control over all his nation’s riches. So he needed to create a situation where the nobility would have no room to complain if they didn’t step up.

This entire emergency meeting was a charade to make that happen. A charade to make them all convinced the king thought, Well, if nobody’s going to volunteer, then I suppose it is my duty as leader to .

The king looked around the room one more time, making sure none of the higher nobles or ministers was about to open their mouth. Now he had the atmosphere he wanted. The king would have to come out himself. The time had come.

“I was hoping I could ask all of you, but perhaps it is too heavy a burden to bear…”

King Edmaris attempted to continue. Before he could, a single nobleman raised his hand.

“My lord, if I may dare to interrupt you! This monster nation, Tempest, has reportedly already made ties with the nations of Dwargon and Blumund. They have begun engaging in trade with adventurers. I thus wonder about the wisdom of making any rash moves…”

“Indeed,” said another. “And this talk of developing their own technology, with the full assistance of dwarven smiths… If we raised an army, who can say what sort of meddling our neighbor kingdoms would engage in?”

This was, in turn, the Marquis of Muller—himself a leader of one of the larger nobility factions—and Count Hellman, who generally followed his lead in court affairs. They both turned to Razen, resisting the urge to scowl at him.

“…You are correct. To be honest, I can certainly see the wisdom of letting sleeping dogs lie…”

“I am in agreement with you, Razen,” stated the king. “But—”

“Yes, I am aware, sire. If we leave that nation to their own devices, our authority in the region will plummet. Thus, we must strike them before that happens, regardless of the potential profit at stake… This is a competition for survival.”

King Edmaris nodded, eyes clouded with greed. As were Razen’s. They had practiced this exchange earlier. The king, ever thinking about his own nation, and the loyal retainer who served him. None of it was real, but the king’s trap was already sprung upon the audience.

“I also have an announcement to make,” Reyhiem stated. “We have not submitted public notice yet, but we have already received divine guidance on the subject. Our gods tell us that the land of monsters must be destroyed.”

This unnerved the nobles. It was now a holy war they were talking about, a Holy Church–approved conflict. The will of the nation would be on their side now.

“I understand the concerns of our good marquis and count,” the king said. “But I could hardly find it in me to doubt the words of the Holy Church.”

“And consider this!” Folgen shouted. “Consider this a way of opening the eyes of the assorted nations who have been tricked and deceived by this country. No monster is worthy of trust—a lesson I feel we should teach them personally!”

“B-but…”

“That would mean we could potentially take the blame…”

“Hmm?” King Edmaris turned a gentle smile toward his two doubtful noblemen. “Then what do you suggest we do?”

Any concerns from neighboring countries would no longer be an issue the moment the Holy Church backed them up. Farmus was a superpower, one with major clout in the Council. If the cause was presented as just, both politically and religiously, it would be simple to spurn any outside interference.

The two nobles turned to face each other for a moment. “Could we perhaps send a messenger?” Muller suggested for them. “If we could negotiate with them, we’d be able to tell whether they are worthy of our trust or not! And if they seem ready to be allies, the monster threat would be a thing of the past. We would have nothing to fear. The Church has not made an official proclamation yet, I am sure, because it wants to discern their true motives first.”

“Exactly.” Count Hellman nodded.

He and Muller both owned domains that bordered the forest, making defense a constant worry. The marquis’s lands also shared a boundary with Blumund, which they had good relations with. That must be what drove his opposition.

Well, well. Perhaps Blumund has been bribing you…but this is already settled business.

King Edmaris laughed a bit internally, reveling at how late this resistance was as he placed both of them on his watch list. His mind was already full of the fortune and glory he would no doubt acquire soon.

“No, my good marquis and count,” Reyhiem interjected. “The divination has already been provided. Luminus refuses to abide the presence of any monster—especially monsters who dare to build a nation. Any such nation would mark the birth of a new demon lord! Allowing such a filthy thing to exist is an egregious and unforgivable sin!!”

Muller and Hellman both gasped, taken aback by this outburst.

“I understand your views,” King Edmaris added solemnly. “Let me ask you: Can we trust these monsters? Who could guarantee that they will not attack people someday? Are you willing to take that responsibility? Are you willing to protect the lives and fortunes of my beloved people? We are dealing with monsters. Creatures we could never fathom. Creatures in eternal conflict with mankind. Don’t you find the views you espouse to be rather imprudent?”

The overpowering performance caused both of them to turn white, unable to respond. How could they? The enemy wasn’t even human. What could possibly bring anyone to trust in them? That unspoken implication was impossible to refute.

As far as King Edmaris was concerned, the so-called leader of this horde was nothing more than a softhearted pushover. The speech he reportedly held at the Armed Nation of Dwargon made that patently clear. When he read that ridiculously idealistic quote in the report—“as we attempt to build a nation in the Forest of Jura that serves as a bridge between the human and monster races”—he laughed. What a foolish, easily manipulated leader this was! Someone with no force of personality, a monster who found it impossible to tell a lie—that was the impression the king received.

That little tidbit wasn’t included in the reports handed out to the nobility. It was a small trick, crafted to ensure there would be no dissenting opinions, and it could be easily defended as “not my fault” if someone found out.

If their leader is this softhearted, it might be easier to make them surrender than I thought…

In Edmaris’s mind, this leader might find war so distasteful that a bit of a sales pitch on the benefits of life under Farmus rule might bring him right to the bargaining table.

And if so, we can resolve all of this in peace. If they provide their fortune, I could even allow them the right to self-govern…

He tightened his expression, now in danger of becoming twisted in avaricious glee. Confirming that no further dissent was coming, he spoke.

“This is a holy war! We will begin by deploying a vanguard force to relay my will to our foes! If they acquiesce to us, then fine. If not, I will show them the will of divinity with our most loyal of forces!”

“““Rahhh!”””

And with that out in the open, nobody would dare voice their disagreement now. The effort to “cleanse” the land of Tempest had begun.

After the conference:

“But what if they don’t surrender once our vanguard force causes an uproar in their territory? They might show their true colors and resist us.”

“They could,” Razen replied to Folgen. “That’s why I believe we should send the otherworlder Shogo along with them to prove our strength…”

“Oh? I’m not sure if sending Shogo alone would be wise. He may spout a great deal of nonsense most of the time, but his strength is genuine. We can’t allow him to go out of control and lose him for good.”

“Indeed. Well, you know the number of monsters involved. We might be able to flee back home, but one bad decision and he might just be killed. With Kyoya along, I doubt we will run into any issues. Besides, we have the perfect person for a mission like this.”

“Ah. Her, you mean? I see.”

King Edmaris nodded his agreement.

The mission of this military strike was to sap the enemy’s will to fight. If they could subjugate Tempest without any bloodshed, they could hope for nothing more. They had the numbers to guarantee victory if push came to shove, but as the king theorized, the fewer casualties they could get away with, the better.

“Yes,” he said. “We may not need to target our full forces upon these creatures after all. But keep your guard up.”

“Worry not, sire. We have taken every possibility under consideration. I ordered them to simply spread a little havoc and then return to us.”

As the king hoped, Razen was planning to take a wait-and-see approach.

The three of them were then interrupted by Reyhiem and his near-inhuman smile. “My lord,” he said, “if possible, would I be able to test out one of my secret spells?”

“Secret? What sort of spell is this, Archbishop?”

“What are you scheming now, Reyhiem?”

“Well—”

He gave them a full rundown, his smile growing ever more cheerful. It proved contagious, spreading to King Edmaris’s face, then Razen’s and Folgen’s as he continued to speak.

“Heh-heh-heh… I like it.”

“Your answer?”

“Very well. Go right ahead! I will allow it, Reyhiem.”

“It gladdens me to hear that, sire. I promise it will bring you the utmost of glories!”

And so Reyhiem’s pawns slowly, secretly began to move themselves.

Following King Edmaris’s missive from on high, a vanguard force was quickly formed. It consisted of a hundred mounted cavalry, plus a breakthrough force consisting of several wagons. Three otherworlders were among them: Shogo Taguchi, Kyoya Tachibana, and a woman named Kirara Mizutani.

“Umm,” Shogo griped, “I haven’t been on a trip in, like, ages. If they chose me, does that mean, like, it’s that kind of thing?”

“Yeah, no doubt about it.”

“You hear anything, Kyoya?”

“…You were there, too, weren’t you? The Kingdom of Farmus is stepping up to wipe out that slime.”

“That’s crazy. All these forces just to squish a slime?”

“Well, who can say? If it’s got ten thousand or whatever monsters under its control, that’s gonna be a pretty decent threat.”

“Yeah, whatever. I mean, the knights in this country are just pathetically weak! Seeing that, it makes me think—like, the humans in this world are such massive wusses that even dinky little monsters are enough to make ’em crap their pants.”

Kirara laughed. “That, or maybe you’re just too damn strong, Shogo. I mean, that unique skill you got for battle is nuts.”

“Ahh, I’m more scared of your skill than Shogo’s.”

“Yeah. Even I wouldn’t like my chances against you.”

Kirara was still young, aged eighteen. Just like Shogo, she had been summoned into Farmus-controlled land three years ago. Her skill—which involved influencing people’s thoughts during negotiation—wasn’t directly related to battle, which led to rough treatment and assumptions that she was just another failed summon. At first.

Then it happened. It was too much for her to put up with—and that had made her use the power right . “Stop screwing with me, you assholes!” she’d screamed. “I just wish anyone who messes with me would die !” The nature of the resulting Bewilder skill ensured that the effect was immediate. Anyone who’d failed to resist it immediately committed suicide.

A negotiation skill? No way. All she had to do was bark out an order, and she could make anyone do her bidding. It depended less on the actual words and more on what Kirara wanted on the inside. The results were nothing short of a massacre until Kirara’s summoner managed to place a locking curse upon her.

All three of them had had their powers checked from the moment they were summoned. The first few months were devoted to magic-assisted language lessons, along with a wide array of testing. The locking curse could not be resisted. Any order made with it simply had to be followed, whether you wanted to or not—and as part of that, Kirara was forced to reveal what her skill really was.

She revealed it, but she was inaccurate on a few of the details, thanks to her unfamiliarity with the language. As a fifteen-year-old at the time, for Kirara, learning a foreign tongue was a struggle. Even with the magical support, the mere act of studying was pure torture to her. The results led to that “I hope you all die” tragedy, and ever since, Kirara’s skill had been sealed away, restricted from activating without permission.

The same was somewhat true of Shogo, but (whether it was lucky for him or not) it didn’t take long for Shogo’s full strength to become obvious to all. That was what happened when you killed the thirty magicians surrounding you the moment you got summoned. It was the work of the unique skill Berserker, and as the name suggested, it simply provided a massive boost to the wielder’s physical strength and abilities.

He had been seventeen then, a delinquent from a failing high school, and his discontent and lust for violence had awoken the skill in him. Combined with the karate Shogo had studied since childhood, Berserker provided a massive boost to his fighting strength. That led to thirty massacred sorcerers. If Razen hadn’t been there, it would have been even worse.

It was never a given that people summoned into this world would just go quietly with their new guardians. They were taken from their own lives for purely selfish reasons; anyone could see the effect that would have, and the people on this world knew it well. To handle it, each set of summoning-ceremony spells came with a locking curse included that made the otherworlder do the summoner’s bidding.

“I swear,” muttered Shogo, “I wanna kill that old man. Just ordering us to do whatever he wants…”

“Yeah, seriously. One of these days he’s, like, totally goin’ down.”

“Oh, don’t be like that,” Kyoya replied. “At least if you do what he says, you’re guaranteed the best food and accommodation this world has to offer.”

They had gone through this conversation before. It was never enough to leave Shogo or Kirara convinced.

“Huh? Yeah, no shit! Especially when the ‘best they have to offer’ is garbage compared to our world.”

“Oh, totally,” Kirara added. “There are no cute stores, no cosmetics… No TV, no Internet, no smartphones. This world’s, like, completely devoid of entertainment. I’d be totally fine if this planet just exploded.”

The complaints had piled up to the point where all three could blow up at any time. Being forced to carry out orders with no free will, in particular, was proving unbearable. And Kyoya knew that much—but unlike the others, he was willing to take a more flexible approach to his plight. There was nothing he missed about his old world; he was far more interested in the powers obtained on this one—Shogo’s, Kirara’s, and his.

He had observed them, researched them, and thought about what could be done with them.

And as he had, this current incident occurred—a monster-slaying quest, their chance to work in the open. Finally, after two years, Kyoya would get to see actual battle.

Maybe Shogo and Kirara don’t like this, but I think this is our big chance. If it turns into a war, that’ll keep the guys with the locking curses on us too busy to keep tabs. Maybe we could even kill them—or maybe they’ll just go die themselves.



He couldn’t discuss this much with the other two. There was too much of a chance they were being magically eavesdropped on. Which wasn’t a bad thing exactly. But there Kyoya was—seeing this as a chance, waiting patiently for the exact moment he could strike and reclaim his freedom.

Soon, the wagon carrying all three of them—each with their own thoughts in mind—set off for Tempest.

Mjurran had received an emergency contact from Clayman. He ordered her to deploy a special sort of high magic.

This magic involved taking the entire area within a three-mile radius and converting it into an anti-magic zone. Spells like these took time, so he ordered her to begin working on it at once. The purpose was to shut off communication with the outside world—there was more to it than that, no doubt, but the demon lord offered no further guidance.

It was clear Clayman planned something big—something that he didn’t want the people of Tempest to know about. It deeply concerned Mjurran, but she would never be allowed to ask questions. Orders were orders.

What’s more, this magic was meant as a defensive spell against other magic. It was being specially customized to fulfill Clayman’s request, and as a result, it would have to be launched around a circle with her at the center. There was the rub. To keep high magic going, Mjurran would have to reveal the identity of the high-level magic-born who drove it: herself. There was no way doing so wouldn’t draw the attention of the locals.

In effect, Mjurran, a magic-user, was being faced with a potential angry mob of Tempestians in a zone that she herself had blocked all the magic from. It was essentially being ordered to die. The magic Clayman stipulated was positionally based, so once it was launched, it’d last for several days whether Mjurran was around for it or not. She was, in effect, a throwaway piece of the puzzle.

Receiving this order crushed her. But there, yet again, the figure of a single man in her life crossed her mind. If she refused this order, it would bring that man an all-too-tragic fate. Mjurran knew this better than anyone else, and that was exactly why the only choice available to her was to accept it.

I knew this would happen. A suitable end for me, I suppose, but I wish at least he could be spared—

She recalled the face of Yohm, the man who claimed to love a woman like her, and smiled. For someone who had lived with the coldest of frozen hearts for the past several centuries, those words were as gentle as a spring breeze.

Those words are all I need…

Steeling her resolve, she began to walk off by herself.

“Where’re you going, Mjurran?”

“Oh, Gruecith. Did you need something?”

“Heh! Not exactly, no.”

But he was clearly trying to follow her.

She tried to get away, recalling how Clayman had acted around her just a moment ago. He was always so calm and collected, but his orders just now hid a twinge of panic behind them. “You will trigger the magic as soon as possible,” he had said before shutting off their link. Something unexpected must have happened.

“Hey, speaking of which, did you see the new dessert they’re offering at the dining hall? It’s called a ‘cream puff’ or something, and Yohm said it was the best thing he ever had. Wanna try it out with me?”

Gruecith couldn’t have acted more carefree. It annoyed Mjurran a bit. His smile was already starting to corrode her steely resolve.

“I appreciate the invite, but sorry. Yohm brought one for me last night. He said it was a present.”

“Pfft. That bastard… Trying to get a leg up on me again.”

“A leg up? What’re you talking about? I have a bit of an errand to do, so if we could talk later—”

“An errand? I’ll really get to see you later?”

“Er, of course. Why wouldn’t you?”

She did her best to brush him off, leaving Gruecith behind on the path.

“Well, I got the weirdest news just now, y’know?” He pointed his eyes at Mjurran. “Something about the demon lord Milim declaring war on my leader. It sounded insane to me, but you’re acting pretty weird, too, so I was just wondering.”

Ah. There we go. Now Mjurran understood. She had no idea why the demon lords Milim and Carillon were at odds with each other, but she was sure Clayman was pulling the strings yet again. He was pulling them—and then something happened that he hadn’t expected. Maybe Milim’s declaration of war was outside his prediction? Maybe his plan was to have Milim launch a surprise attack on the Beast Kingdom, with Mjurran launching a spell to coincide with that. But now that Milim was going off script, she imagined, the whole thing was falling apart.

But why does he want to cut off all communication from this country?

Englesia and Tempest had an agreement with each other, but against an angered Milim, they simply didn’t have enough war power. What would be the point of cutting their—?

Then it struck her like a bolt of lightning.

…Oh. He’s afraid of that slime Rimuru. That slime might just have the power to change Milim’s mind, after all.

The demon lord Clayman feared Rimuru, a presence increasingly becoming an X factor in his life, joining the fray. So he ordered Mjurran to prevent Carillon from contacting Tempest’s leaders, who’d then surely relay his SOS to Rimuru. The longer she dallied, the angrier Clayman would be with her. She needed to launch it at once.

“Plus,” Gruecith continued, “knowing you, I’m sure you’re already aware, but the top leaders in this nation are pretty damn busy right now. Do anything funny at a time like this, and it’ll be your life, y’know?”

He was right. The top staff in Tempest were, to say the least, flustered. Some mysterious armed group had been approaching their territory for the past few days, requiring the full attention of Soei and his agents. There were storm clouds ahead, it seemed, and everyone could practically feel the tension among the leaders.

“Oh? I didn’t know.”

Something was happening. Something beyond Clayman’s expectations. It unnerved her. There was no telling what it could be. She had to launch that magic at once, or else Clayman, crazed with fury, might just kill her and everybody else in this town. And Gruecith just refused to let her go.

“‘I didn’t know’ ain’t gonna cut it, lady. I can’t let you do anything weird right now—you got that?”

“What kind of nonsense is that…? If you’re fighting against Milim, aren’t you in much more danger than any of us?”

“Oh? You talk like you know her. Don’t worry about me. Lord Carillon is invincible. I don’t care how strong Milim is; I couldn’t even think of my lord tasting defeat. What I care about more right now is you , Mjurran!”

“Look, really, what are you—?”

“Let’s stop playing games here. You’re magic-born, aren’t you?”

Maybe she’d be able to talk her way out of this. But right up to the end, Mjurran never considered the option of deceiving Gruecith.

“Huh. Your mind’s always the sharpest when it comes to things like that , isn’t it? Well, no point hiding it. I think the ogre mages spotted it, too.”

“So why?!”

“Because I have to. Listen, Gruecith, I like you a lot, too—as a friend. But if you’re going to get in my way right now…I’m ready to kill you.”

With that, Mjurran did away with her magic-driven human disguise, revealing her original magic-born form.

“Ah…?!”

Gruecith quivered under the pair of large eyeballs boring down into him, virtually roaring with flame.

“Why are you so ready to…? Are you preparing to die? What for? What…? You’ve got a master giving you orders, don’t you?”

“I don’t see any need to answer that.”

For Gruecith, that was as good as a yes.

“Y’know, they said Lord Clayman’s notorious for using his minions like throwaway cannon fodder. You aren’t—?”

“Enough from you! Say one more word, and I will kill you, Gruecith!”

Seeing the normally immovable Mjurran descend into such a panic told him everything else he needed to know.

“Oh. I get it. If you’re willing to follow him straight to your own death—”

He was interrupted before he could finish.

“—Let me hear more about that.”

It was Yohm, using all-but-perfect camouflage skills to trick them as he strolled out from underneath the trees. He usually took great pains to look out for Mjurran. There was no way he wouldn’t notice her bizarre behavior.

“Yohm…”

She had revealed her secret to the one person she least wanted to—but, oddly, it filled her with a sense of relief. A relief that turned into surprise at what he had to say next.

“Mjurran, you have to believe in me. I swear I’ll protect you.”

“What are you, crazy? You can see perfectly well by now—I’m a high-level magic-born! How is a human weaker than me supposed to keep me safe?!”

Yohm ignored the frantic plea, growing unusually passionate.

“Human? Magic-born? None of that stuff matters, man! I fell in love with you. I love your face, I love your scent, I love your warmth. The way you live, the way you hold yourself all proud like that. I love all of it. And that means everything to me!!”

“…What are you saying? All that was just a fantasy created to trick you.”

“Don’t worry, Mjurran. I’m prepared to let you keep on trickin’ me…right up to the day I die!”

“Nh…!!”

What an idiot , she thought from the bottom of her heart. But it was such a bold, pleading declaration that it struck her completely dumb.

“Heh. I won, didn’t I? You’ve fallen for me?” He flashed her the biggest smile she had ever seen. “I swear I’ll believe in you until I die. If I do, then how’s that any different from it being the truth, huh?”

Mjurran still lacked the words. You’re so stupid. So, so stupid. But if that’s how you are, then I…

“Heh-heh-heh. What a pitiful man you are. I approached you because I wanted to take advantage of you. You’re so pathetic; it makes me laugh. This is ridiculous. Enough of this charade!”

And with that cold rejoinder, Mjurran began to cast. There was no more time left to waver. The tears she felt on her cheeks surely must have been her imagination.

“No! Stop, you fool! You’re really…?!”

“What’s going on, Gruecith?”

With a beautiful, lilting voice, the spell unfurled itself—and the laws of the world began to be rewritten. Yohm and Gruecith were already powerless to stop it. If they could, the only real way would be to kill her. And if that happened, she was okay with it. But she simply had to complete this spell.

She continued to chant, as if in prayer—with her heart and soul, aching to protect the man she loved.

The scene in Tempest was even more chaotic than Gruecith thought—even before everything went to pieces, just as Mjurran neared the end of her work.

Benimaru, drowning under a deluge of hurried reports, already looked sick of it all. The most worrying one had come from a sentry posted at a substation a few days ago, by way of Gobta. “Uh, Benimaru,” he’d said, “I guess there’s this bunch of humans in full armor, and they’re headed right this way. The sentry asked what they wanted, and they just said, ‘We have no need to speak with underlings!’ and marched on.”

Soei had quickly been dispatched to investigate. It was a group of knights, over a hundred in number, and Benimaru decided they could no longer be ignored. Soei kept gathering intel, along with Soka and his other men. Soon, they’d pinpointed the group’s origin: the Kingdom of Farmus.

As long as the Farmus platoon’s goals were unclear, working with them had been difficult. Thus, Benimaru had Soei’s team keep a close eye on them as he’d discussed the increasingly worrisome issue with Rigurd.

“Perhaps we should inform Sir Rimuru?”

“Ah,” Rigurd had replied, “after he left us to watch this town, is it really good to keep pestering him?”

“Perhaps. He makes frequent return trips at night, so we could inform him then.”

That brought them to now. Rimuru, after all, could use his Warp Portal to come back here any time he wanted. So Benimaru left his briefing for later and worked on the medley of other issues awaiting his attention. It was all very unfamiliar work, and being chased constantly by it made the days pass like lightning.

In the midst of all this, Soei’s team sent a report from Farmus itself. The kingdom was apparently engaging in rapid preparations for war. It made Benimaru wrinkle his eyebrows.

“This might be bad news for us, Rigurd.”

“I’m afraid so. Not something we can afford to take so casually. I think we had best have Sir Rimuru back here at once.”

The two looked at each other. They both concluded that handling this brigade of knights the wrong way could very well lead to war. So Benimaru tried contacting Rimuru—but before he could, he received an emergency magical communication from Alvis, the Golden Snakehorn and one of Eurazania’s Three Lycanthropeers.

“The Beast Kingdom will enter hostilities with the demon lord Milim in one week’s time. As a result, I want you to accept the citizens we are evacuating.”

The delays Mjurran experienced in deploying her anti-magic zone allowed this message to squeak its way through. Although Clayman himself should take some of the blame—Milim’s flight speed was so fast that she reached Eurazania far ahead of his planned schedule. Not that it mattered to Benimaru. No, the portent of this news was so vital that it seemed to change the very air around them.

“You must be joking!”

At once, the top leaders of Tempest were gathered—Rigurd and Rigur, Lilina and the other chief hobgoblins, Kaijin as a special adviser, Shuna as secretary, Shion as Rimuru’s representative, plus Hakuro and Geld. Nearly a dozen people crammed into the meeting hall. Gabil was not in attendance, not having been appointed to this level of leadership yet. Instead, he was simply advised that an emergency was underway and to stand by until further orders. Kaijin also informed Vester of the news, telling him to maintain regular contact with King Gazel of Dwargon as needed.

And in the midst of all this, the very party of humans who had vexed Benimaru earlier arrived, disguised as merchants.

Dude! This town’s more advanced than the capital of Farmus!

Shogo couldn’t hide his surprise.

He and his otherworlder friends were trundling into town, a single knight serving as their coachman while the rest of the hundred-strong team kept their distance. The unexpected sight of the town rendered him speechless. It was amazing. Nothing about the term monster town had prepared him for this. The sewer system kept all foul-smelling odors at bay—and, really, the monsters walking around seemed more identifiably human than any other species. They were clean, bathed, and wearing more proper clothing than many of the merchants and townspeople around Farmus.

One look was all it took to confirm that life here was far more bountiful than life over there. It was packed with adventurers, merchants briskly running to and fro as they carried out their business.

Goddamn! I’ve been ripped off this whole time! Why the hell’re the monsters livin’ better than we are?!

The initial waves of shock were wearing off. Now, within Shogo, a darker well of anger was beginning to rise. The same was true with Kirara.

“Um, what’s the deal with this? Like, why’re these guys living way swankier than we are? Something’s got to be wrong here.”

“Ahh, don’t get too angry,” Kyoya said—but even he couldn’t help but feel it was unfair. His eyes were squinted, brooding with resentment.

“And this whole place is run by a slime, yeah? If we kick its ass, we can take over this joint, can’t we?”

“That’s, like, the best damn idea I ever heard, Shogo! Let’s do it!”

“I’m fine with that, too, but we can’t stray from our orders too much.”

“Oh, it’ll be fine! I’m just sayin’—they told us to kick up a ruckus before the rest of the knights showed up, right? Everything’ll work out great!”

“Totally. Like, they wanna stage it like we’re a bunch of lawful citizens and the monsters attacked us out of nowhere, yeah? I can just use Bewilder to set up some kinda pretext, and all the non-monster adventurers will do whatever I want.”

Kirara liked her chances, and she had reason to. It was the main reason why the three of them were here. And neither of her friends saw much to worry about, either.

“Yeah,” Kyoya agreed, “that’s pretty much what Sir Razen told us to do.”

“Pfft. Quit callin’ that asshole ‘sir’ around me!”

“Totally. I hope that dude gets a heart attack or something. Then we’d be, like, free and stuff.”

“Ha-ha-ha! Sorry, just a habit,” Kyoya said. “We can’t really dis him to his face, you know?”

His lighter approach had a distinct motivation behind it. Kyoya, unlike the others, was still hiding his true character in this world to some extent. For now, he felt, it was best to play the loyal student around Farmus circles.

As they spoke, Shogo mentally went over his orders one more time, growing increasingly impatient to kick some ass. “I don’t care what kind of excuse you have to make,” Razen had told them. “Just start some kind of trouble—then you , Kirara, use your power to get the adventurers on your side! We’ll begin taking action once you do.”

Farmus was currently engaged with a total of three otherworlders. That alone was enough war power to decimate a smaller country. It was rare to deploy three at once, but the government wanted to cover for the possibility that another otherworlder was aiding the monsters.

Once Shogo and his friends began their business, the coachman driving their wagon would send off a signal to begin the rest of the operation. The otherworlders weren’t informed of the exact details, but nothing they’d do would be any hindrance to them, and presumably it’d make things even more favorable for victory. Shogo despised Razen, but even he had to praise his talents. If he weren’t a gifted magic-user, all three of them would’ve been free long ago.

Now he ran a hand through his well-oiled hair, lifting it up like the comb of a chicken.

“All right. How ’bout we get things moving?”

Kirara was the first to take action.

“Aaahhhhh!! You—you touched my butt just now, didn’t you? You tryin’ to do somethin’ to me?”

She had deliberately bumped herself against what seemed to be the perfect target—a kind of dopey-looking sentry who was staring into space. This was Gobzo, a guard under Gobta’s command and a hobgoblin known even among his own species for being a bit special.

“Unhhh? I—I didn’t do anything!”

He lifted up his arms, head swiveling around in search of some kind of support.

“Hey! Don’t, like, play dumb with me! Just tell me what you slapped me there for. All right?”

Kirara drew closer to him as she spoke—then, suddenly, she jerked her body backward and tumbled to the ground.

“Owww!! Help! Somebody call the guards!”

“Wh-wha—? No! I didn’t even do nothin’! I, uh…I am a guard…”

Gobzo was already starting to tear up a bit. He was the victim here, but frankly, he didn’t have a lot of allies nearby. The sheer dopiness of his act did little to turn the suspicion away from him—and Kirara was already deploying Bewilder, letting it sink in to the minds of human passersby.

“Whoa, the hobgoblin attacked that girl?”

“That’s a town sentry, isn’t it? What kind of sentry would pull that crap? I can’t believe it.”

“But he just knocked her to the ground, man.”

“Really? I thought the monsters here were supposed to be nice.”

“They are . Usually. So what’s the deal with this guy?”

The locals were still a bit incredulous, but few to none of the adventurers and merchant types nearby were willing to stick up for Gobzo. Nobody had a full grasp of the events, and it wouldn’t be long before Kirara’s skill had their minds completely under her control.

Shogo and Kyoya grinned at each other, then took a step forward to drive the dagger down.

“Whoa, dude, so this town just attacks its visitors without warning?”

“That’s their plan, huh? Invite merchants and people over and then strike when they least expect it?”

They shouted as loudly as they could as they walked over to protect the frightened-looking Kirara. Their trumped-up charges were lodged. The real show would begin only when this sentry’s supervisor showed up. If he was apologetic, they could just ratchet their beef up the ranks, with the crowd on their side. If he got angry and started throwing his weight around, that’d be a godsend. Even if he didn’t, it’d grow into a huge hullabaloo, the rest of the knights would storm in, and then they’d serve as judge and jury.

Shogo was therefore hoping whoever showed up next was just as stupid as their first target. He was disappointed.

“So what’s up?”

Gobta, apparent captain of the sentries, cheerfully strolled onto the scene—then did something Shogo wasn’t expecting at all.

“Oh man, Gobzo, not you again! I swear, every single time something happens, you’re in the middle of it!”

He gave him a bop on the forehead before turning back toward the otherworlders. “Hey, sorry about that, guys,” he said with a friendly nod. “I’ll try to educate ’im better.”

“G-Gobta, I, but, I…”

“You didn’t do it? Doesn’t matter. If you’re under suspicion, you’ve already lost.” He ominously raised an eyebrow. “Remember what Sir Rimuru said about the horrors of being falsely accused of assault on the street?”

This raised some eyebrows among the onlookers as well.

“S-so you believe me, Gobta?”

The sentry’s boss sighed. “Why d’you have to ask me that? You wouldn’t have the guts to do anything anyway.”

Gobzo rewarded him with a hug and a hearty “I’ll follow you wherever you go, sir!!” as tears streamed down his cheeks. This didn’t particularly delight Gobta, judging by the look on his face, but he still patted his sentry’s shoulders to calm him down.

It wasn’t a sight that pleased Kirara much.

“Whoa, what the hell? Are you saying that I’m, like, lying or something?”

“Oh, it didn’t sound that way?” a surprised Gobta asked. It was more than enough to set the girl off.

“Don’t give me that, you piece of shit! You got a lot of balls, tryin’ to pick a fight with me! Why do you trust this guy right off? You weren’t even here to see it!”

The shouting did little to affect the unbothered Gobta. “It’s simple,” he said. “It’s natural for us to trust our friends.”

“What?! You want me to accept that lame excuse?!”

“Well,” he calmly explained, “if you want me to explain further, the only girl Gobzo’s got a thing for is Shion, y’see. Everybody in Tempest knows this, so there’s no way he’d try puttin’ his hands on a young girl like you, no.”

There was a moment of silence as everyone digested this.

“Oh, that’s just mean , Gobta!” Gobzo’s face turned bright red.

“Yeah, yeah. Everyone already knows, remember?”

“Everyone…?”

Gobta shrugged. “Yeah, everyone. Deal with it, Gobzo.”

“I—I think I won’t follow you wherever you go anymore, Gobta!”

Now Gobzo was almost as angry as Kirara. Almost.

“Will you stop with this stupid crap?! I’m still here , you bastards! All of you should just die !!”

There was no longer any plan of action. All Kirara wanted to do was take everyone making her into a laughingstock and kill them. Shogo and Kyoya would be the only ones left standing in this street intersection, probably, but Kirara was too furious to care. It wasn’t like those guys cared about Razen’s orders that much. So she screamed it out without reserve, half smiling as she did. Thanks to living fairly restricted lives in Farmus, the three otherworlders were near the ends of their ropes mentally—and now the rebound was happening.

Already, Kirara could picture the stabbed, mangled bodies that would litter the street shortly.

But nothing happened.

“Wha…? Huh…?”

““—?!””

The adventurers and merchants looking on were too busy laughing at Gobzo to die for her. It visibly unnerved Kirara, as it did Shogo and Kyoya.

“I see,” a gentle but firm voice said to them. “Your skill converts your voice into streams of force that interfere with your targets’ brain waves. That’s quite a powerful one, so I’ll have to prohibit you from using it in our territory.”

It was Shuna. A pair of hobgoblins had reached her to relay the events just before the conference began. It had sounded like bad news to her, so she’d run over with Shion as her bodyguard.

Shuna revealed a breezy smile as her eyes focused upon Kirara. Her unique Parser skill provided a complete analysis of the girl’s ability, letting her unleash an aura that matched and neutralized the waves of force. One look from her discerning, fearsome eyes was all it took.

“You do not appear to be suitable for this nation. Please take your leave at once.”

She smiled again—but her eyes were frigid. She could tell Kirara had meant to kill with that attack, and she wasn’t about to take that lightly.

“Like…no way…”

Kirara sat weakly upon the ground. Now she knew it. She was completely outside her element. This woman was different. Not just another face in the crowd. She was a real monster.

Her two companions, however, had yet to pick up on this—or they did, perhaps, but didn’t find it worthy of note. Kirara had lost, but the violence her friends could mete out wouldn’t be suppressed by any weird mystic force. They had absolute confidence in their powers, and now they had the ideal opportunity to test them out. Besides, the plan was in full swing, and there was no canceling it at this point.

“Hmm…”

Shuna’s beauty attracted Shogo’s eye for a moment. Then he recalled why they were here. To enslave them. And if a woman as beautiful as this was a monster, there was no reason not to treat her as a slave.

“That’s your attitude, huh? Well, all right. If you’re up for it, I’m ready for you!”

His desirous eyes turned to Shuna, analyzing how best to tackle her. He looked forward to bellowing with laughter as she lay on the ground, bruised and crying, and continuing the torment until she begged for mercy.

Then a quiet voice broke his concentration.

“Your licentious thoughts are written all over your face, lowlife. March straight out of this town, and we’ll let you live. Refuse to obey, and your life will be forfeit!”

Shion’s slim, well-proportioned body was attired in a business suit, the epitome of cool beauty as she stepped in front of Shuna. Her eyes were furious as she strode forward.

Shogo flashed a ferocious smile. He stood strong, never even contemplating defeat. “Ha! I like it! Get in my way, and I’ll crush you!”

“I see. It appears you will not understand until you are smashed to the ground. Very well. Allow me to engage you!”

Then the two of them collided.

Kyoya couldn’t wait for this moment. There was no meddling referee overseeing this sparring match and thus no need for him to play the star-pupil role. And with Shogo wrecking things first, he had no reason to be patient any longer.

“If that’s how it is,” he said with a twisted smile and drawn sword, “I get free rein, too, don’t I? I was hoping I’d get to test this out sometime.”

Ever since he’d come to this world, Kyoya had been waiting for the tides to turn in his favor. Now, the time had come. Before his eyes was Shuna, with Gobta and Gobzo behind her.

Heh-heh-heh… I can’t wait to see how much I can do!

“Hoo boy. Gobzo, protect Lady Shuna for me.”

“Yes, sir, Gobta!”

Gobta drew his dagger and lowered himself for combat. Kyoya did the same, sword straight ahead of his eyes. He was a talent in kendo, and his unique skill—known as Severer—was focused entirely on slicing and dicing.

It was backed by his natural-born fencing talents and the extra skill All-Seeing Eye. The skill allowed him to fully grasp the situation around him, as if watching the action from a video game’s camera perspective. It blasted this information straight into his eyes, boosting his reaction time—and thanks to Mind Accelerate, he could recognize and address threats three hundred times faster than normal.

With these three skill powers in hand, Kyoya had become the greatest swordsman in both Farmus and the rest of the Western Nations. Razen had ordered him to keep these powers hidden, but that order was no longer valid. Kyoya finally had his chance to unleash them all, and it made the blood surge through his body.

“Haaa-ha-ha-ha! With these kinda skills, not even that old lady Hinata could challenge me, much less some wimp like you!”

With a final hearty laugh, Kyoya descended upon Gobta.



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The conference began in the meeting hall, minus Shuna and Shion.

“All right,” declared Benimaru. “Are we all ready? It is time to call for Sir Rimuru!”

He launched the Thought Communication.

Nothing happened.

The line was silent.

“I—I can’t connect to Sir Rimuru…?!”

The whisper from Benimaru plunged the meeting hall into silence. Silence then gave way to panic. The hall bustled with worried faces and hurried speech. Even Benimaru, who was scarcely ever rattled, instantly turned pale. That was how much Rimuru’s silence filled them with a sense of impending doom.

It was around that moment when Mjurran’s incantation reached its completion.

In an instant, all magic disappeared, throwing the entire town into a state of chaos. The townspeople moved to evacuate their panicked guests, but the effort didn’t last—or, really, wasn’t even possible. Because alongside Mjurran’s high magic, another secret spell launched itself—Prison Field, the result of extended research on the part of Archbishop Reyhiem. It worked on the same principle as Holy Field, the spell used on an official basis by the Church’s crusader teams, but modified so even the less-experienced Temple Knights could set it off if several of them worked together.

The buildings sagged down, creaking painfully. The merchants ran for cover, the adventurers trying to protect them. Some basked in the mayhem; others tried to save the town from it. The multiple factors tangled together to spread chaos, creating a day of disaster unlike any Tempest had seen before.