

PROLOGUE

THE DAY OF RUIN

The demon lord Carillon gazed up at the sky, a tense look on his face. Far beyond, he could feel a large, concentrated ball of magical energy flying his way, its aura so powerful that its owner didn’t even bother to conceal it.

It had to be his fellow demon lord Milim. She was clearly ready for combat, and her target was this very country.

Swooping in faster than the speed of sound, Milim stopped on a dime directly above Carillon’s castle. The declaration that ensued was made at deafening volume. It generally unfolded like this:

“Ah-ha-haaa! I am Milim Nava, the demon lord! And as of this moment, I hereby declare all treaties and agreements made between myself and the other demon lords null and void. That includes any and all pacts made with the demon lord Carillon! I’m also declaring war on him, so how about we meet up again a week from now? Best of luck trying to figure out how to deal with me. Ahhhhh-ha-ha-haaa!!”

As both a demon lord and Beast Master of his realm, Carillon got a headache from simply this one-sided declaration. “What in the hell is that airheaded woman thinking?!” he pondered. But he could stew over this later. For now, he needed to give out his marching orders.

“All warriors of the realm, assemble here at once!!”

The command was carried out with all due haste. In another moment, the whole of the Beast Master’s Warrior Alliance—led by their erstwhile leaders, the Three Lycanthropeers—was assembled in the great plaza in front of the castle.

“My lord,” stated the Golden Snakehorn Alvis, “we are all present, save for Gruecith.”

“Right.” Carillon sagely nodded. That single moment was enough, apparently, for him to compose his thoughts. “In a week’s time,” he gravely began as his army eagerly awaited his speech, “that Milim will come to attack us. The impertinent fool has abandoned all agreements made with other demon lords, not even bothering to convene a Walpurgis to make it official. This means she has made enemies out of all ten of the other great demon lords who rule the lands. It is simply beyond comprehension. Milim always was one to work on impulse a little too quickly, but she can be both cunning and prudent in thought. I can only assume something has happened to drive her into action.”

No one in the audience doubted him. They could hear Milim well enough from back there. But it all seemed so unreal that many among them couldn’t even guess how to respond.

“So,” Alvis calmly said, “how are the other demon lords reacting?”

“Frey and Clayman aren’t believing a word of it,” Carillon spat back. “Valentine’s as unresponsive as always, and Ramiris is too busy bragging about her ‘new guardian’ or whatnot to listen to a word I say. My compatriot Guy couldn’t care less, and I imagine the other three are similarly disinterested. Of course, if Milim and I really do engage in war, they’ll certainly be forced to believe it then.”

It didn’t sound like Carillon had many allies to rely on.

“Then war is the only option, General!” bellowed Sufia, the Snowy Tigerclaw. “And as for me, I’ve already got a ticket for the front row!”

Phobio, the Black Leopard Fang and a man known to let his passion for battle get the best of him, rose. “Sufia,” he said, “you can be so optimistic only because you know nothing about the demon lord Milim’s strengths. I can’t state this more clearly—she is on a different level from anyone else. The entire Warrior Alliance could take her on and be wiped out within seconds.”

His previous experience with Milim gave him due reason to be cautious, taking a more analytical approach to this threat. As far as he was concerned, any fight would mean a quick defeat for them.

“I am glad to see you act more maturely, Phobio. You know of Milim’s power; I have no reason to doubt you. So who do you think is stronger—Milim or myself?”

Phobio winced at Carillon’s fastball of a question. He took a moment to compose himself, then looked his master in the eye.

“It is impossible for me, Lord Carillon, to estimate the full strengths of two demon lords. However, as rude as it may be to say, I can tell you that the demon lord Milim lives up to every syllable of her alias, the Destroyer.”

He had avoided giving a direct answer, but Carillon could read between the lines well enough.

“Really, then! She is stronger than myself?” He gave this a good belly laugh. “Then perhaps this is the perfect opportunity to show all of you how powerful the Beast Master can truly be!”

This, as far as Carillon was concerned, could be a golden opportunity. And he was not trusting too much upon his own powers, either. He knew, with reasonable certainty, that Milim was likely stronger than he was. But—

“You know, in the end, if I turn tail and flee from my foes simply because of their strength, would I honestly deserve to be called demon lord? Plus, you want me to give up the chance to fight one of the most legendary demon lords ever? I’d never turn my back on that much excitement!”

Now his blood was pumping, his heart dancing in his rib cage. Milim was a pillar of strength. One of the oldest demon lords and (despite her looks) someone who struck fear in the hearts of almost anyone with a pulse. And he’d get to fight her. It was impossible not to be enthusiastic.

His parents had told him, as a child, a fairy tale about a dragon princess who ruled as a tyrant over her kingdom. Perhaps it was about Milim; perhaps it was about someone else. But back then, his parents’ words to him were:

“Inspire the wrath of the dragon princess, and your nation shall fall to ruin! Do not engage in conflict with the dragon princess, at all costs!”

Carillon always thought they were being silly. The Beast Kingdom of Eurazania was one of the continental superpowers, boasting a large expanse of bountiful land. They were a warlike people, and over half the population could credibly call themselves warriors. Its military was easily the equal of any other demon lord’s domain—and since Carillon became a demon lord, the ensuing several centuries had seen its power grow even further. There was nobody to fear. Carillon was sure of it. And gaining the chance to fully express his strength made his bloodlust burn white-hot inside him.

But, as king of a nation, he remained coolheaded enough to give one more order.

“Milim will be entirely my quarry. Along those lines, if she brings an army with her, I command you to engage them in combat—but if Milim comes by herself, I want all of you to evacuate the country at once. You guys get caught in the cross fire between us, I guarantee it’ll be painful for you.”

“B-but, my lord…?!”

“Allow me to join your side…”

“Lord Carillon, we must—”

“Silence!!” Carillon shouted, cutting off the Three Lycanthropeers’ complaints. “I am the only one of us who can prove a worthy opponent to Milim Nava! All of you must devote more attention to protecting our people. You are forbidden from joining the battle!”

On cue, Carillon unleashed the full extent of his aura, using it to cow every high-level demon into agreement. The sheer force was overwhelming enough that no one dared to object. Immediately, everyone there kneeled and expressed their allegiance.

“Trust me. I will win for us all!”

“““Raaaaaahhh!!”””

The plaza was bathed in cheers. The demons and vassals all looked up to their master, roaring with excitement. It had taken precious little time for the nation to decide its direction. From this moment on, the Beast Kingdom plunged into full war mode.

Once it was decided, the beasts began to work quickly. In short order, the evacuation of noncombatants kicked off. It would proceed quickly enough to be completed within a short week’s time.

“Say,” Carillon reflected to his three closest generals, “wouldn’t it be a good idea to confer with that slime at a time like this?”

“Meaning Sir Rimuru, sir?” asked Alvis.

“Ah yes, that was the name. Tell him to stock up on that wonderful drink of his, because we’ll be holding one hell of a victory celebration.”

“Hee-hee-hee! I look forward to it, my lord. The citizens should be evacuated to the Forest of Jura, then?”

“At once. I leave that in your capable hands, Alvis.”

With the order, tens of thousands of Eurazanian residents were on their way to Tempest, under the watchful leadership of Alvis. All who would remain in the country were Carillon, Sufia, Phobio, and twenty or so Warrior Alliance members serving them. The fateful battle with Milim was coming, but for now, they contented themselves with quietly sharpening their fangs.

The day came. Carillon looked up at the sacred mountain that loomed behind his castle, confident in his power. Then he stood, ready to engage Milim.

“Today will be the day when I prove to the world that I am strongest!”

“Fight on for us, Lord Carillon!”

Sufia nodded. “Once we are sure Lady Milim is alone, we will retreat to safety as well.”

“I don’t dislike you, Milim. We could’ve been good friends, I think. A pity.”

Carillon only barely whispered the words. Even in the best of conditions, it would have been difficult for anyone to hear. But they were wholly extinguished by the sound of Milim’s flight rippling across the battlefield.

Slowly, Carillon engaged his flight magic. Just as Milim arrived, without a single word between them, the battle began.

First, the preliminaries. His fists, filled with all his might, were enough to hold Milim back. But they failed to damage her, as if her body were simply refusing to take the blows. Her skin was protected by a Multilayer Barrier, repelling all physical stimuli.

With a light exhale, Carillon spread his aura forth, brimming with fighting spirit. As he did, he deployed a multilayer attack of his own, gouging away with it. Each blow had a vast store of slashing force as it struck at Milim—and none of them was enough to place even a single wound upon her. The spirit-infused blows simply knocked a few layers off her barrier, failing to reach her actual body.

Even with his ace in the hole—the White Tiger-Blue Dragon halberd he wielded—Milim’s Temma Sword absorbed every blow. Despite her small, childlike frame, she had enough power to fully resist the untold extent of Carillon’s own might. This Temma Sword was an ominous blade, a long, curved scimitar that suited her well and glowed a bluish-white. It was legendary, a sword that had felled many magic-born and demon lords in its time.

Geh, she’s drawn that sword?!

With a click of the tongue, Carillon fell back, regaining his balance. That single engagement was enough to make him revise his opinion of Milim. He’d had no intention of laughing her off before, but this was beyond all expectation. He hadn’t gotten truly serious about the battle yet, but he still had no idea how deep Milim’s strength ran. He instinctively realized now that this was no time to leave anything off the table.

“Look, Milim… Why are you doing this?”

“……”

The question was greeted with silence. Something was strange about this to him. She barely seemed there mentally, almost acting like someone else was controlling her.

“Heh. Let me guess: Has someone taken over your mind? If so, that is quite a pity. I wanted you to put your heart into this so that I could defeat you and prove I am the strongest!”

“……”

“The silent treatment, eh? Could it really be, then…?” Carillon grinned. “Well, it doesn’t matter. I’m going to win either way!”

The idea of the demon lord Milim having her brain taken over seemed like a sick joke to him. But she was acting weird—weird enough that he couldn’t dismiss the idea as sheer fantasy. If that was the case…then whatever the cause of this extremely odd turn of events, Carillon knew there would be no negotiating with her. This was a fight to the death, pure and simple.

So, without hesitation—first as a magic-born, then as a demon lord, level by level—he unleashed his force.

As befitting his name of Beast Master, Carillon was a lion-type creature. The king of the beasts, leading all his own beasts. Beast Transform, the intrinsic skill that all his subjects possessed, was now more powerful than ever—transformed within him into the unique skill Royal Beast.

Such was the form that Carillon was in now, the king of all creatures both beastly and magical in nature. His head was the proud head of a lion, his body as hardy as an elephant’s. His arms were as strong as a bear’s but boasted simian dexterity. His legs were supple, as powerful as any in the feline family—and upon his back, he bore the wings of a great eagle.

All these natural animal advantages melded with one another in the most beautiful of ways, covered in tough silvery fur. He was protected by Legend-class equipment—the best there was, obtainable only by evolving one’s own Unique-class weapons and armor over many years.

On his head was a crown, a mighty bird decorating the edge. Around his waist, a jewel-encrusted belt bearing a black tortoise of basalt. In his hand, the White Tiger-Blue Dragon halberd. All of these were infused with the magical power flowing from Carillon’s own body, letting them fully release their sheen and force.

The power was overwhelming, incomparable to before the transformation. This, beyond all doubt, was the demon lord Carillon’s true form.

Milim’s eyes twinkled momentarily at the sight—long enough that it caught Carillon’s attention but short enough that he wondered if he’d imagined it.

“Now, Milim,” he intoned, dismissing the thought. “I hate to say it, but since I have shown you this form, I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to leave, all right? It is a pity, but farewell!”

There was no room for sentimentality on the battleground. The moment he shouted it, Carillon focused all the power coursing through his body upon his blade. On the ground, the sheer weight of energy would be enough to rend the earth, pulverizing anything nearby. Even now, the remains of the aura filled the air like burned-out embers, hot enough to scorch the atmosphere itself.

“Prepare to disappear from this world forever! Beast Roar!!”

This was, in essence, a particle cannon that fired magical force. The tip of White Tiger-Blue Dragon was now gone, reverted to its composite magical particles. It was the Beast Master’s ultimate finisher move, one that could make everything in front of it vanish without a trace on the ground. Normally, its force did not begin to dissipate until around three hundred feet from the launch point. From there, it would gradually disperse before it reached its final point, one and a quarter miles away.

It was a long-range move meant for handling hordes of foes, and now he was focusing its entire fury upon a single figure. It was the first time he had ever done anything of the sort with Beast Roar, but Carillon was absolutely positive nobody could possibly survive such a blast. He gave it everything—no letting up, no thinking about what came next; it contained his full power.

He could feel the magicule count drain from his body. Even flight might pose a challenge after this, but if it earned him the win, it was a fair price to pay. Normally, he’d restrain it enough so he could fire off two or three blasts without issue, but not against this foe. This was Milim Nava, the Destroyer.

The attack was true, expanded to maximum range and powerful enough to cause damage to its own caster. No creature could ever survive this—that was how sure Carillon was. He breathed a deep sigh as he attempted to descend to the earth…

…then immediately went into evasive action as his animal instincts sniffed out a lethal threat right behind him. That snap decision saved Carillon’s life. Blood gushed out from a wound on his side, caused by the sword as it swished by. He closed the cut through sheer force of will.

In a panic, he turned around. He knew there was no point confirm ing it, but his mind still couldn’t believe it. His eyes were greeted by just the person he expected, floating there in midair, platinum-pink hair flowing in the wind as she spread her dragon’s wings wide. Now there was a bloodred horn jutting out from her forehead, which hadn’t at all been there before. Her skimpy outfit, somewhere along the line, had transformed into a suit of ebony armor.

Ahh… Is that how you usually look in battle form…?

Carillon had just about exhausted his magical force. Despair began to paint over his previously indomitable will to fight. You’re kidding me! She took that without getting hurt? Give me a break… It put him in an odd state of mind; he wanted to cry and laugh simultaneously.

Then, for the first time in the battle, Milim spoke.

“Ha-ha-ha! Not bad! I like it. It’s been a while since my left hand’s gone numb like this. As thanks, I’ll show you something I’ve got saved up.”

The words sounded a bit flat and unemotional to Carillon’s ears. But the impending danger they portended gave him no time to ponder over it. He didn’t want to see it. He really didn’t. At least none of his citizens was anywhere nearby. They were fully evacuated. There was no need to worry about the castle town.

Carillon contemplated fleeing the scene at full speed. His instincts, so trustworthy up to now, were telling him that staying here meant death.



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Her draconic pupils burst wide, her wings fully extended, Milim shouted:

“Drago-Nova!!”

The blast of light was thin, beautiful, reminiscent of the twinkling of stars. It rained down upon both the castle and the townscape that surrounded it, and remained soundless as it disappeared. The frequency it emitted reached beyond a human’s auditory range, which, along with the accompanying shock wave, was enough to fully destroy everything visible to the naked eye. Anything exposed to the light was helpless as it was ruthlessly disintegrated.

It was the ultimate in magic, the strongest in existence, and it was one main reason why Milim had always stood at the peak of all the battles she had fought over her many years.

That’s insane!!

Carillon just barely managed to flee above Milim in time. The fact that Drago-Nova had launched out in the direction she faced saved his life again—but the sight under him now made him lose all his words. The town, built of simple stone structures that integrated well with the local landscape, was completely erased.

This was Milim Nava, the Destroyer. A demon lord with whom you absolutely never engaged in conflict. Now Carillon had to admit it: His parents had been right. This was doomed. She was in too different a dimension.

But—

“But I wonder if there’s…”

“You wonder if there’s what? I’d like to know.”

Carillon could feel a thin blade touching the back of his neck. He sensed another woman there, flying in from behind. It was Frey the Sky Queen, the demon lord who held absolute rule over the heavenly skies. Now Carillon realized why Milim hadn’t bothered to hide her overwhelming aura. It provided Frey all the cover she needed to make her approach undetected.

“Ngh, Frey… Not you, too…?!”

“Not me what, exactly? Would you mind taking the time to explain?”

Frey moved her hand—and Carillon’s consciousness went dark.

It was the worst day in the history of Eurazania, one that would later be referred to by the assorted lycanthropes who called it home as the Day of Ruin.

