EPILOGUE

THE FINAL BRIEFING

It was evening by the time we wrapped up our talks with the tengu on the final day. After an earlyish dinner, we decided to hold our first administrative meeting in a while.

Since we had all my officials here for a change, I figured it’d be a good chance to brief each other on recent events. We also had a few visitors—Veldora, Ramiris, and her servants Beretta and Treyni. Milim would be “officially” coming to town three days from now, and I guess she was really starting to feel the heat from Frey, so she decided to head back home in the meantime. Smart girl. I don’t know how pissed off Frey was, but if Milim stayed here for much longer, I bet the answer would be very, and I didn’t want to be caught in the cross fire.

Plus, we had another new face:

“Now, before we begin this conference, there’s someone I’d like to introduce to you all. This is Mjöllmile, or Mollie, and I am considering a government post for him. He’s been intimately involved with arrangements for the Founder’s Festival in three days, and if it turns out successful, I’d like to name him chief of our financial affairs. I want all of you to treat him well.”

I had wanted to do this when everybody was around. Plus, I wanted Mjöllmile to handle the final pre-festival briefing for me.

“Er, my name is Gard Mjöllmile. Sir Rimuru has been kind enough to give me a crucial duty in the upcoming festivities, and frankly I’m rather tense, but I hope I will earn good favor from all of you here today.”

As an ever-so-slightly overweight fellow, Mjöllmile didn’t look “tense” at all. Still, it must’ve taken guts, introducing himself to a room full of monsters. Even he gets nervous sometimes, I guess. Dealing with mafia types in the big city was probably a far cry from going face-to-face with high-level magic-born like us.

With our introductions now concluded, I jumped right into the topic at hand.

“All right, Mollie, if you could go over how things are looking for us right now…”

“Yes sir. If you’ll excuse me, then—”

Taking my cue, Mjöllmile got up from his seat next to Rigurd and went over our preparations for the Founder’s Festival.

Two days from now, on the night before opening ceremonies, we would be holding a citywide launch party. This would be open to everyone, including not just event invitees but the merchants (and the adventurers bodyguarding them) visiting town, with free food and drink for all. The news had already gone out, of course, and I heard about farmers and the like from nearby cities traveling over for it—the exact sort of tourism I wanted to attract, so I wanted to be damn sure they had a great time.

In the reception hall, meanwhile, we’d hold a palatial banquet for the visiting royalty and nobility. Everything served here would be a tandem effort between Shuna and Yoshida the baker; they were debuting a lot of new dishes, I knew, so I couldn’t wait. This would be a standing buffet-type thing, since I wanted guests to enjoy smaller bits of as many different kinds of food as we could offer.

Then the Founder’s Festival officially began. On the morning of the first day, I would hold a speech. Yes, yet another speech, but I needed some kind of event to officially proclaim that I was a demon lord, so this was kind of unavoidable. I suggested skipping this, since everyone knew already, but my advisers all just smiled and said no.

Right after that, we’d kick off the battle tournament at the coliseum. I, however, would not be in attendance. This festival was meant to help VIPs from other nations get to know Tempest, so I couldn’t just sit around watching the preliminary rounds all day.

Instead, my itinerary included a seat at our newly refurbished and extremely fancy-looking theater. Nobody’s told me what kind of performance to expect, which made me a bit anxious, but Mjöllmile seemed really enthusiastic about it. “I feel this will be a chance to show the world that you are a cultured demon lord,” he’d said with a grin.

Shion was smiling right along with him, which did nothing to calm my nerves. But no point stewing over it. If it had Mjöllmile’s stamp of approval, I’d have to trust in him.

After lunch came a technological exhibition, including panels like Gabil and Vester’s history of healing potions, Kurobe and Garm’s grand tour of their weaponry, and so on. This would take place at our museum—which, like the theater, would be open to the general public from day two onward; for today, it was open to nobility only, so they could take their time with everything on display. I thought that staggering the schedules like that would be best for security purposes.

Speaking of day two, that’s when I’d begin to take in the battle tournament. Later that afternoon, I’d also hold a series of chats—or to put it another way, it was some unscheduled free time for me. Basically, I’d be in my VIP box at the arena, and if anyone wanted to talk to me, I’d take their questions one by one. Mjöllmile was arranging all that for me, so really, it’d just be a pleasant distraction as I took in the tournament. Everyone who received paper invites would have a guide provided for them, and they’d be free to enjoy the fest any way they wanted—peruse the stalls, enjoy our luxurious hot baths, or check out the tournament themselves.

Then, on day three, we’d finally open up our long-awaited Dungeon. The final matches of the tournament would take place that morning, and in the afternoon, you’d get to watch as adventurers tried their hand at conquering the labyrinth.

“You’ve completed quite an impressive coliseum while I was gone,” marveled Geld, no doubt impressed that there was a whole generation of talented craftsmen below him now.

“That we have. You and Mildo have a great apprentice in Gobkyuu. It’s a perfectly sound structure; you wouldn’t even know this was a rush project. If our top magic-born fought in here, I’d be worried, but any fights between competitors ranked below A shouldn’t be a problem.”

In terms of safety, the arena could juuuust about withstand a high-level spirit like Ifrit raging inside it. Which, I mean, if someone focused the full brunt of their attacks on the arena itself, I couldn’t do much about that, but I’d be there for the main battles, and I planned on putting a light Absolute Defense barrier over the stadium. Barring a catastrophe, the audience would be perfectly safe, probably.

“Kwah-ha-ha-ha! And I’ve discovered the ultimate in gourmet bliss with my hibachi grill. It will be a can’t-miss delight, trust me on that!”

Oh, I almost forgot. He really wanted to run a stand, so there wasn’t much to do for it except let him participate in disguise. It’s funny, though—somewhere along the line, Mjöllmile and Veldora had really started to get along with each other. All the impossible demands I had given them, and it looked like he was now fully used to things. Amazing. This guy may be more of a monster than I thought.

That was all for Mjöllmile’s rundown. Diablo, Hakuro, and Geld—who weren’t around for all the lead-up work—listened intently to it all, no doubt saddened that they couldn’t be a part of it. I should probably give each of them a reward of some sort. Geld’s could wait until he was done with his current job, but Diablo and Hakuro had wrapped up theirs with flying colors.

Making a mental note of that, I turned to my officials. “So far, everything’s been going smoothly,” I said. “Have any of you run into any issues?”

If nobody had, I was going to turn it over to Soei, but—

“Yes sir!”

That was Ramiris’s cheerful voice sounding out as she raised her hand. Ramiris, huh? I’m sure it’s nothing serious, then.

“What’s up, Ramiris?”

“Well, um, I got a problem?”

“Yes? What is it?”

“Okay, well, you see, it’s about the bottom floors of the Dungeon…”

She fell silent, glancing at Veldora.

“Kwaaaah-ha-ha-ha! Yes, erm, it is nothing serious. You recall the forest installed in Floor 95 of the labyrinth? Well, for some reason, it has started growing its way up into higher floors, and it now covers everything up to Floor 71!” Veldora said.

He sounded so casual about it, too. Floors 91 to 94 were thankfully sealed off, so they apparently weren’t affected. But the rest of the levels were now lush forest, thanks to the plant life making its way up the magicule ventilation ducts.

“Uh, that’s gonna be a pretty big pain in the ass to clean up, isn’t it?”

“It sure is! That’s why I’m bringing it up with you!” Ramiris cried.

I hated to say it, but she had a point. Eesh. If this was anyone’s fault, it was Veldora’s.

“And erm, we do have one more small issue,” the dragon added.

“…What would that be?”

I really didn’t want to ask, but I had to. But what Veldora gave me went far beyond my expectations.

“My boss-level monsters are missing. That was what I wished to discuss.”

Ah. Well, at least he wasn’t bringing up something stupid. Apparently, this creeping forest was sucking up the magicules in the labyrinth before those monsters could be spawned. As a result, we weren’t seeing monsters worthy of being deemed bosses of the lower dungeons. We did have a single tempest serpent born (rank: A-minus), but I already designated that the boss of Floor 40. It was Veldora and Ramiris, after all, who said they didn’t need “small fry” like that in their domains. If they wanted it back now, forget it.

“Also, I’m thinking about making a new Elemental Colossus, so I want you to get the materials for me!”

“Yes, and I want you to employ monsters worthy of serving as my bosses. And clean up the forest for me.”

“......”

Ramiris, I could at least lend an ear to. I was only planning to open everything up to Floor 50 for this unveiling anyway, so I figured we could manage. But I really didn’t have time for Veldora’s selfish demands. We’d have time to worry about that later; for now, he’d just have to take care of things himself.

I was just about to turn him down when I heard three voices at the same time.

“I think we have the perfect person for the job, actually.”

“Sir Rimuru, why don’t you let them take care of this?”

“My master, I can think of someone suitable…”

It was Shuna, Treyni, and Ranga.

Shuna suggested that Adalmann the wight would work as a boss; Gabil rapidly agreed with her. “Adalmann’s forces are weak against sunlight,” she reasoned, “so they would thrive in cave-like environments. I think the labyrinth would be perfect for them.”

Indeed, while Adalmann could leave the cave in the day, none of his forces could. I heard they liked to wander outside at night, much to the consternation of passing merchants. I had a stack of complaints from them in my office. Yeah, if I ran into a walking skeleton in the dead of night, I’d probably pee my pants, too. Putting them down in that maze seemed like a good idea.

“Besides,” Shuna glumly continued, “he is a little pushy. Praising you as a god and everything…”

In Adalmann’s eyes, I was a god, and Shuna my shrine princess. That was pretty annoying, yes.

“All right. We’ll stick Adalmann in Floor 60 as the boss. And Ramiris, I’ll get some stuff to make an Elemental Colossus with. Have Adalmann help you out.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. He’s got a lot of intelligence, if not much else. He ought to help out with your research.”

“All right. Thanks, Rimuru!”

So we had bosses for Floors 60 and 70.

Now it was Treyni’s turn, and she suggested leaving Floors 71 through 80 (where the vegetation was still relatively sparse) to Zegion and Apito. “Those two can summon their underlings,” she said, “so they should be able to reclaim those floors in quick order. Plus…” She flashed a look at Ramiris. “I think that Zegion would make a fine boss for Floor 80,” she said, smiling. “He’s done a wonderful job protecting the treant homeland up to now.”

“I see…”

“That sounds like a splendid idea,” chimed in Veldora. “I would be happy to train him up to a fighter worthy of making Floor 80 proud!”

Yeah, Zegion was definitely a lot stronger than one might guess. Definitely stronger than a tempest serpent, or at least he was the last time I saw him. But this is still Zegion we’re talking about—he’s just a bug the size of a squirrel or something, you know? I’m not sure how much you could “train up” something like that, but oh well. I already knew Veldora was a weirdo, so I could just let him do what he liked.

“Okay. Let’s go with that.”

Then for Ranga.

“Master, the fox spirit I have been tending to has awoken and claims to be gifted at clearing out forests in any way requested. I would suggest accepting the offer, perhaps,” he said, poking his head out from my shadow.

And sitting between his ears was what looked like a fox pup with four golden tails swaying behind it. So cute.

“Wanna try it?”

“Indeed, I do, sir!” The fox nodded, eyes gleaming at me. Again, sooo cute.

Essentially, this kit’s offer was to blaze animal trails through the vegetation, creating a sort of maze with them. If that was what it wanted to do, I saw no reason to say no. If it proved not up to the task, I could just raze the forest then.

“Okay. So…”

Then I noticed a problem of my own. This fox, nicknamed Nine-Head back when it was under Clayman’s control, still didn’t really have a name.

“Well, wait. Before that, lemme give you a name. From this day forward, your name is Kumara.”

It was totally casual, like giving a dog a name. But I wasn’t stupid. I had learned my lesson by now, and I wasn’t gonna have all my magical energy sapped away this time. No, this time I could control— Wait, whooaaaaaaa…

I was suddenly seized by a flooding sort of lethargy. This was soon followed by panic.

Report. This is the effect of the naming. Since the subject, Kumara, held a vast amount of magicule energy, more energy is being consumed than…originally surmised.

I was tricked by this tiny fox pup in front of me, but… Yeah, it’s actually one of the rarest, most high-level monsters out there. I, um, may have dropped the ball there. Plus, the moment I uttered the name, Kumara started growing fast—not in size, really, but in number of tails, which went from four to nine in a hurry. It had only three during the fight with Ranga, and each of those tails had its own special ability.

In a way, what I had done…I suppose…was summon not one, but nine different magical beasts at the same time.

“My deepest thanks, Sir Rimuru!! I shall do all I can!!”

Ah well. No point dwelling on the past. I managed to avoid slipping into unconsciousness, so I guess Raphael’s calculations were close enough, even if it wasn’t quite as expected. Not much surprise in its voice anyway. It must’ve assumed it’d hand over this level of magicules to the little fox from the get-go. Otherwise, Kumara wouldn’t have grown exactly nine tails like that.

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C’mon, don’t play dumb with me! I can see through you well enough.

Thus, I decided to leave Floors 81 through 90 to the overjoyed, scampering Kumara. It’s not like this zone would see a swell of adventurers from day one; I bet Kumara solo would make a fine boss.

That wrapped up Ramiris’s and Veldora’s issues.

I was glad to see the rest of my staff was pretty excited about the Dungeon, too. Its success was really important to me; I wanted to be sure its operation started on the right track. I gave Kumara a pat on the head.

With all the reporting on the Founder’s Festival done, I wanted to listen to Soei’s recent findings.

“All right, Soei, the stage is yours.”

“Yes sir…”

What he had for me was quite a surprise. It turned out that a Hero had taken down the entire Orthrus Slave Market organization. Its exposure and downfall had already led to severe consequences for certain nobility around the world—including that Viscount Cazac guy, who was now in the custody of the Blumund authorities.

“Even Englesia is alive with rumors of the affair. Orthrus had connections with virtually every nation in the world; it was an armed group who held possession of a great number of battle slaves, including magic-born and magical beasts. Their military power was equivalent to that of a small country, but it’s said a Hero’s band was all it took to destroy it…”

Soei smiled a little. This Hero—Lightspeed Masayuki, a name familiar to me—was now being lauded as the strongest man in the Western Nations, a reputation no doubt buoyed by the news of my victory over Hinata. Did this mean anyone who lost to a demon lord wasn’t worth pinning the hopes of humankind to? I felt like I did something bad to her now. Hope she doesn’t take it personally.

But back to Masayuki. There wasn’t a lot of hard intel on this guy, so we didn’t know much about him. However, he was confirmed to have destroyed Orthrus—and freed the elven slaves they were holding.

“Several elves were among the slaves, and it seems Masayuki is now accompanying them back toward our nation.”

Sounds like I owe him a word or two of gratitude.

…But there was a problem.

“What should we do, Sir Rimuru? If you like, I could dispatch him before he causes any trouble for us…”

“…No, better not. Let’s try talking with him first.”

“All right. Anyone who professes to slay a demon lord needs to be taught a lesson, in my personal opinion, but…”

…Yes, as could be surmised from this conversation, there were rumors in the Western Nations that Masayuki intended to topple me. Soei already had an inhumane-looking smile—just imagining what he’d do with the guy, no doubt—but he still followed my orders.

But…man, I really didn’t wanna have to face a Hero right in the middle of the Founder’s Festival, one of the most important events in the history of Tempest. I was worried the battle-obsessed members of my staff—Shion and Diablo, to say nothing of Soei—would defy orders, run off, and do something terribly unwise.

“Let me take care of Masayuki. Absolutely no touching him, you got it?”

“““Yes sir!”””

Well, at least they knew how to say “yes sir” in unison.

But with three days to go until the Founder’s Festival, I now had a thorny problem at hand. It was like rain on my parade, and it made me feel a lot gloomier about the future.

But not long from now—a massive, intense party was about to kick off and throw all my trivial worries to the wind.