EPILOGUE

FLAMES OF AVARICE

Duke Meusé staggered along. He had just tasted fear. Fear and despair.

The demon lord Rimuru was no one he had any hope of handling. The plan was to make Rimuru owe him a favor, then tame him into doing exactly what he wanted him to. But, looking back, he couldn’t have been further out of his league.

It made Meusé feel laughable. He thought he had him wrapped around his finger, but the shoe had been on the other foot the whole time. He couldn’t help but laugh about it, but he no longer had the mental fortitude.

And thinking about it, those people have it worse than I do…

He recalled the merchants gathered up for him. A handsome man came from behind the demon lord’s shadow, reading off their names, birthplaces, and the type and price for each and every one of their goods. His voice was like an accursed spell binding Meusé’s heart.

How deep did they search…?

If they were disallowed from dealing in the demon lord’s domain, they’d all have to return to their home nations. And Rimuru knew that. Reading off all their nationalities was his way of applying that extra beat of pressure to their threats.

The demon lord’s domain would no doubt develop further in the future, as would any nation working with it. It was the creation of a new, and powerful, economic bloc, and it meant any nation shut out of it would immediately fall behind in competitiveness. No nation had the luxury of sheltering its own merchants and ignoring a new alliance like this.

Having just experienced the Founder’s Festival, Meusé could see that as the unvarnished truth. Such wonderful music, such innovative science. The gourmet delights, all rarities in the Western Nations, were a shock to him. Monster nations, rural towns, and so on… He’d looked down on them all before he came here, but now he felt pathetic for doing so. Sensing all this culture he had never seen before made his heart throb.

Being spurned by this demon lord was a serious issue, one that had to be remedied no matter what. But so confident was Meusé in his scheme that he misjudged how Rimuru would react to it.

Those merchants may have nowhere left to go, but I’m just the same…

There would be no more advancement in his career. The Five Elders weren’t forgiving enough to allow failures in their midst. He would lose his fortune; perhaps he’d even be purged. But all Meusé could do was report the truth. Because no matter where he went in this wide world, there was no fleeing the eyes of the Rozzo family…

“I see he really did fail, Grandfather.”

“That he did, Maribel. I should have let you handle that. When I first heard the news, I thought that nation was too valuable to destroy, and now look…”

“You couldn’t help it. I saw and heard it, too…and I felt it. The aroma of a culture from my past. But that’s why we need to erase it all before it becomes known.”

It was Maribel’s indirect way of telling Granville Rozzo his orders were too half-hearted. And as head of the Rozzo family and chief mediator among the Five Elders, Granville bitterly agreed with her.

The Tempest Founder’s Festival was attended by the world’s ruling classes. It was Granville who ignored Maribel’s warnings and decided to see it. If they could bring the demon lord Rimuru under their wing, they could’ve invited him onto the Council—in a way that benefited them, of course.

That was their decision…but with far fewer movable pawns available at the moment, Granville grew timid. That was why Maribel stopped him from taking action, instead having a third party feel this demon lord out. And as a result, Duke Meusé failed.

If only Maribel was there, the Rozzos would never have lost. Granville was sure of it, but Maribel looked like a young child…and instinctively, he hesitated to let her go off alone.

“Grandfather, I need to make a move of my own.”

“…That’s the only way?”

“Don’t worry, all right? I am Maribel. I am greed. I wish for everything, and I take it all for myself. This world belongs to the Rozzo family!”

“That it does. You’re right. It’s all in your hands.”

Granville gently caressed Maribel’s head.

Thus Maribel the Greedy took action. And then, one month later, a letter arrived in Tempest from the Council of the West.