

CHAPTER 2

BATTLE OF THE GOBLIN VILLAGE

The path from the underground lake to the surface took the form of a single long cavern path, which I was currently bouncing and oozing my way along. I was moving quite a bit better than I’d originally pictured. Even in the dank darkness, harnessing Magic Sense made it look as bright as a sunny day to me.

Back when I was blind, I was too focused on my footing to notice, but slimes can actually truck along pretty quickly when they want to. I never got particularly fatigued, but there was no real reason to hurry either, so I tended to keep it at a regular walking rate by human standards. (This was definitely not because my last flirtation with exuberant locomotion landed me square in the water.)

As I plodded on, I found that the path was blocked by a large gate—the first man-made object I had seen in this cave. Very suspicious, but it didn’t throw me off much. It was just like any of the dozens I had seen before in RPGs. Every boss room usually had a gate in front of it.

So how to get it open? Water Blade my way through the bars? It seemed like a decent idea, but as I thought it over, the door opened by itself with a creak. Flustered, I scurried over to one side of the path and watched.

“Whew! Finally got this thing open. The whole lockin’ mechanism must’ve rusted out…,” someone said.

“Yeah, I’ll bet. Nobody’s even tried going in for three hundred years or whatever, right?” replied a second voice.

“There is no record of anyone attempting an entry. Are you sure we’re safe? We are not leaving ourselves open to sudden attack…?” commented a third.

“Gah-hah-hah-hah!” laughed the second one. “Come on. Maybe this guy was invincible a few centuries back, but it’s just a big overgrown lizard, y’know? I told you guys ’bout how I bagged a basilisk solo once, didn’t I? It’ll be fine!”

“I was wondering about that, actually,” the third replied. “Are you sure that’s the truth, Kabal? A basilisk is a B-plus-ranked monster. You truly handled that by yourself?”

“Quit playing dumb! I’m B ranked, y’know! Some huge reptile ain’t gonna faze me!”

“All right, all right. Just keep your guard up, if you could. And remember, we can always use my Escape skill if things turn sour…”

“Can we save the friendly chitchat for later?” the first interjected. “I need some quiet. It’s just about time for me to activate Concealing Arts!”

Three of them, it sounded like, none of them making much of an effort at stealth. And I understood everything they said, too. Odd.

Received. Your Magic Sense skill can be adapted to decipher sound waves that have willful meaning stored inside them.

Okay. So I couldn’t speak to them, but I could get what they were saying. That was good. I was never too gifted at foreign languages. I was always one of those kids in the back of the class, bitching all like, “Why do I need this? I’m never gonna live outside of Japan, anyway! Save it for somebody who will!”

Now that I was actually in that position, something told me that excuse wouldn’t work for much longer. Time to hit the books, I guess.

But that wasn’t important. What should I do? That was a tougher question than opening the door, for sure. I didn’t know what they wanted, but if I had to guess, they were adventurers. Treasure hunters, maybe? These were the first humans I’d encountered in this world—I had an urge to tail them to see what they were up to. But…ooh, if a slime who couldn’t speak their language showed up, what would they do? Slice me up with impunity, I’d bet. Better save it for next time. Safety first. I could save the human stuff for when I could talk to them.

The slim man leading the trio did something, and the three of them suddenly began fading from sight. Not entirely, mind you. He did mention a “concealing” something or other—some kind of skill, presumably. I wonder what he learned that for. Not for sneaking into people’s bedrooms, hopefully. How scandalous. I’ll have to make friends with him later.

Once the trio went out of sight down the path, I sprang back into action. No need to rush this. It wasn’t as if this would be my last chance to meet people. Slow and steady wins the race, as the ancients said, and I believe them.

Through the door I went, and before any of them could come back to check on things, I was gone.

Proceeding a fair distance from the door, I arrived at an intersection with several paths branching out from it. Which one would bring me to the surface? Thinking about it wouldn’t help much, so I chose a path and headed on down the cavern path.

Flick! Flick!

Our eyes met.

Slowly, I averted mine. There was a gigantic, ominous-looking serpent in front of me, a jet-black one with thorned scales, tough skin, and an appearance that made the snakes of Earth look positively cuddly. This creature in my path made me feel like a deer—or a slime—in the headlights.

My mind went blank. Maybe I’d be okay if it didn’t notice me? Slowly, I tried to slide myself back. No luck. The black snake reared its head upward, matching my movements. It flicked its tongue at me as it silently menaced me with its eyes. Damn it. It’s not letting me off the hook! We didn’t need to exchange any words for that much to be clear.

Should I fight it? I had this killer finisher that I’d spent the last week training for, didn’t I? It’s just that…you know, fighting a monster like this would take a bit of an…extra oomph. In other words, I was crapping my pants.

But hang on. Get a hold of yourself. Thinking about it, I’ve been through scarier stuff before. Remember Veldora? Compared to that dragon, this guy… Hell, maybe it’s not so scary after all. Maybe this is all gonna work out!

With a somewhat calmer mental state, I took a moment to size up the dark snake. It must have been thinking that it had stunned me into silence, that I was unable to move. Probably coming up with ways to land the final strike on me. Maybe it found the concept of swallowing me whole to be too bland or something.

Well, no point holding back. Without another moment’s hesitation, I squared up toward the snake’s neck and unleashed a Water Blade. With a lethal-sounding fwissh, the blade pierced through the air and struck the monster.

It all happened in an instant—so quick, I doubted my eyes. Without a single bit of resistance, the Water Blade lopped the black snake’s head off. A snake so huge, so ominous looking, I was sure I’d be nothing but a midafternoon snack to it.

This skill…might have been a tad stronger than I thought. If I’d used it on that adventuring trio, things might’ve gone all slasher film pretty fast. Good thing I’d had the foresight to try it on a monster first.

Before I go on, let’s do a quick recap of what was occupying my stomach at the moment. Veldora, 15 percent. Water, 10 percent. Medicinal herbs, recovery potions, and the like, 2 percent. Ore and other materials, 3 percent. Grand total, about 30 percent in use. Each Water Blade strike used not even a regular cup’s worth of water, so…sheesh, I could probably spit out thousands of these before I even began worrying about running out.

Hell of a lot more efficient than some stupid magic spell. I think I’ll be relying on this against monsters for a while to come.

So about this snake. Would it have any abilities I could steal by absorbing and analyzing it? No time to waste. Let’s give it a shot.

The results were…not bad. In addition to the ability to disguise myself as a black snake, I gained the following two skills:

Sense Heat Source:

Intrinsic skill. Identifies any heat reactions in the local area. Not affected by any concealing effects.

Poisonous Breath:

Intrinsic skill. A powerful breath-type poison (corrosion) attack. Affects an area seven meters in front of the user in a 120-degree radius.

It looked as if this poison had a corrosive effect on its target, damaging whatever equipment or flesh it touched. A normal adventurer would probably have a lot of trouble against this guy, wouldn’t they? Though who could say, really, given the kind of magic available in this world.

I spent a little while analyzing the skills of this snake I’d just vanquished. The more cards in my hand, the better, I figured.

The results:

1. Mimicking the black snake increased my bodily volume.

2. The skills I’d just earned could be invoked without having to mimic the snake’s form, although their performance could suffer as a result.

To go into further detail:

1. I could break down and store the monsters I consumed with Predator in my stomach. I’d used Predator on my own body in order to repair damage, and this provided some spare cells to help with that, in other words.

2. “Intrinsic skills” appeared to be skills that were exclusive to a certain type of monster. My Absorb, Self-Regeneration, and Dissolve skills were intrinsic to me as a slime. However, to use intrinsics, I needed to take the form of the monster in question, or else I couldn’t bust them out all the way. I could still use them in part, though, and some skills—like Sense Heat Source—seemed to work just fine either way.

Putting it all together: Predator freakin’ rocked. I couldn’t wait to track down some other useful skills with this thing.

Three days had passed after my snake battle. I was still in the cave. I couldn’t feel heat or cold or anything, but for all I knew, it was pretty chilly in here.

I had yet to see a single ray of sunshine, but my vision still worked just fine in the dark. However, a certain anxiety was starting to work its way into my head… I mean, I technically knew it wasn’t possible, but I couldn’t help but consider it.

“…I’m not lost, am I?”

No. I couldn’t be. What kind of idiot gets himself lost in the very first cave? That first easy-peasy cave’s supposed to be a springboard that helps you dive into the experience, isn’t it? It looked as if that adventuring trio knew where the hell they were going, didn’t it?

I’d be fine. It was probably just a really long path. Not knowing the exact way did make me a little nervous, though. Was there any way to get some help with that?

Received. Display the paths you’ve currently taken in your brain?

Yes

No

Pfft. I laughed at myself. Are you kidding me?! I thought, unable to resist a little whining. If I had something like that, why didn’t you tell me sooner?!

Of course I immediately picked “Yes.” I used to think automapping was cheating once, too, but now I knew the error of my ways. With older games, you were expected to bring your own pencil and graph paper, filling in the squares with every step you took in the dungeon. That was what made them fun—making sure you were on the right track with every single step you took. As time passed, though, people became more reliant on strategy guides, and games started to be shipped with their own built-in mapping features. It sucked all the real fun out of the genre, you could say—but once you got used to the convenience, there was no turning back.

What I’m trying to say is…you know, if you’ve got such a powerful feature at your fingertips, you might as well use it, right? Besides, this wasn’t a game. It was real life.

I scoped out the map that flashed into my mind.

Am I reading this right? It looks like I’ve been circling through the same area over and over again…

………

……

…

Following the map in my brain, I delved into a branch of the cave I’d never bothered trying before. There, I was greeted by a sight that had wholly eluded me for the past three days.

Heh-heh-heh. Guess I’m lost after all. Flustering me like this… This must be one hell of a cave. I gotta hand it to the thing.

(And my lack of direction was not the issue, all right?!)

I must have been getting close to the entrance—to the great outdoors. Moss and weeds were starting to appear on the walls and ground. And I didn’t know where the sun was, but the light, dim as it was, was starting to make its way inside. Which meant it was daytime.

Along the way, I had a few more monster encounters. To be exact:

A centipede monster (“evil centipede,” rank B-plus)

A big spider (“black spider,” rank B)

A vampire bat (“giant bat,” rank C-plus)

A big shelled lizard (“armorsaurus,” rank B-minus)

No more of those black snakes, though. Maybe that was the only one.

They were all pretty strong. Not that I’m one to talk, given that Water Blade was still enough to end a battle all by itself. But the bat guy did dodge my blades long enough to get a few bites in, and my attacks just bounced off the lizard guy’s body if I didn’t hit it at the right angle.

They wouldn’t all go down easy. The centipede concealed itself long enough to attack me from behind, but between Magic Sense and Sense Heat Source, I had enough of a bead on my surroundings that I was fully prepared. One Water Blade tossed behind me was all it took to end that encounter.

The spider, on the other hand. Oof.

I always had a hang-up when it came to bugs in the first place. It was as if I was physically repulsed by them. Just one look was enough for me, thanks. Transforming into a slime must’ve powered up my mental fortitude as well, though—enough that I fought that guy without running away screaming.

Sorry, dude, you’re getting full blast! Five Water Blades at once, thrust deep into its thorax. I didn’t want it in my sight for another moment.

Not that it stopped me from consuming it afterward, though, nor any of the other guys. Survival of the fittest and all. The spider and centipede gave me a little pause, yes, but I soldiered on.

If any cockroach monsters showed up, though, I was definitely making a sprint for it. It wasn’t a matter of winning or losing. Just because I could didn’t mean I always should.

Between this and that, I managed to absorb quite a few monsters in this cave. Let’s go over the skills I acquired.

Black snake: Poisonous Breath, Sense Heat Source

Centipede: Paralyzing Breath

Big spider: Sticky Thread, Steel Thread

Vampire bat: Drain, Ultrasonic Wave

Shelled lizard: Body Armor

Whenever you get a new toy, you want to use it, right? Same here. So I harnessed the Great Sage to research all the skills I picked up.

Basically, I didn’t use Poisonous Breath from the snake. I actually transformed so I could try it out against the lizard, and…like, whoa. All that armor didn’t do jack for the armorsaurus. It literally melted into a puddle of goo before my eyes. Grossest thing I’d ever seen in my life, all those organs and bits of flesh all over the place. I had to spray another salvo of mist to break down the rest of the chewy bits. Last time I’d have to see that, hopefully.

Really, this breath was almost too much of a force to be reckoned with. I didn’t want to use it much, if possible. Sense Heat Source, though, was awesome. Pretty much every living creature emits heat. Combining this with Magic Sense meant that I was all but impossible to ambush. There was no telling what kind of magic or special skills I’d run into once I started dealing with humans or intelligent high-level monsters, so I couldn’t afford to let my guard down.

Next up, the centipede. I hardly wanted to mimic that guy, what with how it looked and all. Its breath had about the same range as the black snake’s, and its form was about the same size as well. As I figured, trying to use it in slime form limited the range to only about a meter. It could come in handy for a surprise attack, I supposed, but if a foe was already within that radius, I’d be sunk unless I transformed or ran, so…

The lizard’s armor, as I mentioned, put up zero resistance whatsoever to Poisonous Breath. I couldn’t expect much from it. Besides, I already had Resist Melee Attack, so there wasn’t much point. Using it in slime form just made my external surface a bit tougher, kind of like the metallic slimes that show up in that one RPG series and give you lots of EXP. It gave a nice metal sheen to my light-turquoise body; whatever it did to me must’ve changed the way the light reacted to my surface. I didn’t want to test how I took damage with that on, though, so its effect remained a bit of a mystery. That little extra tint might help scare my foes into submission, though.

That about wrapped up those three. The real meat, so to speak, lay in the other two. They were pretty darn fascinating.

First, the spider. Who wouldn’t want to imitate that famous superhero who does all the spidery stuff? Firing webs from his hands powerful enough to let him swing around skyscrapers, and all that?

Sticky Thread, it seemed, was originally meant to let the user encase their prey in webs, rendering them immobile. But could I use it to do some fancy web-rope slinging of my own? Let’s try it. Point it at that tree branch, and…

Whoosh! …Swiiiiiiing………

So, uh, on to Steel Thread.

What? Sticky Thread? Never heard of it. Just some skill that leaves you hanging around motionless in the air. Pass. On to Steel Thread.

I guess this is meant to block your foe’s attack. The spider uses it to help it create an effective (i.e., labyrinthine) web, the Sage told me. So I busted a thread out and whipped it against a tree.

Whoosh! Snap!

And lopped the trunk right off.

With Magic Sense, I could tell that this Steel Thread would be extremely difficult for the naked eye of a human to detect. If I worked with it a little, I bet it could be a decent weapon. I spent a little time doing just that in case it would come in handy later.

Finally, the bat. To be honest, out of this entire zoo, I had the greatest expectations for the bat.

But—I mean, geez, Drain. If it hits, you could use 70 percent of your target’s skills for a limited period of time. Big whoop! Predator was far more effective. Talk about a precipitous drop in quality. And what’s the point of sucking someone’s blood when you can just analyze their data instead? I’ll just toss that one aside.

Ultrasonic Wave, on the other hand, piqued my interest. This skill had the effect of confusing your foes or making them lose consciousness, but it was originally used for echolocation. Just like bats back on my home planet, you could use these sound waves to suss out exactly where you and other objects were positioned.

But the skill didn’t matter to me. The sonic waves it emitted did. This slime was about to get his voice back. Talk about a stroke of luck. Instead of having to reinvent the wheel from the cells I had, I could just absorb a relevant monster and take the skill for myself.

Can I form it into a voice, though? That’s the tricky part. So I continued my research. Restlessly, forgoing all sleep (not that I needed it), I walked around for three days and three nights, testing it out.

The end result:

“I COME FROM OUTER SPACE!”

Perfect!

It was still a bit distorted, like someone tapping at their throat while yelling through a box fan, but it was definitely a voice! Now all I had to do was fine-tune it!

Trying my best to calm my excitement, I began the long, arduous voice-adjustment process.

These supersonic waves were so useful. I thought I remembered reading something about a weapon that used sound waves. A sonic buster or sonic blaster or something like that? Could I do that?

Received. There is a chance that the skill “Super Vibration” may be derived from “Ultrasonic Wave.” This cannot be acquired at this time.

So I need to derive it or change the skill somehow? Not much to go on, but nothing doing for now, I guess. Not like everything’s gonna be handed to me on a silver platter. Maybe I’m getting too greedy, but the more cards in your hand, right?

No need to push things along too fast, though. Obtaining vocal cords is a huge coup by itself. I should be happy with it.

Looking back, I’d obtained a ton of skills in pretty short order as I wandered around, continuing with my research as I aimed for the exit.

And while it took some time, I eventually made it. The outside. The first time I got to bask in the sunlight of this world.

Feels as if it’s been a while, going outside like this. It has been several months, come to think of it. Hopefully the light wouldn’t burn or melt me like a vampire…although as a monster, I would reportedly have an instinctual knowledge of what would be dangerous to my continued existence.

People do things they know are bad for them all the time, right? No joke. We could learn something from these monsters.

The cave, it turned out, was in a forest. The exit was just a hole at the foot of a mountain—more of a small hill, really, which stood out against the vast trees that surrounded it. In fact, thanks to the dense foliage, this hill was the only point you could see the sun from. Take a step into the forest, and all appeared to be dim darkness again.

Climbing to the top of the hill, I saw some kind of strange pattern carved into it. A magical pentacle or something? Sure seemed like it. Maybe those adventurers I bumped into were responsible? Guess it doesn’t matter much. A wise man keeps away from danger, as they say.

I sidled off.

A fair amount of time had passed since I left the cave. The sun was starting to set, which indicated that I must have reached the cave exit right around midday. I had a surprisingly accurate internal clock, and it would’ve been nice if it could’ve aligned itself with a standardized sense of time.

And the moment I thought about it, it happened. Sheesh. Is it this easy to do stuff like that? This Sage is one heck of a personal assistant to have around.

Anyway, it was now past four in the afternoon. About time to prep for dinner, but sadly, I no longer had to eat. I could, but the meaninglessness of the gesture would probably just make me feel empty inside.

So I kept messing around with the new skills I’d obtained from the monsters I’d consumed in the cave. How to use them, neat ways to combine them, whatever else I could do with them, et cetera. Speech was a particular focus.

That was what occupied my time as I continued down the path I’d found. No particular destination. It would’ve been nice if there was a town or village with someone nice I could’ve talked to…but everything had been incredibly quiet over the past few days. After getting attacked so frequently in the cave, I hardly got any attention at all outdoors. Just once, while practicing my elocution, a pack of wolves started stalking me. I tried to threaten them—“Ah?” I said—and that was all it took.

“Yipe!” With pathetic yelps, they scampered away. We’re talking multiple enormous canines, each easily two meters or so in length, and the sight of a slime freaked them out. Pathetic.

Not that I minded being left alone. Getting a wolf’s sense of smell would be neat, though.

The reaction surprised me enough that I began paying closer attention to my surroundings. Turned out it wasn’t just the wolves—not a single monster out there dared get within several meters of me. Were they really that scared? It sure seemed that way, but…like, why?

As I thought over that, my Magic Sense skill spotted a group of monsters approaching.

Nothing like a good crisis to come at you out of nowhere, huh?

They were small in size, their equipment plain and crude. Their faces were dirty and devoid of intelligence, but with their swords, their shields, their stone axes, and their bows, they weren’t entirely bestial. It took a mere instant for my gray matter to figure out who they were—goblins, those infamous marauders of many a would-be adventuring party.

Talk about sticking to the script. No doubt they were here to attack the weakest of would-be heroes—which meant me, I guess. But, really, thirty of them against a single slime? Kind of a lot at once, wasn’t it?

And yet, I didn’t feel so much as a whiff of terror. My instincts told me I had absolutely nothing to fear. Their swords had rust on them, and their armor was thin and torn at the edges. Some of them were dressed in nothing but stained rags. Compared to the hard-scaled lizards and the spiders with massive serrated blades on their feet I had dealt with before, I couldn’t imagine their gear inflicting any damage at all on me. Besides, if things got hairy, I could just go into black-snake mode and Poisonous Breath them all into puddles of goo…

As I sized them up, the goblins’ apparent leader opened his mouth.

“Grah! Strong one… Have you business here?”

Huh. Goblins talk. Or maybe Magic Sense is helping me decipher their grunting.

And—come on, “strong one”? First they’re surrounding me with their weapons; then they’re rolling out the red carpet for me… What do they want?

It got me curious. They didn’t look ready to descend upon me immediately. It might be a good chance to test out my speaking abilities. No better time to start than now.

I gave the goblins a quick look-over.

To them, this must have been one of the most frantic moments in their lives. Their eyes, as well as their weapons, were trained on me, although at least a few of them were ready to flee at the least provocation. The leader, meanwhile, was every bit up to the post, his steely eyes practically drilling holes in my gelatinous form.

Hmm. They seem intelligent enough. Maybe this conversation thing could work out after all. But will they understand me?

I focused my thoughts on my still-newborn voice and gingerly tried a few words.

“Good to meet you, I guess? My name is Rimuru. I’m a slime.”

The goblins murmured among themselves. Does a talking slime surprise them, maybe? I thought…only to find a few of them already prostrating themselves before me, weapons tossed away. Weird.

“G-garrh! Strong one! We, we see mighty power of you. Please! Quiet the voice of you!”

Mm? Did I put too much force into it? Maybe making myself understood wasn’t such a big deal after all. Plainly, I was freaking them out.

I figured an apology was in order. “Sorry, I don’t have this fine-tuned too well yet…”

“We, we need no apology from such great form of you!”

Guess that worked. This is turning into some decent practice. I was impressed that plain old Japanese worked on these guys. With all the politeness they gave me, I figured I should return the favor—but given how terrified some of them were, I might as well show off the confidence they thought I had.

“So what did you need from me? I don’t have any business around here.”

“I see. Village of us is ahead. We felt strong monster nearby, so we came to patrol.”

“A strong monster? I didn’t spot anything like that…?”

“G-gaah! Grah-gah-gah! Such joking! You cannot trick us, even with form of you!”

These guys totally have the wrong idea. Apparently they thought their powerful intruder had disguised himself as a slime. These were goblins, the world-famous lower caste of the monster totem pole. I shouldn’t have expected much.

The goblins and I spoke for a while longer, and before long, I wound up receiving an invitation to their village. They were willing to put me up for a bit, even. Pretty nice guys, given how scraggly they all looked. So I accepted. I had no need to sleep, but a little rest never hurt a guy.

Along the way, I got to hear a bit of the local gossip. It turned out the god they worshiped had recently disappeared. Without it, the local monsters had started acting up a lot more than before. At the same time, more human adventurers—“powerful ones,” as they put it—were starting to invade the forest. And so on.

And funnily enough, the more we spoke to each other, the more clearly I began to understand them. It must have been my Magic Sense skills getting more accustomed to however the goblin language was wending its way through the particles in the air. Maybe getting in some practice with goblins before my big human debut was a good idea after all, I thought as I followed along.

The village was shockingly dingy. Maybe I shouldn’t have expected much from a goblin’s den. They guided me to what I supposed was the most structurally sound of the buildings. It had a thatched, pitted roof that was rotting away in areas, the walls bearing nothing but a few pieces of flat wood nailed to them. No slum I’d ever seen in my world could out-filth this one.

“I am sorry to keep you waiting, honored guest,” one of the goblins said as he entered. The leader of the expeditionary force I ran into earlier accompanied him.

“Oh, no need for that,” I said, flashing my salesman’s smile—or in this case, my slime smile. “Don’t worry about me. I haven’t been waiting for that long.”

Something about smiling at your conversational partner always did wonders to keep negotiations moving your way. Once you were aware of it, it was scary how well it worked. Not that I knew what we were negotiating yet.

“I apologize we cannot provide you more hospitality,” the goblin said as he brought out something resembling tea for me. “I am the elder of this village.”

Even goblins must have this stuff, I thought as I took a sip (well, technically, slid my way over the teacup, but same difference). I couldn’t detect any taste from it, which made sense, since I didn’t have that sense. That might have been for the better, for all I knew. My Analysis skills didn’t detect any poison, but reportedly it bore a bitter, acrid flavor.

It was good to see the goblins trying to play nice with me, though, so I made sure to politely drink it up.

Then I decided to get to the point. “So to what do I owe the favor?” I asked. “What made you decide to invite me over to your village?” This had to be more than monsters acting buddy-buddy with each other.

The village elder shivered a bit. Then, firming up his resolve, he turned to me.

“You have heard, I trust, that the monsters have been more active around here as of late?”

I had, on the way here.

“Our god has protected the peace in this land for generations, but about a month ago, he hid himself from us. That has allowed the nearby monsters to start meddling with our lands once more. We do not wish to let this continue, so we have fought back…but from a raw-power perspective, we face an uphill climb.”

Hmmm. Was he talking about Veldora? It would match time-wise. But if the goblins wanted my help…

“I understand you well enough, but I’m just a slime, so I’m not exactly sure I can provide the help you need…”

“Grah-ha-ha! Trust me, no need for modesty! It is no mere slime who can emit the mystical force you do! I cannot imagine why you are taking that form…but you have a name bestowed upon you, yes?”

Mystical…what? What’s that? I don’t remember busting anything like that out. I focused my Magic Sense on myself instead of my environs. Then I realized it. There was, in fact, some kind of ominous-looking aura covering my whole body. You’d think I would’ve noticed that in the midst of all the monster transformation and Body Armor malarkey, but it was too late now.

Whew. Talk about embarrassing. Here I am, exuding all this mystical stuff, and I didn’t even bother to say “excuse me.” I felt as if I were walking down the middle of Main Street, baring everything I had to the world. With all the magicules in the air over in the cave, I’d been completely oblivious.

This is bad! Really bad! But at least it explained how the monsters in the forest reacted to me before now. Not too many of them would have wanted to take on this hombre. No one was stupid enough to be fooled by appearances.

Well, might as well run with it.

“Hee-hee-hee… Impressive, elder. You noticed?”

“Of course, my friend! Even in the shape that you are, there is certainly no hiding the strength inside you!”

“Ah. Well, if you spotted me, then I guess you guys have a lot of promise!”

Now I’m diggin’ this! Let’s just pull the elder’s strings for a bit and talk my way out of trouble. At the same time, I tried to find a way to extinguish the mystical aura around me, futzing around with the surrounding magic to try to push it back in.

“Ohh… Were we being tested, perhaps? Then I certainly hope we are worthy. Many would be cowed to submission by such a force.”

By this time, my mystical whatever was mostly hidden. I was back to being just a regular old slime. Funny to think, though—earlier, if I had looked like any old slime on the street, would the entire forest have tried to kill me? That would’ve been a bummer.

“You’re right. Anyone willing to speak to me without being frightened by my mystic powers must be worthy indeed.”

Worthy how? I wondered to myself silently.

“Ha-ha! Thank you very much. I will refrain from asking you why you hide your true form…but I do have a request of you. Would you be willing to listen to it?”

About what I figured. Nobody would go up to a fearsome, hideous monster for no reason at all.

“It depends on what it is,” I said, trying to keep my swagger going. “But go ahead. State your business.”

Here’s the rundown.

It turned out some newcomer monsters from the lands to the east had been pushing into the area, hoping to seize it for themselves. The area was home to several goblin villages, including this one, and even the small clashes so far had resulted in a large number of goblin deaths—including some named goblins.

One of these named creatures was the sort-of guardian of this village, and with his death, the value of keeping this village intact had declined dramatically.

The other goblin communities had largely abandoned this land. Their reasoning was that they could coerce the newcomers to attack this village, buying them time to come up with countermeasures of their own. The village elder and the leader of the expedition who greeted me had tried to reason with them but were coldly brushed away. The frustration was clear in their voices as the two of them explained.

“I see,” I replied. “So how many of you live in this village? And how many are battle ready?”

“We have approximately one hundred residents. Counting our womenfolk, about sixty of them are ready to fight.”

Doesn’t sound like much. Pretty smart goblins, though, if they’re keeping track that closely.

“All right. And what types and numbers are we talking about with the enemy?”

“They are direwolves, we believe—certainly wolflike in appearance. Under normal circumstances, it would have to be ten of us against one of them for us to have a fighting chance…but they appear to number around a hundred themselves.”

Huh? What kind of impossible game is this? I turned my eyes toward the village elder. He didn’t seem to be joking; his eyes were as sincere and dedicated as a goblin’s could get.

“So these goblin fighters took them on in such small numbers, even though they knew they couldn’t win?”

“…No. This information I told you… Those fighters risked their lives to obtain it.”

Oh. Might’ve been a rude question, there.

Upon further questioning, the named goblin they’d lost turned out to be both the elder’s son and the older brother of the scouting party. I spent a moment weighing the options, the elder falling silent as he awaited my decision. It might have been my imagination, but I could have sworn there were tears in his eyes… I was probably just imagining it, though. Tears don’t go too well with monsters.

Better pump up the swagger, I figured. That’s how a feared monster should rightly act!

“Let’s get something straight, elder. If I help this village, what do I get in return? Do you even have anything to give?”

Not that I minded helping them out on a whim. But it took ten goblins to maybe beat one big dog or whatever, and they’d be facing a pack of a hundred. It wouldn’t be simple. I think a little black-snake action could take care of them…but I can’t just snap up this job without thinking a bit.

“We shall give you our allegiance! Please, grant us your guardianship. If you do, I promise we will swear our loyalty to you!”

Honestly, as gifts go, that’s not much. But after experiencing ninety days of silent solitude, even talking to goblins was kind of fun. The thought of saving this dive probably would’ve disgusted me back in my human days, but right now, I was a monster. No need to worry about falling in a puddle and picking up some infectious disease any longer.

Plus, those eyes on the elder. I could tell that he was truly relying on me to say the right thing.

I reflected on my past life. When someone asked me to do something, I always did it. Even if I bitched and moaned about it at first, even if the guys at the office yelled at me about it, I was never able to say no to my manager or clients.

“All right. Your request is granted!”

I nodded sagely. And that’s how I became the guardian of a goblin village.

The direwolves ruled the roost over at the plains to the east, enough to give endless headaches to the merchants who plied their trade between the Eastern Empire and the kingdoms around the Forest of Jura. Each one of them was the equivalent of a C-ranked monster, hardy enough that an adventurer could find his leg bitten off if he wasn’t paying attention.

The real threat, however, came when they roamed in packs. Only when a talented alpha was leading the horde did the direwolves show their real worth. The entire pack would act as a single mind, a single creature, every member acting in lockstep. Such a pack, in full motion, could easily be rated a B.

The eastern plains were located next to a wide grain-producing region, a vital lifeline for the Eastern Empire and one kept very well secured. No matter how cunning the direwolves were, no matter how advanced their skills, penetrating the Empire’s defensive lines remained a difficult task. Even if they made it through, doing so would rouse the full fury of the Empire, putting the direwolf race’s very future into question.

The pack’s leader was fully aware of this. It was something he had learned through hard-fought experience, amid the many skirmishes he had witnessed against the Empire over several decades. Targeting the smaller-scale merchants who passed by wasn’t enough to make the Empire take full action—but the moment wolves stepped into its grain fields, it would truly retaliate.

After so many failures, no more would the direwolves repeat the mistakes of their comrades. That was the alpha’s way of thinking. But his monster’s instincts also told him that, under the status quo, there would be no progress, nothing to push their pack forward.

As a rule, the direwolf race did not require food to survive. Attacking and consuming humans provided them with a nice little snack, but those didn’t hold much in the way of magic.

To the pack, their real sustenance lay in the world’s magicules. They would need to attack stronger monsters or slaughter humans in droves to evolve into calamity-level creatures. None of these options were particularly accessible to them. The Empire was just too powerful. But merely picking off passing merchants would never do anything for their dreams of evolution.

Then they heard tales of the southlands. A fertile territory, one with a forest that offered all its blessings—a vast store of magic. A paradise for monsters, so it was said. In order to reach it, though, they would have to traverse the vast Forest of Jura.

The monsters of this wood were, in and of themselves, no great foes. Their past experience hunting the stragglers wandering out of it proved as much. So why had they shied away from entering it themselves?

Simple: Veldora the Storm Dragon. He was the one and only reason. Even when he was within his prison, the waves of dreadful magical force shook their very hearts. The creatures in the forest, they believed, enjoyed the dragon’s divine guardianship—which was why they could survive under those scorching waves. That was what they had to believe. Otherwise, the truth would drive them mad.

So despite how it pained them daily, the direwolves had given up on infiltrating the forest. Until now.

The alpha turned his bloodred eyes toward the forest. That evil, horrid dragon could no longer be felt. Now is the time, he thought, to hunt the forest clean of monsters—and then we may become the lords of the forest. The idea made him lick his lips and sound the howl commanding his pack to advance.

Okay. So now I’m a guardian. What should I do next? To me, it just felt like bodyguard duty, despite the grandiose terms the elder used to describe me.

To start out, I had all the goblins capable of fighting gathered around me. It wasn’t a pretty sight. They were in awful shape. No way could I count on them on the battlefield. And from afar, the remainder of the village looked like…nothing but children and the elderly to me. Reinforcements, in other words, were out of the question.

The village elder must have been shaking at the knees. Even if they fled the village right now, they’d practically starve before the day was through.

Meanwhile, the goblins around me were all staring with an almost religious faith in their eyes. This was heavy, man. To someone like me, who lived a fairly easy-breezy life, those gazes added a lot of pressure.

“Right,” I said, “do all of you know what kind of situation we’re in?”

I wasn’t trying to make a joke. I just couldn’t think of anything inspirational I could say.

“Yes, sir!” the goblin leader instantly replied. “We are preparing for a battle to decide whether we live or die!”

The other goblins around him must have felt the same way. Some of them were visibly shaking, which I couldn’t chide them for. A person’s mind can think one thing and their body do something very different.

“All right,” I replied, trying to act like the best general I could. “No need to get all worked up. Keep it chill, all right? Whether you’re revved up or not, if we’re gonna lose, we’re gonna lose. Just focus on giving this everything you’ve got!”

That helped lighten my mood, at least. Maybe it worked better than I thought.

Might as well get started, then. If I screw up, that might be it for these goblins. But I gotta stick to my guns. I wanted to bring some swagger into this, and now I’m gonna!

With a moment to collect my thoughts, I gave my first order to the goblins—an order I would give many times to come.

Night. The direwolves’ alpha had his eyes open. It was a full moon—the perfect night for a battle. Slowly, he rose, surveying the area, the rest of his pack looking on with bated breath.

Just the right amount of intensity, the alpha thought.

Tonight, they would level the goblin village, establishing a foothold for themselves within the Forest of Jura. Then, slowly but surely, they would hunt the monsters around the area, expanding their territory until they ruled the woods. Soon, when the time was right, they would turn their eyes toward the south, invading it for the power it held.

They had the strength to make it happen. Their claws could rend the flesh of any monster; their fangs could pierce any armor.

“Awooooooooooo!”

The alpha gave the signal.

It was time to let the carnage begin.

There was, however, one concern.

The alpha had sent a scout a few days ago who had come back with some perplexing news—news of a small monster that let off a strange, mystical force. Enough to surpass that of even their alpha.

He had shrugged off this report at first. It was too preposterous to entertain. He himself had detected nothing of the sort in the forest. Every monster they’d encountered was a comparative weakling. Up to this point, nothing even resembling resistance to their advance had appeared—and they were almost in the dead center of the wood. A dozen or so goblins had picked off one or two members of their pack, but nothing else.

The scout must have been too excited about the upcoming hunt to think straight. That was the alpha’s conclusion as he kept his eyes forward.

Ahead lay a village. It was situated exactly where the scout said it was. He had followed the trail of a wounded goblin straight to it. Nothing about his report suggested it to be a threat.

This was not the alpha’s first battle. He was cunning, and he never let his guard down. However, even he had to admit that the strange…thing around the village was a tad unusual.

It was…a fence, like one would see in a human village. The homes that once composed the settlement had been disassembled, formed into a defense that neatly covered all of the village grounds.

And there, in front of the single opening in the barrier, was a lone slime.

“All right, stop where you are, okay?” the slime said to them. “If you turn back now, I promise I won’t do anything to you. Move away from here at once!”

Impertinent little bastard. Leaving just one entryway open to block a mass attack? Just the kind of shallow thinking one should expect from a garbage monster like this. Our claws and fangs would make mincemeat out of that rickety old thing.

It was time to show this slime their true power. The alpha gave the order. As if they were his own right hand, about a dozen direwolves immediately set off to attack the fence—the picture of coordination, the exact reason the pack essentially functioned as a single monster.

The Thought Communication skill enabled their collective behavior. It was far faster than giving verbal orders, letting the pack work in perfect tandem.

The first wave should have been all it took to destroy the fence. Instead the alpha, already picturing a screaming rabble of goblins struggling to flee after the miserable failure of their stratagem, let out a surprised yelp. The force he had sent toward the fence had been blown straight backward, some of them bleeding profusely as they writhed on the ground.

What could this be? The alpha kept his mind sharp as he surveyed the area. The slime by the entryway had not moved an inch. Did it do something?

One of his men sidled up to him to report. It was him, boss! The thing with the mystical force that outclassed yours!

Nonsense, the alpha thought as he looked at the slime. It was a small monster. They would occasionally be born here and there along the plains. Even calling them “monsters” at all seemed absurd—their whole existence was petty. That thing, holding more force than me…?

The alpha fumed.

Impossible!

Few, indeed, were the monsters more sly and crafty than the alpha. He had years of experience to draw upon, and he could summon it on the fly to calmly, nimbly formulate a new plan. And his years of experience told him that this monster could not possibly be stronger than he was.

Right there, for the first time, the alpha committed a fatal mistake—one that would ultimately decide his fate.

You wretched little worm of a monster—I shall crush you to pieces!



Yeesh. That was a shock.

I didn’t think they’d go lunging at the joint straight out. I even gave them that heroic little speech about how I wouldn’t do anything if they turned back, but they totally ignored it.

Instead, the direwolves all started moving at once, attacking the fence from pretty much every angle they had. I was hoping we could talk things over a little first, but they forced me to throw out my entire script. And after all that rehearsing I did while the fence was being built.

The first order I’d given the goblins was to show me where the wounded were. Adding a dozen or so survivors to the sixty fighters we had wouldn’t make the work go much more efficiently, but given their devotion for me, I wanted to do what I could for them.

They were all lying down on the floor of a large, fairly unhygienic-seeming building. Looking over them, I started to think. Apparently, they’re using some herbs to treat them…but left to themselves, they’ll die before long. They were all in rougher shape than I’d thought—skin slashed by teeth and claws, and some were sporting nasty-looking gashes with God-knows-what growing out of them.

Better splurge a little bit, I figured as I took action. Consuming the wounded goblin closest to me, I sprayed some recovery potion on him, then hawked him back up. The elder prepared to say something to me, but he thought better of it as I worked my way down the row—swallowing, splattering, spitting out.

After I’d finished up with a few of them, I took a look behind me.

There they were again, kowtowing to me.

What is with these guys?

They must’ve assumed I’d resurrected them with my powers or something. To avoid future misunderstanding, I opted to just spit the potions out directly from there on, healing the goblins’ wounds out in the “real” world.

The healing process took a little time, but it worked. Once I was done with everyone, I gave the remaining goblins a new order—the fence.

A simple wooden affair would have been fine, I thought, but we didn’t have much time or material to work with. We had to go with what we had, so that was what I did—without a moment’s pause, I had them tear down their homes and use the wood and other components to fortify the whole community.

In the meantime, I ordered the goblins who were decent with a bow to go on scout duty. I warned them not to wander too far afield—wolves were bound to have good noses. I could tell by their eyes that they were willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause. They were ready to shout out “By my very life!” at any moment. A lot more bravado than I really needed right now, but I doubted there was any quick fix for it.

As night fell, around a day after I arrived at the village, the final planks were on the fence. The finishing touches were mine—spider silk to strengthen and solidify the paling and a few Steel Thread traps here and there. Anyone touching the fence without knowing the secret would be carved up before they knew what hit them. I’ll have to remember to go fetch a body or two later.

I made sure the fence had a single entryway on one side. Once it was lined with Sticky Thread, my job here was done. All that remained was to wait for the scouts to come back.

By this time, the wounded goblins were starting to wake up, healed from their wounds. They furtively poked their bodies, staring curiously down at themselves. Looks like that stuff packs a wallop. I’d assumed I’d need to apply several doses to the graver-looking of the patients, but it worked a hell of a lot better than I’d thought. I had no complaints about that mistake.

After that, I had the goblins collect the extra material, pile it up in the center of the village grounds, and set it on fire. It reminded me of more than one camping trip, but now was no time for marshmallows. We would need to keep watch the whole night through. I offered to handle it alone but was sharply refused.

“Nothing doing, Sir Rimuru! We could never allow you to shoulder such a heavy burden!”

“She is right! We will handle watch duty for you. Please, Sir Rimuru, take the time to rest a little!”

The rabble around us echoed their approval. I appreciated the thought. They had to be far more exhausted than I was by now, but I agreed to handle the watch in shifts and rest when I wasn’t on duty.

Just before midnight, the scouts returned—some wounded, but all safe. The direwolves had begun to move, they said. Funny how I thought they were these ugly, filth-ridden monsters two days ago. Now I was starting to feel actual affection for them. If I had my way, I thought as I applied the final Sticky Thread to the entryway, I’d like to get them through this without losing a single one.

So that was our prep process, more or less. Hostilities were under way, so there wasn’t much else I could do. At this point, we had to stick to the plan.

I wasn’t convinced the fence was strong enough to hold, but fortunately, the direwolves couldn’t grab hold of it long enough to do much. The traps mostly sprang just as I’d planned. That was a relief.

Anticipating this, I had ordered small slits built into the fence at regular intervals. Those openings were for arrows so the goblins could attack from the inside and interfere with the enemy’s movements. They opened fire, and even with their crappy aim, they made more than a few direwolves scream their last. A few of the enemy force tried to pry the spaces open and break in that way…only to have their heads caved in by the stone-ax-wielding goblins on either side of each hole.

Two hours wasn’t nearly enough practice time, but this village was playing for keeps. They listened to everything I said, understood it, and took action. And we were reaping the rewards. The wolves were strong, yes, capable of taking on a gaggle of goblins at once, and maybe they were even stronger as a pack. But if they were powerful solo, we could just strike ’em all together. If they were powerful as a team, we’d make sure they couldn’t team up. Use your head, and you can make it work. The strongest creature in the world, after all, is a human being with a little intelligence!

Your luck just ran out, I thought to myself as I stared into the cold eyes of the direwolf boss. Some stupid animal beating me? How conceited can you get?

The confused direwolf alpha was shocked at how far awry his plans had gone.

His pack was beginning to fall into disarray. That couldn’t be allowed to continue. The direwolf tribe shone its brightest only when grouped together. Mistrust in the alpha would lead to fatal results. He understood that, too—and that was why he then made his greatest mistake of all. He was enraged at the weakness of his pack, unable to overcome a simple fence, but he was even more afraid that his team’s frustration would soon be directed at him.

I need to display my strength to them, he thought. I am the strongest of my pack. I am more than strong enough, even by myself!

That was the moment when everything was decided.

My eyes were still firmly upon the direwolf boss. To the goblins, he had disappeared, I assumed, but to me, he was ambling along at a yawn-worthy pace.

Everything was going to plan. I had considered a few possible outcomes, and now one of them was playing out in front of me. These were animals, after all. Not ex-humans like me.

The Sticky Thread over the entryway immediately captured the boss. For all I knew, the silk wouldn’t be enough to keep a direwolf leader stuck tight. There’d been no way to test it beforehand, but that didn’t matter anymore. The Sticky Thread was there just so we could keep the boss in place for a single moment.

If I didn’t hold him in place and he dodged the ensuing Water Blade attack, that would look super lame. Or worse, I could catch my team in friendly fire. In the midst of a battle, that was entirely possible.

That was why I devised the trap. But maybe I over-engineered it a little. These guys hadn’t even gotten the fence down yet. I’d considered lining the entrance with Steel Thread instead but opted against it, worried that it wouldn’t be enough of a final blow.

In situations like these, it was my job to play the ultimate strongman, the ruler of the roost. That was what all this was for—and that’s why, without another moment of self-doubt, I launched a Water Blade at the boss’s head.

It hit home. The head launched upward, and then gravity took it. I had killed the boss—and more importantly, I made it look like a laugh.

“Listen, direwolves! Your leader is dead! I will grant you one final choice. Submit to me or die!”

So how will they deal with that? Will their boss’s death drive them into such a frenzy that they’ll bum-rush me? I’d like to avoid that, if I could.

The remaining direwolves showed no sign of moving. Uh-oh. This isn’t gonna be one of those “I’d sooner die than submit to the likes of you!” things, is it? ’Cause if it is, it’s gonna be all-out war. We were still losing numbers-wise, and we’d definitely take some casualties. We made it this far without any goblin blood—I doubted we’d lose at this point, but I’d prefer it ended without a struggle.

It was oddly quiet, compared to the pitched battle of a moment ago. I could feel the gazes of the direwolves upon me. Amid their stares, I gradually started glooping forward. I couldn’t tell how they’d interpret this, but I wanted to hammer it home that their boss was dead.

In a moment, I was at the alpha’s limp body. Nobody offered any objection. One of their pack, which had taken up position nearby, retreated a step.

Then I swallowed the corpse. As was my right as victor, yeah?

The Sage’s voice rang in my mind.

Analysis complete. Mimic: Direwolf ability obtained. Direwolf intrinsic skills “Keen Smell,” “Thought Communication,” and “Coercion” acquired.

Sounds like a win to me. But despite seeing their own boss eaten in front of them, the rest of the direwolves still showed no sign of movement. Hmmm… At this point, they were either gonna freak out and run, or freak out and come for me.

…Oh, right! I told them “submit or die,” didn’t I? Ah, shit. That might’ve been throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Better give ’em an escape route, I thought as I transformed myself into one of them.

Activating Coercion, I spoke to them in a loud, guttural scream. “Arh-arh-arh! Listen to me!” I declared to them. “Once, and only once, I will let this go unpunished. If you refuse to obey me, I bid you to leave here at once!!”

I figured that’d be enough to make these dogs scamper off. I was wrong.

We pledge our allegiance to you!

Now they were kowtowing to me, although it looked more as if they were having a lie-down for a nap. But regardless, they had apparently chosen “submit” anyway. Maybe they’d been having a little Thought Communication conference about it while they were standing there like statues.

It beats having to fight them, anyway.

That, more or less, marked the official end of the battle at this goblin village.

That’s always the thing, though, isn’t it? It’s not the fight that’s the hard part; it’s all the goddamn cleanup afterward.

Who’s the idiot that ordered them to destroy their own homes? What’re we gonna do about those? And where’re all these goblins gonna sleep tonight? And what am I supposed to do with all these dogs? I mean, sure, we killed off a fair number of them, but that’s still, like, eighty more mouths to feed.

I, um… Ah, screw it. That’s all for today, people! I’ll think about it tomorrow, once everyone wakes up.

For the time being, I ordered the goblins to camp out next to the fire, told the dogs to go on standby around the village, and called it a night.

Morning came.

I had spent the previous night thinking, mostly. The conclusion I came up with: Let the goblins take care of the direwolves! Perfect!

We had a total of seventy-two goblins left in fighting shape. No casualties from yesterday. At most, a few scratches. Meanwhile, we had eighty-one surviving direwolves parked outside the town fence—some wounded, but none so badly that a little recovery potion didn’t prop them right back up. They could’ve recovered themselves, I reckoned, with their intrinsic healing skills.

The morning began with me lining up the goblins who were awake. The children and elderly watched from the side. They couldn’t help but stick out, given the lack of any homes to hang out in.

Next to me was the village elder. He wanted to help me out somehow, I guess, but there wasn’t much an old goblin geezer could do for me. My personal aesthetic tastes remained unchanged from my human years.

That would never change, even though I was transmogrified into a slime. There would be no charming village princess I could ride off into the sunset with. I’d probably have to wait a while for that.

In front of this line of goblins, I summoned the direwolves. “Um, okay,” I began, “from now on, I’m gonna have you all form pairs and live with each other, all right?”

Then I gauged the response. I didn’t get much of one. They were waiting for me to continue, I guessed, not making a single sound as they stared at me. Nobody seemed to openly grimace at the idea of pairing up, at least, so I assumed I was on decent enough ground.

“Uh, do you understand what I mean? Like, groups of two, okay? Get to it!”

The moment I finished speaking, the goblins and the direwolves began exchanging glances with whoever was in front of them. Slowly and meekly, they followed my order. Yesterday’s enemy is today’s friend, and all that. They had to learn that the hard way, but at least everyone was on board.

Then I noticed something. Hang on, do any of these guys have names at all? How are they supposed to call for each other and stuff? What a pain in the ass.

“Elder,” I said as I watched the pairing process unfold to my side, “it’s too inconvenient for me to refer to you and your people. I’d like to give names to you all. Would that be all right?”

Everyone must have heard me somehow. Right at the word names, every single one of them was locked on to me—even the nonfighting goblins, clearly thrown by this turn of events.

“Are…are you sure…?” the elder timidly asked.

What’s the big deal, huh?

“Y-yeah, um… If it’s not a problem, I’d like to give out some names?”

It was as if I’d simultaneously blown the minds of every goblin on the premises. Each one erupted into enthusiastic cheering. What the hell? It’s as if they all just hit the lottery or something. If getting a name makes you that happy, why don’t you just do it yourselves? It all seemed so simple to me back then.

I started with the elder, asking him what his son’s name was. He had been the sole named goblin in the village, now sadly passed. It was “Rigur,” apparently.

So I added a d on the end and named the elder “Rigurd.” No particular reason for it—it just sounded nice. “If your son was here,” I joked, “you could have him state his name and just kinda add d to the end of it, y’see?”

No one laughed. They thought I was serious. “I… I cannot express my gratitude enough,” he blubbered, “for being granted permission to take on my son’s name!” Yeah, great. I’m just shooting from the hip here, you know. It was starting to make me feel a bit guilty…but ah, what the hell!

The goblin scout leader, meanwhile, I named Rigur. I could’ve added a “II” to the end of it, I suppose, but why make this more complicated than it had to be? “Rigur” was fine. Fine enough that it made him kneel before me in prayer, as if this was the most emotional moment in his life. Cripes. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

So on I went, down the whole line. I also did the rest of the onlookers while I was at it, having families figure out their names together and coming up with whatever for the orphans and singles in the village.

They aren’t expecting to, like, keep recycling these names for generations to come, are they? If Rigurd has a grandson, maybe he could start calling himself “Rigurdd.” Or if he has a great-grandson, he could be “Rigurddd” and “Rigurd” then gets passed on to the youngest generation. Something like that? Pretty random, maybe, but how else do family traditions ever get started?

“Sir Rimuru,” the newly christened Rigurd plaintively asked, “we are so, so appreciative of this, but…are… Are you sure?”

“About what?”

“I mean, I am fully aware of the extent of your magical powers, Sir Rimuru, but…providing all of these names in one go… Will you be all right?”

What’s he talking about? I’m just handing out names to folks.

“Mm?” I replied. “No, no problem, I don’t think.” Then I went back to it. Rigurd raised his eyebrows for a moment, but I paid him no further mind.

Once I was done with the goblins, it was time to move on to the direwolves. Their new leader would be the son of the old one—just as strong (and strong willed) as his father, and already looking every bit as stately.

Peering into his gold-colored eyes, I thought for a moment. Hmm. How about Ranga? That combines the Japanese characters for storm and fang into one peppy little word. Perfect! Cheap, maybe, but I rolled with it. I’m the Tempest; he’s got fangs…

Whatever came to mind first was best, I figured. This wasn’t my forte.

The moment I named him Ranga, I began to feel as if practically all the magicules flowing through my body were draining out of it. The sense of hollowness—of the violent emptying of my innards—was mind blowing. What… What’s going on? It was a fatigue like none I’d felt before.

Reporting. Your body’s remaining store of magic has gone below its acceptable threshold. Entering sleep mode. Expected to fully recover in three days.

I was still conscious. I didn’t need to sleep…exactly, and I could hear the Sage’s voice.

Slowly but surely, it began to dawn on me. I’d used too much of my…magic? Like hitting zero MP, sort of? What’d I do to manage that? Had I been wearing myself out this whole time without realizing it? It sure didn’t feel that way.

I tried moving. No response. “Sleep mode” must be something like hibernation. I wasn’t asleep, but I couldn’t move at all. All I could do was sit around—which was fine, because the goblins had prepared a seat of honor for me by the fire, so I might as well bask in it. Nothing else to do, or that I could do.

I took the opportunity to reflect on what just happened. Why did I run out of magic after I started naming people? Did doing that consume magicules somehow? Come to think of it, it really started to flow out once I named the direwolves’ leader, didn’t it?

It was still just a theory, but it seemed clear to me that naming monsters actually required magic. That conclusion took around two days to reach.

It sure explained why Rigurd was so aghast at what I was doing, among other things.

This… Oh, crap, this isn’t common knowledge among monsters, is it?

“Guyyyys,” I wanted to shout, “you gotta tell me these things!!” But there was no point lashing out at others. Not that it’d stop me once I could move again, I imagined.

Initially, the goblins seemed kind of worried about how I fell stone silent, but…somewhere along the line, the question of who had the right to wipe my surface and take care of me almost erupted into violent conflict. What are they doing? This is one harem I seriously wish I weren’t involved in. I was starting to feel like a magic lamp people could rub for three wishes.

Finally, the third day passed.

R E C O V E R E D !

Despite depleting my magic earlier, I felt stronger and more magic-rich than I had before my little accident. Magic was the power to exert force upon the world, and the particles around me were the energy driving it. That seemed to be about the extent of it.

Is it one of those “that which does not kill me makes me stronger” types of things? I pondered experimenting with it further but decided against it. There didn’t seem to be much need, and if I died in the process, I’d look like an idiot. Yet another case of me going overboard too soon.

Anyway.

The worker goblins, realizing I was awake, began congregating around me. They were joined by the direwolves, who were streaming in from their outside base. Which was fine, but…

“Um… Hey, guys? Have you all, like, gotten bigger?”

They had. Goblins averaged a little under five feet tall. Now they were all nearly a full foot taller. The guy next to me looked as if he was pushing six and a half, even.

These…are goblins, right? And check out the wolves. I remembered them being a lot browner. Now their fur was straight-on black, with a lustrous sheen. They had grown, too, with the bigger ones now pushing nine or ten feet in length. I didn’t remember any of them being much longer than six feet before.

The one that really caught my eye was the wolf at their forefront, walking silently forward. I swear he had to be at least fifteen feet. I could feel the mystic force lashing out of every pore. This was nothing like the boss I beat a few days back—between his looks and his sheer force of presence, he had to be some higher-level monster. The star-shaped birthmark on his forehead and the magnificent-looking horn also raised a few red flags.

Kiiiinda scary.

“My master!” this beast of my worst nightmares bellowed in a fluent human tongue. “How it elates me to see you well once more!”

Holy… Is this Ranga? What happened over the past three days? I was left to wonder that for myself as the cheering, howling monsters surrounded me.

All right…

So in the three days I was checked out, all the monsters around me grew. That was freaky. The only thing that could produce something like that was…evolution, I suppose. So does naming a monster evolve them?

And didn’t Veldora go on about something like that for a while…? The difference between “nameless” and “named” monsters?

Oh, right! Something about how earning a name provides a sort of “divine blessing” that helps boost your ability as a monster. Hence the evolution.

Well, hell, no wonder everyone was so happy. And no wonder it tapped all my magic reserves at once.

Monster evolution happens fast. I’d say they didn’t “grow” so much as become completely different creatures. The tepid, void-like eyes of the goblins now shone brightly with the pale light of intelligence. And the females… Yow! They actually kind of look like women now!

I was so shocked, I could barely even speak.

Huh? …Huh?!

It made me literally do a double take. These guys were like little imps a moment ago, maybe closer to baboons than humans, and now—well, to use their official terminology—the males were “hobgoblins” and the females “goblinas,” although the latter sounded pretty stupid to me. They had both evolved, and according to Rigurd, they had heard the so-called World Language when they did—something that all evolved creatures experienced. A very rare occurrence, and one that excited Rigurd to no end, judging by how he couldn’t shut up about it.

This wasn’t entirely a happy thing for me, though. The female goblins had covered their entire bodies in rags before. Now, thanks to their evolution, the skimpy clothing allowed one to see certain…things. There would be no brushing them off now. The males certainly seemed happy about it. Even though they were wearing nothing but loincloths themselves…

The village was in desperate need of food, clothing, and shelter. Better start with clothing first, I figured.

Another issue I had to deal with was Ranga. He was so delighted that I was back to full consciousness that he wouldn’t stop following me around and bothering me. If you like those fuzzballs, I assume you’d be in paradise, but I was always more of a cat person. It wasn’t the worst thing, but still.

“So, Ranga,” I said, “I’m pretty sure I only named you out of the pack, so…how come all the other direwolves evolved, too?”

It was true. My magic stores conked out the moment I named this thing.

“My master! We, the direwolves, are both one and all. My brethren and I are connected together—my name is the name of our tribe!”

Huh. So the whole gang evolved together.

The “one and all” thing was something the previous boss never quite fully believed in, as Ranga explained. If he had, that battle might’ve gone in a different direction. Ranga, meanwhile, had already gained full control over his pack, it seemed, allowing them all to evolve from direwolf to “tempest wolf.” “More power for everyone” is the way he put it.

“Nice work!” I said, since he seemed to be desperately fishing for praise. He whipped his tail back and forth, a display that was adorable on such an enormous beast. On the other hand, a happy five-yard wolf could produce nearly enough wind to launch me right out of the village.

“Hey, watch what you’re doing with that thing!” I warned him. The downtrodden look he gave in response made me chuckle—and the way he then shrank his body down to around three meters long made me stop. His race could adjust their sizes, apparently. How useful, I thought as I instructed him to stick to the small side from now on.

The biggest issue of all, however, was where the heck we were gonna keep all these guys. The wolf-hobgob pairs seemed to be sharing households with each other by now—not that they had houses, so it was really more the hobs using the wolves as blankets. The lack of clothing was killing me, but housing also needed some attention.

So. What now?

I saw a mountain of food piled up before me. That solved one of our problems, at least.

Once I used up all my magic, the rest of them began the evolutionary process. It took about a day to complete, and they wanted to celebrate with both that and the end of battle with a feast. The elder refused to allow it until I recovered, however, so instead they spent their time gathering the food first.

I had noticed them sparring with one another over who got to shine me up during my departure but not the evolution or food-gathering efforts. This “sleep mode” made me well-nigh defenseless, it looked like. I’d need to be careful with it.

The way they began taking action without waiting for orders, at least, was much appreciated. The evolution process must’ve done wonders for their intelligence. It might’ve impacted their mental strength even more than the physical.

And the food! Back in their regular goblin days, they’d eked out a living off fruits, nuts, edible plants, and whatever monsters and animals they could hunt down. Now, with the aid of their tempest wolves, they could cover a lot more terrain.

The pairs had, much to my surprise, gained the ability to use Thought Communication with each other—goblins who could guide their wolves more surely than the best of jockeys. I couldn’t guess how much this improved their combat ability, but previously unbeatable foes were now simply a warm-up for them. This entire mountain of food was the results from the past two days alone.

But relying on hunting and gathering would leave them in danger if something happened to their environment. They’d have to start thinking about agriculture pretty soon. A steady food supply is the key to a life of plenty. I’d need to figure out what kind of produce grew well here, as well as what sort of grain crops (assuming there were different types at all on this planet). Always something new to explore, at least.

Today, though, I just wanted to shut off my brain and enjoy the feast. And I did.

Well into the night, we celebrated our evolution, the end of war, and—most important to me—my recovery.

The next day, I gathered the entire population around me. We had a heap of issues to tackle, but I had something even more important to tell them.

We needed to hammer out the rules of this village.

Rules, as everyone knew in Japan, were a must to maintain a communal society. “Because I said so!” was only gonna go so far around here, no matter how many times I used that phrase in my old life.

At the core, I had three rules in mind—three guiding principles I wanted to be sure to have them follow. Everything else, I imagined they could figure out.

“Everyone here? All right! I have some rules to give to you! Three, to be exact. The bare minimum I want all of you to follow.”

And so I laid out my standards:

1. Do not attack human beings.

2. Do not fight among your friends.

3. Do not look down upon other species.

I could’ve gone with more if I kept thinking about it, but I couldn’t expect them to follow too many from the start. Instead, I just stuck to the basics. But how would they take it?

“Could I ask a question?” Rigur shouted. “Why are we not allowed to attack humans?”

Rigurd gave his son the dirtiest look I’ve ever seen from a hobgoblin. Was he afraid I was offended? I wish we could keep things a little more informal, but…

“Simple: Because I like humans! That is all.”

“Ah! Very good! I understand!”

You…do? Well, geez, that was easy. But I couldn’t read a single hint of dissent on any of their faces. I was expecting a little more debate on the issue. Talk about a letdown.

“Human beings live in groups,” I continued, giving my full explanation whether they needed it or not. “If you lay hands on them, they may retaliate in force—and if they throw everything they have at you, I doubt you would be able to defend yourselves. That’s why I prohibit interfering with them. It’d help you all if you were friendly with them, besides…”

Really, though, it just came down to me liking humans, seeing as I used to be one.

Ranga nodded deeply at this. It seemed to make sense to him. He must have had his own reasons to think challenging mankind was a bad idea. The hobgobs, meanwhile, appeared even more convinced than before, so I didn’t bother thinking about them much.

“Is there anything else?”

“What do you mean by ‘Do not look down upon other species’?”

“Well, all you guys are freshly evolved, right? I’m just saying, don’t let that get to your head and start lording it over all the weaker species! Just because you’re all a little sturdier doesn’t mean you’re some high-and-mighty race now. Sooner or later, your rivals will get just as strong—or even stronger—and they’ll want to get back at you. That’d suck, wouldn’t it?”

I had the ears of everyone in the audience. Looks like that worked well enough. I was sure some of them wouldn’t listen to reason, but it’s best to try to nip these things in the bud, anyway.

“That’s pretty much it. Stick to those rules as much as you can, all right?”

The first rules the village ever had were set in stone. Everyone nodded their approval, and with that, the curtain rose on a new life for them all.

With local laws out of the way, it was time to start divvying up roles. The village watch, the food-prep team, the group collecting materials for the village to make things with, the ones building homes and tools and such…

I decided to assign police duty to the extra Thought Communication–wielding tempest wolves. There were seven left after all the hobgobs were paired off, and with Ranga practically glued to my ass, that made six I could send on patrol.

Beyond that, I figured I’d leave the assignment details to Rigurd.

“Rigurd, I hereby appoint you ‘goblin lord’! It will be your job to keep this village well run and well governed.”

In other words, I tossed everything onto his lap. As hard as possible.

But think about it. I worked for a general contractor back on Earth. I’m no ruler. And if I got too wedded to this village, I’d never get a chance to visit a human town. Even if it meant being a tad pushy, I’d have to hand it off to him someday.

I was expecting some blowback, but—

“Y-yes, Sir Rimuru!! I promise you that I, Rigurd, will devote myself body and soul to this vital post!!”

He was sobbing tears of joy again.

Fair enough. Let the king reign, not govern. Or at least let him bark out orders now and then, and leave him alone otherwise.

You know, I seem to remember Rigurd being this doddering, wrinkled mess of a goblin when we first met. Now he’s a hobgoblin in the prime of his life—fit, muscular, and bursting with energy. He might even be stronger than Rigur. How did that happen? The more I mess with this magic stuff, the crazier it all seems to me.

“Very well,” I crowed. “It is in your hands now, Rigurd! Now, I was watching the construction work. It’s terrible, isn’t it?”

One could barely call the structures houses. These were stronger, smarter goblins now, but I suppose asking them to suddenly develop technical skills was asking a bit much.

“It pains me to admit so, Sir Rimuru. We never had a need for very large buildings in the past…”

“Yeah. You guys are bigger now, after all. As for clothing… You guys are all exposing way too much flesh. Could you maybe pass some clothes around?”

“Ah! Yes! There are some people I know that we’ve had dealings with several times. Perhaps they could supply clothing that could fit our needs. In fact, with their skills, they might know how to build homes as well!”

Hmm.

Having worked for a contractor, I had an eye for decent building quality. In terms of what I could actually construct, however, my skill was limited to your basic Sunday afternoon DIY projects. Not enough to serve as a building foreman. If these businessmen could help with that, perhaps it’d be worth paying them a visit.

“I see,” I replied. “It wouldn’t hurt to talk to them. What did you pay them with, though? Money?”

“No, Sir Rimuru. We do have some currency that we confiscated from adventurers, but that remains in storage. Instead, we have obtained the materials we need via either barter or short-term work.”

“Oh. So who are these guys?”

“They are known as dwarves.”

Dwarves! The infamous smithing race! I gotta check ’em out! And while the loincloth crisis had captured most of my attention, something had to be done about their defensive capabilities. Their armor provided no more protection than tatters—and they couldn’t even use it, because it didn’t fit anymore. It was certainly an issue, and tackling it right now would be killing two birds with one stone.

Just one problem. Almost nothing they had seized from passing adventurers was of much use any longer, and whatever money they had stored up couldn’t be very much. What could we trade? Another problem to shelve for later, perhaps…

“I’ll try visiting them. Can you make the arrangements for me, Rigurd?”

“Ah! Ah, of course, Sir Rimuru! I’ll have everything for your journey by tomorrow afternoon!”

He sounded enthusiastic enough about it that I felt safe in his hands. He’d probably give me whatever money was left, too, not that I should expect much.

Currency, though, huh? It’d be funny if it was paper.

Thinking about it, though, I didn’t have much money to my name, either. The fact that currency existed at all in this world was a nice surprise, at least. I’d figured it did, but I’d had no idea how it was circulated at all.

Once I reach a human town, I’ll have to go around and check out prices. But that can wait until after the dwarves. After all the hard work getting this town in shape, a leisurely visit would do wonders for me. I’ll be with my own humankind soon enough—checking out one of the other races could help me learn a little more about this wacky world.

Although technically a subrace of people, the dwarves apparently lived in large towns of their own. They had a king as well, although no goblin was ever permitted even a glance. Just being allowed into their towns was considered an all-time achievement for goblinkind.

I started to wonder about the state of goblin discrimination around here. I was a slime, after all. Would I be treated fairly? There were lots of anxieties to entertain, but I still couldn’t wait to meet some of those little guys. The excitement remained fresh in my mind all throughout the rest of the night.

