

CHAPTER 2

THE DEMON LORD INVADES

On a flying horse, the trip from Dwargon to—ugh—Rimuru apparently took just one day. They were soon off, with Gazel promising to visit again soon.

And he did.

“Well, Rimuru!” the king half shouted as he dismounted. “Here I am, as promised!”

“Uh, didn’t you just leave two days ago?” I couldn’t help but point out.

“What are you talking about? Your fellow swordsmanship pupil is here to visit! I thought you would be happier!”

I hate people who obviously never listen to anyone else. And that “fellow” crap again. He wasn’t even trying to hide the fact that he wanted to be my big bro at the sword dojo. It was really starting to affect his majesty as a dwarven king, and I didn’t think I was imagining that, either. And he came alone this time! Did he even have the time for this?

As I silently stewed over these doubts, Kaijin came running up to me. “Your Majesty!” he shouted. “You didn’t sneak out of the castle, did you?!”

“Pfft! Can you believe it? A hundred-man security detail, and not one noticed me escaping! Such ignoble slackers! It’s right back to hard drilling for them when I return home.”

“Well…I mean…they can’t handle someone like you, my liege…”

“Mm? Did you want to say something, Kaijin?”

“N-no, Your Majesty…nothing…”

“Oh? Capital, then.”

Considering the speed at which he sprinted up to us, Kaijin was surprisingly weak against his king. He was refuted before I could even get a word in edgewise.

But—a king sneaking out of his castle? What’s with that? Was the Dwarven Kingdom going to put up with this?

“Er, so what brings you here this time, Your Majesty?”

“Well, simple, really. You recall how I exiled you both from Dwargon based on my own personal judgment, so that’s why I had to come here. And you will recall how our covenant included the sharing of technological expertise? Well, I’ve brought along the perfect man for the job.”

He tossed the bag he was carrying on the ground. It began to wriggle around.

“What on…?!”

Flustered, Kaijin opened the bag, only to find a skinny, pallid man flying out.

“Oh, geez, Vester?!” I couldn’t help but shout. The very bastard who had trapped us. Why here?

“Heh-heh-heh…precisely! I banished him from the palace as punishment for his scheming against you, but it’d be a waste to let him just play around for too long! So I brought him here.”

I had no response to that.

“My—my liege, what do you mean by ‘so I brought him here,’ exactly?! Do you even understand what it would mean, having Sir Vester work here…?”

“Mm? Don’t want him?”

“Of course I don’t, Your Majesty! You would be leaking all his knowledge to us!”

Kaijin was impassioned about pleading his case. Deep down, I guess he’s more serious-minded than I had thought. Vester, meanwhile, didn’t seem like he knew what had happened yet. I guess he was in that bag for the whole previous evening, on a winged horse, so I couldn’t blame him.

“Leak, you say?” Gazel returned Kaijin’s look of concern. “Well, a bit late for that now, is it not? It was already leaked the moment you left us! I honestly considered asking my covert team to assassinate you, do you realize?”

It didn’t sound like he was joking.

“My… My liege, is that—”

“It’s true! I called it off, though, after quite a bit of thought. There is nothing I hate more than wasting good talent. And that’s why I want Vester working here!”

Vester’s eyes sparkled at the words.

“Your…Majesty…”

“And don’t you get the wrong idea, Vester. I have not absolved you—but as I said, I have great expectations for you. You may no longer serve me, but I hereby grant you the right to pursue your duties here. Make use of your natural talents and show me you can live an honest, fruitful life for a change!”

“K-King Gazel?!” Kaijin sounded like he was beside himself. “Should I take this to mean you’re fine with letting us take every piece of dwarven technology you have?”

The king laughed, like it didn’t bother him in the least. “Pfft! Let me give you this request, then. I want you to take this land we stand upon now and harness it to create technology like none seen before. You understand me? Your research should not rely on previous perspectives—you must work more freely than that, as you conceive new ideas. That is the whole reason why I have allowed the free exchange of technology between my nation and yours.”

So this was his aim the whole time, I thought as Gazel pressed his full royal authority upon them both. He wasn’t just looking at my skills—he had his eyes on Kurobe’s forging abilities, Shuna’s weaving, even our top-secret potion development. His keen sense of self-interest let him sniff out what we were doing here, to some extent. No wonder the Dwarven Kingdom had been so prosperous for so long. In some ways, I was less than thrilled by it. He just kept leading us around by the nose—as if he was reading my mind…

I was interrupted before I could continue this train of thought.

“Rimuru, listen to me. You failed to detect Haze, the deepest level of our concealment magic. Magic Sense is a powerful skill, but there are a thousand ways to outwit it. That lies at the core of any battle—guess how your foe will scope you out, and get a leg up before he can. Relying on one’s skills prevents real growth. And politics, you see, are just the same. You must read what your opponent is thinking and work beyond that. Fail at that, and you have no future as a politician. You must remain diligent.”

See? Reading my mind. Good advice, though.

But really, this has to be—

Understood. There is a high probability that the individual named Gazel possesses mind-reading skills.

Yep. That was the only explanation. In fact, that explains the whole thing. Dodging every single move of mine did seem a bit unnatural. His evasion was a little too spot-on, like he knew what I would do each time.

“Hey, are you—”

“Oops! Bet my covert force has caught up to me by now. I’ll be on my way, then!”

As if waiting for the opportunity, Gazel grinned and took a fist-size crystal from his pocket.

“Let me give you this,” he said. I took it without objection. “This communication crystal will let us keep in contact. Vester should be able to set it up for you. Use it to call us in case of emergency. Farewell for now!”

In a flash, he was on his horse.

“Vester,” he said with a final nod, “may you strive as much as you can to succeed in your research!”

“Y-Your Majesty!” Vester nodded. “This time… This time, I promise I will not let you down!”

“I am off!”

Then he flew away. A very sudden arrival, and a very hurried exit. The man was like a living thunderstorm.

The king had left Kaijin and me staring at each other.

“Kaijin, are you sure your nation’s safe with such a freewheeling man ruling it?”

“Who can say…? He’s been ruling for centuries, so I imagine we’ll be fine, but… Certainly, he was not so flighty when I served him in the palace.”

“Ah, well. I’m not one to speak, I suppose.”

And I wasn’t. I was planning to hang out in some human towns before long. No need to voluntarily put my foot in my mouth.

With that hazy end to the subject, we were walking away from the main square when we heard a voice behind us.

“Sir Rimuru! Sir Kaijin!” Vester was there, head bowed downward. “I deeply apologize! Please, let me atone for matters first. And if you will forgive me, please, I hope you will let me work here!”

I hadn’t forgotten the trap he almost sprang on us. But Vester’s eyes were clear now, not filled with the avarice from before. I can trust him, I thought.

“Well, let’s get one thing clear first—you’re following my orders, you got that? No more dissing me because we’re all monsters here. You think you can manage that?”

“…Of course. Looking back at my behavior fills me with shame. It began with this terrible jealousy I had for Sir Kaijin, but every time I think about it, it makes me feel like a fool.”

He sized me up, looking me in the eye.

“I’ve been given the chance to restore my good name, and I would never want to lose it. And I can assure you that I really do want to devote myself fully to the research I so enjoy!”

Kaijin responded by patting him on the shoulder. “To me,” he said, “it’ll be great just to have another talented researcher on hand. So you think you can give him a chance? You can yell at me about it if he gets up to anything bad, Rimuru, so trust me on this one and let’s let bygones be bygones!”

I’d say Vester was more of a threat to Kaijin than to me, but … Ah, well. He seemed pretty ready to believe in him, and if he was willing to let it slide, I had no reason to object.

“Well, no complaints from me, Kaijin, if that’s what you want. Welcome to town, Vester!”

“Y-yes sir! I am unworthy of your forgiveness, but I promise you that I will work as diligently as I possibly can!”

“Good news, eh, Vester?” Kaijin added. “I guarantee you, you’re never gonna be bored around here. No time to worry about stupid stuff, let me tell you that much!”

Vester needed a job—and quickly. This time, I actually had just the thing.

Our hipokute-growing operation was finally starting to gain some steam, so I figured we could move on to the actual production of healing potion next. I was anticipating having to teach Gabil the process from the ground up, given he had no real relevant knowledge—but with Vester and his spirit-engineering experience, now it was a different story. I figured the two could work together on the project, with Gabil serving as Vester’s assistant and cave bodyguard.

Before anything, though, I had to introduce them to each other. We headed to the Sealed Cave, Gabil hurriedly trotting out when I called for him.

“Hello! My name is Vester, and it sounds like we’ll be working on this research together.”

“Mmm. Gabil. I am tasked with cultivating hipokute herbs, but if there is anything else I can do, please tell me. Let us both work together for Sir Rimuru’s sake!”

The two of them shook hands. I was concerned the sight of Gabil would unnerve him at first, but I didn’t need to be. So I asked Gabil to guide him into the cave for me.

“Sir Rimuru, look at this. All of this is freshly cultivated hipokute!”

I had to nod my approval. The operation was really starting to go well. The open space beyond the cave’s door seal was awash in green, thriving hipokute, as far as I could see.

We had a problem, though: Gabil and I were one thing, but Vester didn’t have any way of seeing in the dark. Light, whether from a torch or via a magic spell, still wasn’t enough to let you even see where you were standing. There were some dimly lit parts of the cave, but not enough to really work with.

I recalled when Kaijin first entered the cave. His reaction: “Boss, I can’t see a thing in all this darkness…” And he was right. I had forgotten since I had no problems seeing in there, but no way could anyone perform real work in this pitch-blackness.

In the midst of this, it was Shion—my self-appointed secretary, and someone who hadn’t joined the conversation at all until now—who offered a solution.

“So do we just need some light, then?”

“Yeah. Any ideas, Shion?”

“Yes! We can open a hole in the wall to bring in some light…”

“No, you idiot!”

Shion scowled at my immediate refusal. This was called the Sealed Cave for a reason. The walls were incredibly solidly built. Maybe you could smash a hole in them if you applied all your strength to it, but that ran the risk of a massive cave-in—and losing all Gabil’s noteworthy cultivation progress. I hated to pop Shion’s balloon like that, but I had to.

“It’d be nice if we could run some electricity through here,” I muttered to myself.

“What’s that, boss?”

“Could you tell me what you mean by that?”

It seemed to grab Kaijin’s and Vester’s attention. So I gave them a basic rundown of how electricity worked back in my realm, projecting the image of a light bulb into their minds.

“I see… Apply heat to a metal filament to generate light, then?”

“Hmm. Yes, it is quite astonishing. The luminescent moss here won’t provide enough light to work with. It is certainly something we need to develop.”

I was expecting to generate the required heat via electrical resistance. Instead, they proposed a solution involving a magic circle to compress magicules inside. Much like how a magic-imbued sword emitted a faint glow, applying a little magic engraving to metal would apparently let it light up. We’d be using magisteel for the metal, I assume—the best kind of raw material for swords, and very compatible with magicule usage. It’d generate a lot of light, as well as provide heat resistance and durability—and the way it readily soaked in inscription magic meant there was little need to test anything else. It’s pretty valuable stuff, but I had a vast supply on tap—a supply that I kind of mined from this cave, so I might as well use it.

Metalwork and carving work were mostly done in Dold’s wheelhouse, so we decided that Kaijin would discuss matters with him afterward. I gave Kaijin the necessary materials, and with that, my role in the project was over. The three had what they needed, and I figured I’d leave it to them.

“You know,” I ventured, “if we’re going to have some light soon, why don’t we just build a laboratory in here?”

“Could we?!” Vester excitedly replied. “I do rather like the relaxed atmosphere in this cave. Having such a ‘secret lab’ is a concept I always enjoy.”

I guess Vester was more childlike than I thought. His eyes sparkled as he said all this, so I couldn’t walk it back. For now, though, I thought it best to remind him of the local dangers.

“You sure about that, though? There are evil centipedes all over the place. That’s like a B-plus right there.”

“Hmm? Not a problem, I would say. I have dabbled in magic myself a little, and I actually have quite a bit of skill at it!”

I looked at Kaijin. He responded by shaking his head. Guess we can’t rely on that too much. I pressed on, a little concerned for his safety.

“Well, I could set one up for you, if you’re sure you won’t regret it…?”

“Oh, absolutely! Besides, I have Sir Gabil to back me up. Oh, I do hope you could provide that!”

True. Having Gabil around probably meant no attacks were forthcoming. With those concentrated levels of magicules, too, normal monsters couldn’t even approach the place. Gabil and his team just barely got a pass, and even then, that’s thanks to the magicules dissipating a fair bit after I swallowed up Veldora. Humans and demi-humans had no issues, though, and the dwarves and hobgoblins could come and go freely, too. It seemed to me like natural-born monsters were more easily affected by magic, somehow. That seemed to explain it.

“Can I leave Vester in your hands, Gabil?”

“You certainly may! I am here, and I have two of my people on watch at all times!”

Gabil had certainly become a lot more reliable as of late. He got carried away far too easily, which worried me, but he certainly had skill. I could tell he was getting used to his new life here, and he and Vester seemed to hit it off. I thought I was safe leaving things to him.

So before I could work on developing potions, I wound up having to devise a home and laboratory for Vester.

I had both of them wrapped up in a few days.

It’s worth noting that Gabil and the other dragonewts slept immersed in water, so they didn’t really need living quarters to speak of. They could handle a bed just fine, but apparently the wings got in the way, so they were more comfortable underwater. Soka and the other females could fully put away their wings, so they slept in rooms, but I suppose even dragonewts had their own likes and dislikes.

For Gabil’s room, however, he had several of his men dig out what looked like a pretty comfy personal space for him. There was a ventilation duct and everything. He had brought in all the stuff he needed, and it sure didn’t look lacking at all to me.

Now we just needed a way for Vester to safely travel between here and town.

“Sir Rimuru, is it all right if I install a magic circle in here? Summoning magic’s going to be pretty rough on this side of the door, but it appears to be possible outside of it. I’d like to build one here, if possible.”

Vester’s chosen location was the spot where I defeated that first black snake way back when.

“What kind of magic circle do you mean?”

“A teleportation circle, sir. It would let me travel instantly to any location I associate it with. Activating it takes some time, but no more than a few minutes, so I think it would do wonders to reduce travel times…”

He was talking about a Warp Portal, a type of elemental magic. The caster made them work by drawing the same series of symbols at the entrance and exit. These symbols worked strictly as pairs, so stepping into a Portal would always bring you to the same destination, but linking this cave with someplace back in town would still be a great timesaver. Maybe Vester really did know a thing or two about magic. It came as a total surprise to Kaijin, who knew nothing about it.

The required symbols for a Warp Portal would normally be drawn with intricate, and expensive, magical potions. Here, however, we’d be using carvings made on magisteel—which technically was even more expensive, but it meant we could reuse them many times without having to draw them repeatedly. This, we could use to link up top-secret facilities within our own nation.

Elsewhere in the world, magisteel was too precious to last very long without being stolen. Carving-based Portals could only be built in areas where theft wasn’t a concern—leave one out in the open, and it’d face the full brunt of the elements, along with the potential for breakage or robbery.

We didn’t have to worry about cave monsters teleporting themselves into town with it, either. The user needed to exercise a few magical muscles to activate it, focusing on the destination in their mind.

It all sounded good to me, so I gave Vester the nod to go ahead. Magic teleporters, though, huh? Pretty useful. I’ll definitely need a primer on those soon.

Vester was proving to be a much more useful man than I had thought. Having total freedom to pursue his research made him a much less wily, treacherous fellow. He seemed to really love life now. And recalling my time in Dwargon, he didn’t seem particularly happy over there, constantly struggling for power. Research probably suited him more than ladder climbing. Having greed and envy rule your life, instead of the stuff you really want to do, would change anyone for the worse. It’s best to just do what you like, I think, as long as you aren’t bothering anyone.

So either way, we were all set to go, and before long, Gabil and Vester’s tandem research efforts were under way.

It had been a bit of a hectic time with King Gazel visiting and Vester joining my crew, but we were receiving quite a few other guests in the meantime, too.

Just as Treyni warned, the town was now playing host to a wide variety of races. The kobolds came first, stopping by in their usual trade caravan, and they must have been taken aback seeing all the massive changes to the forest. We were, after all, chopping down trees to procure more empty land to place buildings on, and once we wrapped that up, we kept ourselves busy widening the road to the lizardmen’s homelands around Lake Sisu.

“Wh-what is going on in here?!” one shouted at me. They knew something was changing near their own lands deeper in the forest, and now their finely honed nose for business had led them to brave the risks and check things out.

But the changes these kobolds experienced weren’t just to the scenery.

“Well, hello there, kobolds. I do so appreciate your business!”

“…Er, who may I be talking to?”

“Ha-ha-ha! It’s me. Rigurd!”

They need more of a hint than that, dude… And once we explained that Rigurd used to be chief elder of the goblin village, that made the kobolds yelp in surprise even more.

These kobolds, however, were pretty nice guys. The ones here spent their days wandering across the vast forest, covering their own sales territory, and one of them had been the main merchant handling Rigurd’s village. He was now talking cheerfully with several hobgoblins on the road.

“Would we be able to have your permission,” the kobolds asked me, “to build an inn and storehouse to serve as our base of operations?”

I gladly accepted the offer, and with that, I now had a kobold HQ in town, along with an entire clan of the guys to staff it. The old wandering-caravan days were over; instead, they used the town as a base to fan out and tackle all the other settlements they sold their wares to.

Some of our other visitors included halflings and merfolk. The halflings swore their allegiance to us, and I had them work on our farms. The merfolk, meanwhile, were seeking protection. They lived nearby a large lake that had recently become infested with a growing horde of amphibious monsters. I ordered Benimaru to send a cleanup force their way. Most of the trade between us and the Dwarven Kingdom would involve traveling along riversides, and I was sure the merfolk could provide some assistance with that. If they were willing to work with us, they were more than welcome.

As far as more uncommon visitors go, one time, while exploring in the woods, I came across an insectoid—an insect-type monster—that was near death. It was maybe a foot and a half tall, kind of a cross between a stag beetle and one of those big fighting ones, and I just thought it looked so cool. There was a dead blade tiger next to it, a B-ranked monster, and imagining this small creature defeating such a formidable foe was remarkable to me.

So I decided to take care of it. It was hostile at first, attacking me without a moment of hesitation. That seemed reckless, but I quickly realized the motivation. There was another insectoid behind it—it had attacked me so the other one could make its escape.

I didn’t notice the other guy until it spoke up. “W-wait,” it pleaded. This one was about a foot tall and looked like a garden-variety wasp. A foot-long wasp would be the subject of horror films in my world, but this one, too, was critically injured. It was intelligent enough, at least, to communicate with me via thought, albeit haltingly.

“…Why do you not flee? I have no way left to protect you. Forgive me,” the insectoid who attacked me muttered, resigned to its fate.

The other guy must’ve been pretty smart, too. And even though the blade tiger almost killed it, it was using whatever strength remained to confront me. It seemed to be choosing to die a noble death, perhaps realizing that the time was near.

“Strong one,” the wasp asked me, “you…protect us?”

I couldn’t find it in me to just abandon them. Something about that beetle doing whatever it could, even near death, to protect its friend struck a chord. No reason why they couldn’t join the party—

Then an idea hit me.

“Hey, can you guys collect nectar or whatever?”

“Yes… Can.”

I figured they might be able to collect nectar from flowers, and they could. That provided all the reason I needed to lend them a helping hand. They both had lost around half of their bodies, so I lent them a few cells from my own slime form to treat them, using processed magisteel to replace the missing parts of their exoskeletons. That, plus a dose of healing potion, fixed them right up. I named the cool-looking beetle Zegion and the wasp Apito, and now they were my subjects, or pets, or something.

The rarer plants I collected in the forest included those that would only bloom in special environments or places laden with magicules. Apparently such flowers bloomed readily in the treants’ settlement, however. I figured Apito, with its intelligence, could scope out those rarities for me and provide the nectar from them.

Treyni was kind enough to give permission for this, so I ordered Zegion to keep the treants safe while Apito collected the treasure. It would then deliver the nectar spoils to me on regular occasions.

So along those lines, we were starting to find more and more friendly people to interact with. But they weren’t all friendly. Sometimes we’d get small gangs of lower-level magic-born sniffling around and spouting out classic hoodlum clichés like “Whoo, ha-ha! What a fancy-lookin’ town this is! We’re gonna treat it reeeeal good from now on!”

Gobta’s or Rigur’s patrol teams were usually all it took to chase them off, but we’d occasionally run into monsters with some actual strength as well. Such lower-level species always met a tragic end before long.

“Oh, uh, Shion? We’ve got some guests.”

“Yes, Sir Rimuru!”

The idea of talking things out never registered in Shion’s mind. She was much more a fan of duking things out. Really more of a bodyguard than a secretary, and she was harsher on her opponents than Gobta or Rigur ever were.

It was the same thing every time, really—no matter how many lower-level magic-born gathered together, there was just no beating Shion. And when they were sniveling on the ground, begging for forgiveness, only then would Shion smile and ask “So how can I help you?” Even the most arrogant of them would never be seen in town again after that—and if they did, Shion wasn’t keen on second chances.

Generally, I asked her to avoid killing if she was able to. Monsters were all about survival of the fittest, and a convincing show of strength would usually be enough to force them into obedience. Any wayward souls who couldn’t listen to reason and decided to be naughty a second or third time, though? Yeah, I gave her permission to execute them. I didn’t have time for monsters who couldn’t show regret for their actions.

There were still a lot of folks out there who looked down on me for being a slime, weakest of all monsters. That, or called me soft for not killing my foes, no matter how much they dissed me. But I figured those stories would disappear pretty fast, in time.

Soei, in particular, was even colder and more calculating than Shion; he tended to expel any would-be attackers only after introducing them to the meaning of fear. He told me he was busy building up a defense network for the town, but I think he was also doling out punishments for anyone who thought they could do whatever they wanted with us.

At the moment, the forest’s native races were most likely testing us, trying to see what this new force in Jura could do. That’s why we were kind of obligated to puff out our chests a bit, so we could get everyone else to recognize us. We’ll gradually roll that out, and slowly but surely, we’ll make ourselves known.

So the city of Rimuru, in the heart of the Jura-Tempest Federation, was doing a pretty roaring business…but then we encountered a guest we weren’t expecting at all. My Magic Sense alerted me to a massive chunk of magic power flying our way—at a speed I could only call ridiculous.

Oh, crap! In an instant, I jumped off Shion’s chest and headed outside the gate at a full clip. I was right to be concerned. The magic force changed its aerial trajectory and landed right in front of me. If it had gone inside town, I think we would’ve seen some substantial building damage. The nearby trees had been uprooted and blown away, and there was a crater on the ground where it landed.

I instinctively realized there was no way I could handle this level of force. Steeling my resolve, I decided to observe my opponent. Just one look was enough to see that this was on a completely different dimension from anything I knew.

A powerful will hid behind her blue eyes, and her platinum-pink hair was done up in a pair of pigtails. She looked around fourteen or fifteen, but there was no telling a magic-born’s age from external appearances—and with the overwhelming amount of magical power that she didn’t bother to hide, she couldn’t have been the age she seemed to be. She was wearing an outfit that left quite a bit of skin exposed, made out of some unknown material. And—more than anything—she was a beauty, the likes of which I may never have seen before.

Before I could ask who she was, she arrogantly puffed out her chest (her breasts only barely developed). “Hello, hello! I am the demon lord Milim Nava. You look like the strongest hombre in town, so I wanted to come ’n’ say hi!” the beautiful and powerful girl declared.

A few minutes before, Milim the demon lord had spotted the town below her. It was a pretty place—neatly organized rows of buildings, attractive trees lining the city roads. It was a town that seemed to exist in perfect harmony with nature, and she could tell that several high-level magic-born, rated A or higher, lived there.

The biggest surprise of all, however, was that even the rank-and-file residents of town were at least low-level magic-born people as well. Their magic potential varied, but they were all creatures with intelligence, thinking for themselves and carrying out the work assigned to them.

Nothing like these people existed in the Forest of Jura before this point. Seeing such a settlement appear practically overnight would normally be unthinkable. They were all working together, regardless of their differences in strength. Milim couldn’t even imagine what kind of leadership skills were required to make them all follow that.

It excited her like little had recently, and she used her truth-revealing Dragon’s Eye unique skill to gauge the abilities of people around town. Amazing, she admirably thought to herself. Unbelievably, nearly every single resident of the town was a named monster.

No way—everybody here’s got names?!

For the first time in several centuries, Milim felt a mixture of shock and excitement well forth from her heart. No way could she ever bother making something like this—giving away a portion of your own power came with the chance that you’d never get it back again. Any sane magic-born would never try something so hazardous. In a winner-takes-all world like this, there was nothing more distasteful to her than letting her own power flow away from her.

Milim laughed a little. She was happy. This…! Good thing I dissuaded them all from coming here!

The moment their summit ended, Milim was already out the door—but instinctively feeling she needed to lay a bit more groundwork, she had also engaged in direct discussions with two demon lords who might present problems. As negotiations went, it was pretty simple—don’t lay a finger on the forest, or else you’ll have Milim as your enemy—and they ended with a mutual agreement.

Clayman, Carillon, and Frey—they were the younger generation. In Milim’s eyes, they could do whatever they wanted; she was sure she could overpower them if push came to shove. But there were a few demon lords that even Milim found to be a pain in the rear. That applied vice versa as well, however, so as long as she made an arrangement or two with them in advance, she didn’t have to worry about them meddling in her affairs.

Now, she was happy she made the effort. She had a feeling she was about to meet somebody very special, and nobody was going to interrupt her. Let’s start, she thought, by tracking down this magic-born …

She had signed on to Clayman’s proposal for the same reason she always did: a way to pass the time. As long as Milim had breathed, the day-to-day grind was just a bore. Whenever some interesting offer came along, she always snapped it up. Whatever that disgusting low-level magic-born Gelmud was scheming, she didn’t care—Milim’s only motivation was to see how strong the resulting orc lord would become. If Gelmud raised it up to become a new demon lord, that was fine. Being around for the magic moment, she figured, would add some spice to the usual tedium.

Gelmud failed, of course, and given the expectations Milim had heaped upon him, the letdown hit rather hard. But the images Clayman subsequently showed her were enough of a shock that the orc lord hardly mattered any longer.

Her unique skill, Dragon’s Eye, allowed her to view the truth behind whatever she saw—something that worked even through Clayman’s crystal spheres. It wasn’t a complete picture, but it provided enough information to pique Milim’s interest. The mysterious magic-born fighting Gelmud possessed enough power to place it far beyond merely high level. Carillon and Clayman may not have spotted it, but there was no pulling the wool over her Dragon’s Eye.

She also had a guess about who killed Gelmud—someone who then gained Gelmud’s power for their own, letting them evolve up to pretty much one step away from demon lord status. It must have been an awe-inspiring battle.

… Wait. Maybe not. The orc lord would’ve only been able to evolve into a demon lord–level creature. This magic-born’s already far beyond that …

And now she saw that, just as she figured, it was only the mystery magic-born who survived. She scanned the town from the skies, satisfied with herself.

When did they even build a town like this?

There were people maintaining the roads, people carrying around the chopped-up wood to and fro, monsters going in and out of construction sites. They were plainly building their own city.

Milim’s own castle was made by human hands—the devotees who worshipped her as a goddess. It was built to function as a temple, and really, the people were nothing more than a bother to Milim, but they never interfered with her activities. To her, they were worthless—but to them, serving Milim had earned them a millennium of peace. Their lands were recognized to be Milim’s lands, and thus they were safe from anything up to and including a demon lord invasion. No demon lord complained about this; few even enjoyed the right to complain to her without consequences.

But thanks to that, life among her believers had stagnated. They were drowning in serenity, and none dared challenge themselves to try new things. They just went on, generation to generation, gaining absolute bliss from serving Milim. A thousand-year-long morass.

The townspeople here are a far cry from those boring old fools …

She didn’t come here because she was searching for new people to worship her. She wanted some new stimulus, something to fend off the boredom. That was the only reason. If Clayman or Carillon wanted more war power, she was willing to hand it over once she was bored. She’d tyrannize the young demon lords, watch them stew in their own juices, and once she was satisfied, she’d think up some new game to play.

That was her original plan…but the mystery magic-born was much stronger than any of the demon lords had guessed. She couldn’t just leave this guy be, and she was too old to have anyone tell her what to do. She could fight and kill them, or…

Now the other young demon lords weren’t present in her mind at all. She had found him. The one with the demon lord–class powers in this town.

Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! It really has grown to the point of a demon lord!!

Then she plunged forward, eagerly awaiting her prey.

I somehow managed to avoid blurting “A demon lord?!” out loud. What was someone like her doing here?! I didn’t have to ask if she was real—the sheer force she exuded from her every pore was among the strongest I had ever seen. It was just as overwhelming as Veldora was. Plus… I mean, don’t these people send their underlings for jobs like these first? Or, like, one of the four sub-bosses? Something like that? I wanted to chide her but opted against it.

How should I answer her, though…? I was in slime form, and I knew my aura wasn’t leaking out at all. I had grown used to controlling my magic lately, and I could hold it back to some extent without actively thinking about it. To the uninformed observer, I should’ve just looked like a wimpy li’l slime. I knew this because I created a copy of myself and ran Magic Sense on it; the only aura I released was what you’d see from a slime out in the woods somewhere.

If this demon lord saw right through that, she was definitely not one to mess with. No point trying to deceive her. Either way, I had no offense I could hope to use on her. Better not to trip up and do something to anger her.

“Well, good afternoon,” I said, eyeing her closely. “My name is Rimuru, and I am the leader of this town. I am impressed that you recognized this slime as the strongest presence here.”

Actually, that might have been Hakuro. That’s what I thought, but there was no need to say it.

“Hee-hee-hee! That’s kid stuff for someone like me. My Dragon’s Eye can measure all the magical energy people try to hide from me. Don’t try to play the fool around me, you!” she proudly boasted.

She had her chest stuck way out to emphasize her magnificence, although her chest size was, shall we say, disappointing. You could tell from one look that they weren’t fully grown yet. The skimpy outfit made it even more impossible to hide. I, of course, was too mature an adult to mention that out loud. I’m not stupid enough to go dancing into an obvious minefield like that.

But she had a skill kind of like my Analyze and Assess, huh? No point trying to hide anything, then. This was a tad dangerous. My own analysis revealed that she had a clear power advantage, and I’m sure her skill levels were far above mine.

I couldn’t win. If we got in a fight, I didn’t think anything would work on her. I could string my skills together to keep things even and buy some time, but that’s about it. It made the Orc Disaster seem like a walk in the park.

“By the way,” she continued, “is that how you really look? Was that silver-haired person I saw thrashing that bum Gelmud a transformation, then?”

She knew about that fight? Either she heard about it from Soei, or somebody was watching us. I knew Gelmud was, but I didn’t even think that someone would be watching Gelmud, too. So his plans were leaked from the start, then—or Gelmud was nothing but another puppet, another character in the grand show. He did mention that he had demon lord backing—I thought he was just being a sore loser, but maybe he had some connections in high places after all. Someone at this level, for example.

“Ah, did you mean this?” I said as I transformed. My mask was off; there was no need to conceal my aura.

“Oooh, it was you! So you defeated the orc lord? I thought it consumed Gelmud and turned into a demon lord, kind of.”

The demon lord Milim seemed to enjoy this news quite a lot. So she knew Gelmud was dead, but nothing past that, huh? Maybe I could hide the truth a little…but that still seemed dangerous. Honesty was probably the best policy.

“Impressive! Yes, the orc lord evolved into an Orc Disaster, but…well, I fought it and beat it anyway, I guess. So…” I tried to change the subject. “Are you just here to say hello today, or could I help you out with something? You aren’t here to, say, take revenge for Gelmud, are you?”

If she answered yes to that, we were doomed. But she didn’t look like the kind to resort to such pettiness. She might insist on me becoming her vassal in exchange for forgiveness, but that’s about it. There wasn’t much merit in rubbing us out right now, besides. Either way, though, I needed to figure out what she wanted, and how she intended to achieve it.

“Mm? Help me? Um, I’m just sayin’ hi, but…”

“……”

“……”

An awkward silence. The demon lord Milim and I stared at each other wordlessly for a bit. Then:

“Prepare to die!!”

With a shout, Shion slashed at the demon lord.

All the force this demon lord exuded must have robbed Shion of her composure the moment she caught up to me. She was trying to attack first and gain the upper hand. She was accompanied by a lightning-fast black shade; Ranga, leaping out of a shadow on the ground, similarly lunged for Milim. It was a total surprise attack, timed such that even if one strike was parried, there would be no dealing with the next.

Not against Milim, though.

“Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! Oh, did you want to play with me?”

With a teasing laugh, Milim stopped Shion’s sword with her right hand, swinging her left arm as if to swat Ranga away. There was a high-pitched clang, like someone hammering at solid metal, and the sword was stopped cold. She took the longsword straight against her skin, and it didn’t hurt her at all. Ranga, meanwhile, was blown backward by an invisible shock wave, every hair on his body standing on end. I only realized after it was all over that her left-arm swat had unleashed a faster-than-sound shock wave.

“Wh-whoa, wait, guys…?!”

By the time I could tell them to stop, they were already making their next moves.

“Not even a demon lord can escape from this restraining web.”

Using Ranga as a distraction, Soei had used Demonwire Bind to capture Milim. Benimaru, meanwhile, was preparing to encase her in a Hellflare blast.

“And now, the final blow. Burn to a crisp!”

It was a merciless attack, one made with full knowledge that this was a demon lord. They put every ounce of energy they had into it. I imagine that was the ogres’ best idea for dealing with something like this. But…

“Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha!! Impressive! If it was any demon lord except for me, I’m not sure that kind of attack would leave them unhurt. You might even be able to defeat them! But…”

Her aura began to rapidly expand. Then, another shock wave, as if a volcano had just exploded on the spot. She hadn’t unleashed an attack or done anything, really—all she did was unleash the aura she had been keeping restrained.

“…It won’t work on meeee!”

In a moment, the web restraining Milim was shredded to fine pieces. She had her freedom back, and while it was a bit late to say this, the demon lord was just too much. Trying to use cheap tricks or overwhelm her with numbers was never going to work. As King Gazel of Dwargon put it, high-level magic-born were classified as calamity or hazard-class dangers. A demon lord was a disaster, and certain dragonoid types (like Veldora) were feared as “catastrophes.”

Now I could see it for myself. This was a catastrophe. The demon lord before me had force like a howling storm of nature, something no human being could ever contest. One person, posing so much of a threat. What a nightmare—but it was our reality.

So now what…?

Right this moment, all four of my allies—Shion, Benimaru, Soei, and Ranga—were on the ground. Not dead, but certainly out of the battle. But Shion and Benimaru still found it in themselves to try to stand up, giving me a chance to flee.

“Sir… Sir Rimuru… Please, run away…”

“We can take…care of…”

I knew it was impossible, and I knew escape wasn’t an option. Plus, I didn’t exactly have a lot of self-respect, but not even I could toss away my friends and run off by myself.

“You just stay there and rest. I’ll handle this.”

“B-but…”

“If I give up, this is over, so I’ll do what I can, all right?” I shrugged. “Just don’t expect too much.”

That seemed to calm them down a bit. There was no running away, and I had to give it a shot, at least.

“Hohh?” The demon lord gave me a curious smile, beckoning to me with one hand. “You want to take me on? This is fun!”

Well, sure, if you put it that way. If this is what it’s become, no point trying to be modest. Time to bluff and bluster my way out of this.

“Of course, as far as I can tell, there’s only one attack that stands a chance of working against you at all.”

“Oh?”

“Think you have the confidence to try withstanding it?”

I knew full well, frankly, that nothing I could do would win this. How should I put this…?

Understood. The measurable phase indicates a magical energy supply at least ten times greater than yours on the low end. On the high end, it is immeasurable.

I suppose the Sage put it a lot better than I could. And one’s magicule count wasn’t everything, really, but being outclassed ten times over was a tad insurmountable. No wonder the ogres’ full-bore attacks didn’t work.

So there’s just one strategy for me to try. If it was a given that none of my skills would work, I’ll just have to form a plan using the items I have on me. All this, of course, assumes that Milim falls for my prodding.

“Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! All right. Sounds fun to me. But if it doesn’t work, promise me that you’ll become my servant, all right?”

Ooh, there’s a stroke of luck. She’s even more generous than I thought. The fact she wasn’t going to kill us all despite our preemptive attack was a big win. We could just be her lackeys for life instead. That works.

“Okay. You got it. But if it does, you’re gonna let my team here go unpunished, okay?”

“All right. Let’s get this going already!”

Accepting my challenge, Milim gave me an expectant look. I’d better live up to her expectations. With a kick against the ground, I ran with all my might toward her. Without removing my sword, I stormed straight toward her and created a small sphere of water in the palm of my hand. She looked on, full of curiosity, as I approached at full speed. She could tell exactly how I was moving, so I knew no underhanded tricks would work.

“Take this!”

“Mmmm…?!”

I stopped right in front of the demon lord, then threw the sphere of water at her. She seemed breezily nonplussed by this, knowing full well this wasn’t much of an attack. That’s why she let it splash against her, uncontested…right on her mouth.

This bit of water wasn’t an attack at all. It was just there to ensure the item I had for her didn’t spill out mid-delivery. Now it was just a matter of whether Milim took an interest in this item or not. Our entire fate rode on her reaction.

“What… What is this…?! I’ve never eaten anything so delicious in my life!!”

She shouted at the top of her lungs, clearly excited. Her cute little tongue was licking at the droplets stuck to her lips. Whew. Looks like victory is mine.

“Heh-heh-heh! What’s wrong, demon lord?” I grinned as I conjured up another water sphere to show her. “Lay a hand on me, and the secret behind what I just treated you with will be lost and buried forever. But if you accept that I won, I’ll give you some more of that. Okay?”

Milim’s eyes were fixated on the sphere, following it as I tossed it around in the air. She couldn’t have been more enthralled. I was starting to feel like I could talk my way out of this after all.

This was actually some of the honey that Apito was collecting for me after I rescued it. I’d be lying if I said I thought it’d come in handy at a time like this—I just hid it on me because I wanted to eat it later. I hadn’t eaten anything sugary at all since coming to this world.

I was finally able to enjoy some decent grub with this body, so I wanted to satisfy my sweet tooth next. But! Even when I asked Shuna, she said that sweets are considered mega-luxury items and you almost never run into any. The only way to taste anything sweet at all was, realistically speaking, by eating fruit. The western kingdoms and Eastern Empire apparently cultivated sugar, but only rarely did it leave their borders, and it’s at no price the average person could afford.

Well, so be it. I turned my eyes toward honey first, figuring we’d start with something simple. Lucky thing I helped out Apito when I did, in that case. We were still in no shape to be mass-producing honey yet. I had to work hard to gain this small supply of it, so—as guilty as it made me feel about all the others—I was hiding it for myself.

Meanwhile, the demon lord Milim was clearly at an impasse. I could see she was having an internal conflict, interspersed with “Nnnhh… But… But…” and other mutterings. Let’s be doubly sure about this. I tossed the sphere I was playing around with into my mouth.



“Mmmm, this is good!”

“Ah!!”

“Whew. Really good. Oops! I’m almost out.”

“Whaaa?!”

This is fun. She’s just like a child, ripe for getting picked on.

“So you gonna admit that I won?”

“…Wait. I have a suggestion.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“Call it a draw. How about we call it a draw this time?”

“And what do I get out of agreeing to that?”

“I’ll forget about everything that happened.”

“Oh?”

“That, that’s not all, either! I swear I won’t meddle with you guys at all! And you know, if you have any problems, you can talk to me about them, okay?!”

I won!

Her strength was overwhelming, but inside, she was every bit the kid that she looked like. Against a grown-up’s negotiation skills, she had no chance. Yep. Grown-ups play dirty.

Of course, trying to extract anything else out of her would be dangerous. She was a catastrophe-class demon lord, and if I got on her bad side any further, I ran the risk of my town being turned into ash. I decided to play my hand before she changed her mind.

“Sounds good to me. I accept. We’ll call it a draw, then.”

I had a fair bit of inventory left, so I put a generous supply of honey into a jar and handed it to her. It wasn’t a fancy jar, misshapen and handmade from clay, but Milim still accepted it with a smile, scooping a bit up and sucking at it with gusto.

The danger was gone. She was in a good mood, and the most unprecedented catastrophe to ever hit our town ended before it began.

I had just healed the ogres and started to head back into town when I realized that Milim was following me. Oh, brother. I thought I had talked my way out of this, so I assumed she would be going back home, but already my plans were failing.

Holding the jar of honey drops carefully, the demon lord stuck right to my side in lockstep. Does she want more honey? I had a supply, but no intention of letting her have more of it. I didn’t want my portion to run away on me.

“Hey,” she asked, sidling up to me as we walked. “Hey, have you ever thought about calling yourself a demon lord, or trying to become one?”

What on earth is she going on about…?

“Why would I want to put myself through that?” I asked.

She gave me a genuinely perplexed look in response. “Huh? I mean… We’re talking about a demon lord, here! They’re really cool, you know? You kinda want to…look up to them, right?”

“Nope.”

“…Huh?”

“Huh?”

It appeared that Milim the demon lord and I saw things in very different ways. We looked at each other.

“Well, lemme ask you this: Do you get anything good out of being a demon lord?”

“Huh? Umm, well, all these strong guys seek you out to try to start fights. It’s fun!”

“I’m already getting in enough fights now, thanks. Not interested.”

“Whaaaa?! Well, how do you get your fun in life?”

“Oh, all kinds of things. There’s practically too much for me to do, if anything. I only just got my hands on that honey a little bit ago. There’s lots of other stuff I want, too, so I really don’t have the time to be a demon lord. Or is there something to it besides fighting?”

“No, but…you can act all big around humans and magic-born…?”

“Isn’t that kind of boring?”

The question caused Milim to make a face like she was just struck by lightning. I guess it was kind of boring. I was so on the mark that she had nothing to say.

We were almost back at town again, and if she was that shocked about it, I kind of wished she would go away and leave me alone.

“Well, I guess you know my story now. Be careful on your way back home, all right?”

I thought that was a pretty smooth way to drop the hint. I was wrong.

“Wait! Y-you…?! You’re doing stuff that’s more fun than being a demon lord? That’s not fair! It’s totally not fair! Now I’m angry. Tell me what it is! And let me join you, too!!”

I did my best not to call her a spoiled brat to her face. She was a demon lord; riling her could have unexpected consequences. Really, just thinking of her as a child made dealing with her a cinch. Judging by our confrontation just a moment ago, it was super-easy as an adult to talk around her. You can’t try to read someone like this too deeply. Just work around her selfishness and nudge the conversation in your direction—that’s the real key to it, and along those lines, I was already treating Milim like the children of my relatives.

“All right, all right. I’ll tell you. But on one condition. Can you start calling me Sir Rimuru from now on?”

“What? No! You’re crazy! It should be the opposite. You need to call me Lady Milim! Don’t go bandying about my first name like that…”

Oops. Maybe I got a little too cocky? She looks and acts like a child, but angering a walking potential catastrophe could be lethal.

“Well, hang on a sec. We just drew our last fight. That’s fine, isn’t it?”

“Nnngh…”

“All right. Let’s do this. I’ll call you Milim, and you can just call me Rimuru. Sound good?”

“Mmmmhh… Well, okay. I got it! I’ll allow you to call me just Milim. You better appreciate that, though! Only my demon lord friends are allowed that.”

“Well, thanks. I guess we’re friends now, too, huh?”

“Huh?!”

Despite all the sparks, we had overcome our naming dispute. We’d just call each other by our own names—no honorifics or anything.

“Okay, well, I’ll give you a tour of the city, but no wandering around by yourself, okay?”

“Okay, Rimuru! Ee-hee-hee!”

The demon lord Milim—just Milim to me—was being oddly cheerful.

“Great. There’s a good girl. And no starting fights in town without my permission, either. Promise me?”

“Of course! I promise, Rimuru!”

So far, so good. Easier than I thought, even. I ought to be fine now.

“…Well done, Sir Rimuru. Taming the wild demon lord so briskly…”

“We should expect no less of Sir Rimuru!”

“I will let Sir Rigurd know about this…and to take care not to anger the demon lord.”

The feedback from the ogre mages seemed positive enough, too. No complaints, at least—and if they did have complaints, I thought as I guided Milim toward town, lodging them to a demon lord wouldn’t do much.

It seemed, by the way, that calling yourself a demon lord was a good way to make the other demon lords punish you. If you couldn’t prove your strength, they’d boot you right out of the club.

Whew. That was a real close one. If I declared myself a demon lord, like Milim was semi-pushing me to do, I’d start to get watched by real demon lords. Not that Milim wasn’t one, but either way, I dodged a bullet without realizing it. Hearing that story afterward, I gave myself a mental pat on the back for refusing the bait.

I was showing Milim around town.

It turned out to be much more laborious than I was expecting. If you’ve ever taken a young child to an amusement park, I think you can imagine how it was. Take your eyes off her for a moment, and she’s gone. It was exactly like that.

“Hey! I told you to stop running off!”

“Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! I’m over here! What’s this thing?!”

“Listen to me! Just calm down and pay attention.”

“Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! What’s the big deal? I’m listening!”

She plainly wasn’t. She was running up and down the streets, her tension level so high that it honestly made me wonder about her.

“Ah, Sir Rimuru!”

Just inside town, we ran into Gabil, who was carrying a box.

“What good timing. I am here because our test run is complete.”

He may live to regret calling it “good” timing.

“Oooh, a dragonewt! Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! That’s pretty rare. Doing okay?”

“Well, well, here’s a new girl. Indeed, I am Gabil the dragonewt! As Sir Rimuru’s right-hand man, I have been tasked with the development of a secret potion. Are you new to town, too, li’l lady?”

—Snap!

“Huh? What did you just say? ‘Little lady’—you don’t mean me, do you? You want me to kill you?”

She was all smiles a moment ago. Now, Milim was transformed. Guess she didn’t like what Gabil called her.

Grabbing Gabil’s head with a single hand, the demon lord pulled it toward her, then planted a fist in his stomach. I had no time at all to stop her. With a pained exhalation, Gabil had been brought to the brink of death.

Uh… Wait. What happened to her promise not to start a fight without my permission…?

“Listen to me. I’m in a very good mood at the moment. That’s why I’m willing to forgive you now that I’ve done that…but not next time, so watch yourself, got it?”

I don’t think she could’ve done much more than “that” without causing literal death. Some “forgiveness.” It was like she expertly judged the exact amount of force to bring Gabil up to—but not over—the cliff. This girl was fearsome! She probably used Dragon’s Eye to gauge the strike, but still, fearsome.

Good thing Gabil was carrying a test run of our healing potion. We quickly used it on him. It worked.

“Phahh?! I saw my father waving at me from across the river!” he shouted upon waking up.

“Guess you’re fine, then,” I muttered, rolling my eyes. “Your father’s still alive, isn’t he?”

“Er…oh, right. Many pardons. I really was rather close to death, however. Who is this girl—er, this esteemed lady before us…?”

“Yeah, Soei’s informing Rigurd right now, but I guess nobody told you guys in the cave yet. This is Milim. I guess she’s a demon lord?”

“H…uh? Whaaatt?! A demon lord?!”

Gabil was so shocked, he looked ready to piss himself. I could understand why. I waited for him to compose himself, then explained that Milim would be staying in town for a little while.

“I see… No wonder that was such a powerful punch. I suppose I should be glad to be alive…”

“Yeah, well, she promised that she wouldn’t start any fights, so I doubt she’s aiming to kill anyone.”

“Wah-ha-ha! Of course not! That was just my way of saying hi!”

Hell of a way to do that. I guess I shouldn’t trust her on that promise too much. A little love tap from her would have life-altering consequences for any of us. I’d have to make sure everyone here is sufficiently warned.

“I’ll head to the cave later, so let Vester know, too, all right?”

“Yes sir.”

Gabil bowed as he bounded off. Considering the punishment he just endured, he looked in pretty good shape. Maybe the potion was pretty potent, or maybe Gabil was really that tough, or maybe both. Milim gave him a broad, approving nod, waved, then turned to me like nothing had happened.

“Wow, he’s pretty solidly built, huh? Maybe I oughta turn it up a notch next time?”

Um, don’t ask me, I pleaded from the bottom of my heart.

“Hey, um, you know you can’t start punching people just because you’re mad, okay?”

“Hmm? It’s his fault for angering me. Plus, like I said, that’s just a form of greeting!”

No, Milim. No, it’s not.

“Well, I’m not gonna let you greet people with a boxing match, all right? No more of that!”

“No? But I gotta show people a little force to start out, or else they’ll think I’m a pushover…”

“I said, you can’t! I’ll tell everyone in town to treat you with respect, all right?”

“You will? Well, great. I’ll leave that to you.”

“Yeah, thanks. Just chill for now, okay?”

That was about all I could warn her about at the moment. I had a feeling I’d need to gradually teach Milim some common sense over the next little while. It felt like the demon lord had a couple different triggers that enraged her—I’d just have to pray that Gabil was her first, and last, victim.

We continued our journey across town. It was almost dinnertime, when most people would wrap up their work and gather around outdoors, and I figured it was high time to introduce her.

Soei had been nice enough to spread the word around town about our little tyrant, but it was probably safest to show her around and make sure everybody knew exactly what she looked like. I really doubted anyone was stupid enough to try to make a pass at her, but it paid to be doubly sure.

I sent out the announcement for everyone to gather at the main square. They slowly filed in after finishing work, and once the square was filled up, I hopped up on the podium.

“Umm, so starting today, we’ll have a new friend living with all of us. We’ll be treating her as an honored guest, so I’d like you all to treat her politely for me. She’s also promised to follow all the town rules, so if you see her violating any, please let me know.”

I wasn’t willing to let a ton of things slide just because she was a demon lord…but given her violent force, figuring out how to lay down the law was a thorny question. I did make her promise to play nice to the general public, and she seemed confident that she’d stick to that.

“Aren’t you worrying too much?” she said. “I always keep my promises!”

I had my concerns about that, but I couldn’t just sit here and doubt her every move. I decided to trust in her.

Next, Milim took the podium.

“I’m Milim Nava,” she told the crowd, “and starting today, I’ll be living in this city. It’s good to meetcha!”

Um, wait. What did she just say?!

“Whoa, hang on. What do you mean, you’ll be living here?”

“Um, that’s exactly what I mean. I’ve decided to live here, too.”

“Wait, wait, wait. Don’t you already have someplace to live? Aren’t there people you have to worry about over there?”

“Oh, they’ll be fine. I’ll just go home every now and then, and it’ll be no prob!”

It’s a huge prob to me, you idiot! I had to mentally keep myself from screaming my thoughts at her. Well, whatever. She was a pretty flighty girl. Once she got bored of us, I was sure she’d be outta here.

“Well, you heard her, so treat her well,” I said, defeatedly addressing the crowd.

Milim was free to do as she pleased, and the residents generally seemed positive about the news—“What?! Lady Milim, the demon lord?!” “My stars, I’ve never seen her royal countenance in person before!” “Well done, Sir Rimuru! Striking such cordial relations with that tyrant!” “Ahh, it’ll be peaceful days for Tempest now!” And so on.

The name of a demon lord had a lot of cachet around here, Milim’s in particular. Nobody accused her of being a fake, either—with my good word to back her, there was no room for doubt.

“So just to make sure we’re clear, starting today… Well, Milim’s one of us. If she runs into any problems, I want you all to help her out.”

“Yes! Rimuru and I are friends now, so if something comes up, I’m your girl!”

I didn’t expect Milim to require help from any of us. If anything, we’d take the brunt of whatever drama she conjured up. That was what I meant from the statement, but that didn’t register with the demon lord. She took it straight, and I couldn’t deny her.

Still…

“Friends, huh…?”

Was that really all right? Befriending a demon lord and all? I mean, in the short time we’d known each other, Milim seemed nice enough and all, but…

The girl herself, perhaps picking up on my whisper, began to blush. “Yeah,” she said, “‘friends’ does sound kind of odd. Uhmm… Maybe not friends, so much as BFFs!”

Um… BFFs? Milim, when did I give any indication that we were BFFs?

“Er, BFFs?” I hesitantly asked.

“Huh? Aren’t we?!”

I could see the tears welling in Milim’s eyes already…but if anything, the hostile force in her already-balled fists came even more quickly. Crap!

“Hee-hee-hee! Kidding, kidding! BFFs forever, man!”

I quickly corrected myself. Now there’s a mine I almost planted my foot on. I was not gonna go down the same road as Gabil.

“Right? Totally! You sure are good at scaring people!” Milim beamed at me, indicating I had made the right call.

Too easy. Too easy, but still a tough one to handle. No letting my guard down any longer. This had been a real lesson for me. The land of Tempest had a new resident, and she was more dangerous than a warehouse full of powder kegs.

With her introduction over, we filed into the dining hall. Food was on the way, and today’s main dish was curry.

To be honest, it was a dish that did its best to simulate curry. We had discovered a grass that resembled wild rice well enough, and we were in the midst of improving upon it right now. It wasn’t very nutritious at the moment, and it certainly didn’t taste great, but curry’s great at covering up stuff like that, so the results turned out pretty well. I had Shuna’s culinary gifts to thank for that. If we could figure out how to grow some honest-to-goodness white rice, I think it’d be a classic, but either way, this worked, too. We also had some ersatz Indian-style naan bread, so you could choose that instead.

Cooking in this town was the result of a long trial-and-error process. We had a stockpile of recipes at this point, but without any sugar, recreating the dishes I knew on Earth was a challenge. I had monsters scouring the forest for anything that resembled sugarcane. There might be plants with sugar stored in the roots, like sugar beets or whatnot, so I’d been asking our patrols to come back with as many different types of plants as they could. A sample was all I needed to run Analyze and Assess, figure out what was inside, and—over time—extract real sugar from it.

Milim certainly enjoyed the meal. I figured she had pretty childish tastes in food, too, so I asked Shuna to put some extra fruit juice in her curry to make it sweeter. Judging by the way she tore through her helping, I guess I made the right choice.

“Wowwww!! I haven’t eaten anything this good in suuuch a long time!”

Shuna smiled as she doled out a second serving. It was a darling little scene. One that was ruined by the bombshell Shion had for me.

“By the way, Sir Rimuru, I had been wondering—what was that present you gave to Lady Milim outside of town?”

Erk.

Aw, geez, Shion, why’d you have to bring that up all of a sudden?

“No! You can’t have any! That jar’s mine!”

Milim immediately tucked her jar of honey drops out of view. Sheesh. She could’ve just tossed it into Spatial Storage, but noooo.

“Oh, don’t worry, Lady Milim. Nobody’s thinking about taking your things at all,” Shuna said, smiling.

Yeah, I’d hope not. Nobody was suicidal enough in town to try it. And the moment she realized her honey wasn’t in danger, she grinned and resumed her meal—so completely defenseless, one would begin to wonder how demon lord-ly she really was, if at all.

Though Milim wasn’t really the problem. The problem was that people now knew about my secret honey stash.

“You know,” Shuna continued, “I have been noticing a rather fragrant scent around here lately. I had thought it belonged to you, Lady Milim, but was that what Sir Rimuru gave you, perhaps—”

Crap. I did not like her leading the witness like that. This was bad. Soei had his head turned aside, pretending not to be involved, but Benimaru was already giving all of us a curious look. There were six of us seated at the table: Benimaru, Soei, Milim, Shuna, Shion, and me. Shuna was the only one not there for my confrontation with Milim, so I couldn’t explain my way out of it.

Ah, such was my fate, I guess. I was hoping to keep it under wraps until we could figure out how to mass-produce it, but oh well. I took out some honey from my pocket and filled a nearby cup with it.

“Okay, well, this stuff is called honey. I got this as a substitute for sugar, but I can’t make very much of it yet, so I can’t give you all a supply.”

I directed them all to scoop some up with their fingers and give it a try.

“““Ah…?!”””

The looks on the two females’ faces were of abject shock. Soei just raised a single eyebrow, but Benimaru was already looking at me expectantly, hoping for more. Milim, of course, scooped up a bit herself, not that I invited her to. You already have your own, you greedy brat!

“So as you see, the honey tastes extremely sweet, but it also has a medicinal effect. In fact, it can cure almost any disease, but sometimes there can also be poison mixed in, so you need to be very careful extracting it. That’s not a problem if I’m doing it, but still.”

“And you think we can make a larger amount?”

“Not right now, no. I can produce maybe a single cup of this a week.” If I pushed Apito hard enough, we might be able to up that to three cups, but there was no pressing need to, so I let it slide. “I want to conduct more research into its makeup to evaluate it as a medicine, so there’s not a lot to spare for eating quite yet.”

This wasn’t a lie. My Analyze and Assess skill told me that this was a special-grade panacea. The rarity of the plants we extracted it from no doubt meant it had all kinds of astonishing benefits.

“Yes. The nectar we harvested from giant honeybee hives simply doesn’t compare to this. As a sweetener, it was fairly disappointing.”

Shion nodded. She was always a font of information about stuff like that, even if it didn’t directly connect to cooking. And she was right—giant honeybee nectar was more poisonous than sugary, making it ill-suited for food. I figured I could analyze it and extract something decent from it, but taming giant honeybees sounded like pretty tricky business to me anyway.

“If we could prepare a suitable garden for them and let that be their territory, I think we could get some pretty decent honey from them, though.”

“You think?” Shion said, finally seeing things my way.

“You said this could be a substitute for sugar,” Shuna asked, clearly curious. “Is sugar itself really this sweet?”

I could see Milim’s and Shion’s ears perk up at the question.

“It sure is. There’s no medicinal value, but it’s so sweet that people get literally addicted to it. You can use it in food, in drinks; all kinds of areas. We’ll be able to craft a great deal more food than before, once we have it,” I explained.

“Ah… I see. In that case, I will have us devote all our efforts to discovering this sugar, starting tomorrow. Shion…”

“Yes, Shuna. I promise you, I will stake my life on discovering this sweet plant for us all!”

“Yes! Very good!”

The three women gave one another firm nods. I wanted to ask why they’d stake their lives on this (and since when were they all best friends, too?), but it was fine for now. I took a final lick or two of the remaining honey, already assured that real sugar would be ours sooner than ever now.

With dinner wrapped up, I directed them all to the bath, my crowning achievement. The tub, made with the finest dwarven marble out there, was filled day and night to the brim with hot-spring water, ready to be used at any time.

Milim had joined us, meekly following along behind Shuna and Shion. Normally, I’d nonchalantly hop in the bath with them all in slime form, but that definitely didn’t feel right today. She’d be happier alone with the other females, and besides, I would need to discuss things with the ogres whenever Milim wasn’t around.

So I moved on to our meeting hall and gave a rundown of the day’s events to the people assembled there. “My goodness… I hardly know what to say. I never expected a demon lord to visit here on her own volition,” Rigurd said, shaking his head.

I could understand his position. I had never pictured this happening, myself.

“Well, I think it’ll be all right, though,” I said. “She’s promised not to start any fights in here, at least. Not without my permission.”

I wasn’t exactly confident about that, but I had little choice but to trust her on that count.

“Perhaps…but shouldn’t we be more worried about how the other demon lords will react?” Kaijin spoke up.

Hakuro and Benimaru nodded at this.

“How do you mean?” I honestly asked.

“Well, there are multiple demon lords out there, and they all work under a convoluted system of checks and balances. You and Lady Milim just declared each other allies out in the public square, and that basically means this town’s under the protection of Milim the demon lord. And normally, I suppose, that would be incredibly desirable, but…”

“…Sir Rimuru, you are leader of the Great Forest of Jura Alliance and ruler of the Jura-Tempest Federation,” Hakuro interjected. “I suppose the actions of today would seem, in the eyes of the other demon lords, to mean that the Forest of Jura has forged an alliance with Milim herself.”

“Yes!” Benimaru added. “It means that Milim, who hardly has any subjects of her own, suddenly has a much larger force backing her up. It shakes the foundation of the current power balance among the demon lords. One wrong move, I fear, and the entire forest could become subject to a major war.”

Hmm. Yes, I will admit to not thinking too deeply about it, but I suppose my decisions could wind up affecting the whole forest, huh? But… I mean…

“Practically speaking, though, none of us could stop Lady Milim if we wanted to, could we?”

Rigurd offered his opinion, and he was right. Even all of us at once would never have a chance. It left us with nothing but the most passive of approaches—waiting for her to grow bored and leave.

“To be frank,” Benimaru said, “her strength is on a totally different dimension from any of us. There is no point even debating whether we could beat her or not. None of us would be alive now were it not for Sir Rimuru’s quick thinking.”

“…Exactly. If other demon lords oppose her, I honestly like our chances against them more than her. Milim the demon lord is a walking catastrophe.”

Soei nodded at his compatriot’s honest feelings.

That largely settled it. There was nothing else to be done, and that was that. So how to handle Milim in the meantime…?

“In that case, I vote that we should leave the day-to-day handling of Lady Milim to her…ah, BFF, Sir Rimuru. All in agreement?”

“““Aye!!”””

Wha?! Dammit, Benimaru! But by the time I had the thought, I was too late. I was used to tossing the ball to someone else most of the time—this time, they did the same to me.

“Besides,” Hakuro said, “Lady Milim is one of the oldest and strongest of demon lords. A lord that we absolutely must not be hostile toward, one could say. For this issue, at least, I see little we can do besides let Sir Rimuru handle it.”

Way to drive the stake in like that. I didn’t think she was that dangerous, but so be it. I sighed. Nobody else seemed to know how to curry Milim’s favor, and since I was apparently a genius at handling children, I suppose it was up to me to help out. We now had a silent, but steadfast, agreement that the demon lord Milim was my problem.

Milim was already looking drowsy by the time she left the bath. Apparently, she was beside herself with excitement—few baths large enough to swim in existed in this world, so I couldn’t blame her. Most people had to make do with quick dips in cold water, and even nobility had to be content with hot water in cramped little tubs, I was told. Assuming you lived in a rich enough nation to have dedicated baths at all, which wasn’t always the case.

I was admittedly kind of picky about having this bath. Selfish of me, I know, but it had turned into a lovely facility. If people liked using it, I couldn’t be happier.

I asked Shuna to lead Milim to a guest bedroom and put her to sleep. There weren’t any Western-style beds here, just pseudo-tatami mats and futon mattresses on the floor. I worried that she’d have some complaints about that, but it wound up not being an issue. She immediately fell asleep, looking snug as a bug.

It was the demon lord’s first day and night in Tempest, and by and large, it could have turned out a lot worse. Of course, the whirlwind she was kicking up had only just begun.

We were busy as bees the next morning.

First, waking up Milim at sunrise wasn’t easy… “Why does a demon lord have to wake up early?!” she grumbled.

We managed to get her up and dressed. Her current outfit was just too exposed, so we prepared some other clothes for her the previous evening—just a quick outfit built from whatever we had around, but she was pretty enough that she looked just fine wearing anything.

“This is hard to move in.”

“Oh? Well, it looks nice. Isn’t that better for you?”

I made a decent attempt to mollify her, and her mood instantly improved. No complaints there. Children can be so simple like that sometimes.

Next up was breakfast. Something resembling bread, fruit jam, and milk—chilled cowdeer milk. I had been telling people about how good cow’s milk was, and this was close enough. That, plus some hot vegetable soup.

The jam used fruit that had been boiled, cooled, and then sealed in chilled jars. It used no additional sugar, and I wasn’t wholly sure what kind of fruit it was, but it was Shuna’s homemade recipe and quite a bit sweeter than I expected. It was more sour than sweet to my palate, but in a world so lacking in sugary food, this was still a rare luxury. Most people in town just had bread and the remaining vegetable soup for breakfast, so the jam was more reserved for honored guests, so to speak.



“Wowwwww!! This is incredible!” Milim gushed as she ate. Glad she liked it. I watched her go as I thought over a few things.

I didn’t particularly mind being the go-to guy for Milim-related issues, but should I really just be acting normal like this? Most of my work around town involved inspection—checking on construction sites, fields as they were being tilled, the weapon production workshop, our food storehouses. I’d discuss things with the supervisors of each location and nail down our future direction.

If any trouble happened around town, I’d sometimes stop by to arbitrate. With all these races living in the same space, we needed rules in place that everybody had to follow. It was one thing when this was just a village or settlement, but we were now a federation with a population in the tens of thousands, and the rule of law was more important than ever. I didn’t have enough time in the day to enact a ton of laws by myself, so the town still ran on a lot of general guidelines more than anything. Thus, if there was a difference of opinion or some other dispute bubbling, I was left to make the final decision.

Rigurd and the rest of my staff solved most issues for me, thankfully, so I didn’t hear about it unless it was something pretty serious. It seemed to me that this was on purpose—they made sure not to bother me about something unless it really was that important. It was surprising, seeing how well these monsters could cooperate with one another. I’m sure everyone had their complaints, but we now had a culture where, instead of acting out physically, people preferred to let me do the judging.

For today, at least, there were none of those problems to tackle. When there was, I’d be contacted about it at least a week in advance, giving me time to listen to both sides and everyone else time to gather evidence and such. Which meant that the only planned appointment for today was a quick stop by Gabil’s place.

I dared a quick glance at Milim. Would I be okay taking her into the cave? It was now filled with Vester’s valuable laboratory tools and experiments—a sort of federal research facility.

Suddenly, I had a good idea. Milim still had only a patchwork outfit on. If her stay here would be extending a while longer, we’d need to prepare several outfits for her. Which meant—

“Hey, Milim, once you’re done eating, you want to go get some clothes custom-made for you?”

“Why? Isn’t this good enough?”

“You’ll probably want more than one outfit. Besides, I think you’d look nice in something cuter anyway.”

“What? You have cute clothes?!”

“Sure. You can pick out whatever you like.”

“Perfect! Ahh, I should have known, Rimuru! This town has everything!”

The moment I brought it up, she was already dancing around in her seat. Perfect. That oughta buy me some time. Going into that gauntlet of a dress shop, it was easy to spend half a day without realizing it. I had experienced it for myself, being stuffed into outfit after outfit like a dress-up doll. Most of the designs were made for “fun” looks anyway, so I’m sure Milim would be able to find something she likes.

“Oh, Lady Milim is choosing some clothes? I’d be happy to join her.”

“Yeah, if you could, Shuna? I got an errand to run in the cave, so toss me a line with Thought Communication if something comes up.”

“Certainly.”

“Oh, you aren’t coming, Rimuru?”

“Ah, um, I already have some clothes, so. I’ll come back to see you once you’re all set, Milim, so feel free to select whatever you like and have ’em tailor it to your size. You could even have some new clothes made for you.”

“Ooh! Got it!”

Great. That went well. The moment she heard the magic phrase new clothes, her interest immediately launched her in that direction. It oughta keep her from starting a riot or genocide in my absence for a while.

She went off with Shuna to the production workshop after breakfast. Now I needed to get my own errand over with.

I headed for the Sealed Cave with Kaijin coming along.

“Were you all right after yesterday?” I asked Gabil, who was waiting for me. He seemed fine to me, but a cheap shot from a demon lord could lead to all kinds of aftereffects.

“No problem at all, sir!” he replied with a hearty laugh. “I am supremely confident in my body’s durability!”

He certainly acted like always, too. I breathed a sigh of relief as Vester gingerly came up to me.

“By the way, Sir Rimuru, I did file the report with King Gazel as well. I hope it was all right?”

A report about Milim was what he meant. I asked him to send one off yesterday. Our pact with Dwargon did include language about providing whatever support we could if danger befell one of us, and this definitely counted. There wasn’t much Dwargon could do, really, but it’d be polite to at least let them know and prepare for the worst.

“Not a problem. Did the communication crystal work all right?”

“It did, yes. It connected me to King Gazel almost immediately. All I said to him was that the demon lord Milim attacked and that you handled it, Sir Rimuru, but was that good enough?”

I could understand Vester’s concern. That terse report probably threw the Dwarven Kingdom into chaos, scrambling to collect whatever intel it could. Vester was probably being swamped with requests for more information.

“Well, we talked it over last night, and it was decided that I’d be taking care of Milim. The only conclusion we came to was that, uh, there really ain’t much else we can do right now. I can’t do anything besides warn him, but I figured it’d be nice to do that, at least. If they have any bright ideas, I’d love to hear them.”

“Yes, I am sure. The demon lord Milim is a class beyond all the others, as I understand…”

“Quite,” Gabil added. “The strongest in the world, as far as I am aware.”

Huh. Famous enough that even these two knew about her? Hakuro mentioned she was the oldest and strongest of demon lords as well, so Gabil couldn’t be lying.

But maybe this was a good thing, depending on how you looked at it. If every demon lord was such a monster, then no way was I ever going to keep my promise to Shizu and slay her nemesis. Milim being such an exceptional force meant that hey, maybe I had half a chance at offing your run-of-the-mill demon lord after all. The thought lightened my spirits a little.

The passiveness of our current approach notwithstanding, maybe we really would have better luck duking it out with the rest of them. On that point, at least, my staff agreed.

But there was no point in worrying all day. I had time to think about demon lord politics later. For now, I wanted to ask about healing potion.

“Do you have your report, then?”

Gabil nodded, then began explaining his current status with Vester.

The potion from yesterday was apparently the newest that Vester had produced. Something quite different from the things he tried making using dwarven technology, as he put it.

The potion I produced within myself was the result of a 99-percent extraction of hipokute herbs. Drink it, sprinkle it on someone—it worked great either way. Meanwhile, the dwarves could manage only 98-percent purity at best, and that single percentage point made a world of difference in performance.

The official name for the magic elixir I had created was a Full Potion, one that could fully heal any type of injury or wound—even repair missing body parts, like arms and legs. There were a lot of ways to lose those in this world, whether they were bitten off by a monster or blown off by a magical blast, and this potion could fully rebuild them. Magic was the only word for it.

According to the Great Sage, all this was possible because my potion could read genetic information from the body to regenerate limbs—as long as the subject wasn’t born that way, anything was healable.

What dwarven technology could make, meanwhile, was called a High Potion. It was a first-class concoction, capable of healing even major injuries, but sometimes it couldn’t fully restore certain wounds—and it definitely couldn’t regenerate lost body parts all the time. I conjectured this was because the potion wasn’t quite pure enough to fully read all the bodily data it needed for that. It could handle most injuries but couldn’t quite push itself up to perfection—that was the difference.

The hipokute we were growing in here was of the same quality as natural-grown plants. The best out there, in other words. So any difference in quality from the potions that resulted were purely the result of production issues.

“Y’know, I’d think a High Potion would be good enough, most of the time…,” Kaijin said as he scratched his head. He had a point. Already, down here in this cave, they had replicated the best that the dwarves could do in their homeland.

“Perhaps,” Vester replied, “but listen, Sir Kaijin: Once a scientist realizes there is something yet better to achieve, he refuses to make any compromise until he reaches it!”

Once he knew what my potion could do, he wanted to achieve that for himself. Which led up to what we saw yesterday.

“The potion used on me yesterday was in no way inferior to Sir Rimuru’s own potion. If I may be so presumptuous to say, I feel we have succeeded this time.” Even Gabil was confident in this batch of medicine.

“Let me assess it,” I said, running Analyze and Assess on the vial presented to me.

Understood. This medicine is equivalent to a Full Potion.

Oooh. Nice. Vester really made it.

“Good job, Vester, This is definitely Full Potion, all right.”

“Hohhh! I’ve done it!!”

“Superb work, Sir Vester. I am grateful to have aided you.”

“Yeah, not bad, Vester. I always thought you were best suited for research work like this.”

As Vester was almost overcome with emotion, Gabil and Kaijin gave him their blessing.

Man, I didn’t think he could really do it.

“I couldn’t have done it without the hints you gave me, Sir Rimuru,” Vester said, turning to me. Geez. I didn’t really do anything. It was all the result of his efforts, so I didn’t want to unfairly take the credit. I just gave him my thoughts, that’s all. It didn’t seem to me that Vester’s work process was much different from the extraction I did within my own body. The quantities involved differed a fair bit, but I thought it odd that he saw so much more of a performance hit than I did.

My reasoning was that it had something to do with the way the potion reacted to the atmosphere around it. The work space inside my stomach was a complete vacuum, free of impurities and the like, and I figured that let me perform the most complete extraction possible. The fact that even this produced only 99-percent purity, I chalked up to the resulting liquid being highly reactive to particles in the air.

I explained this to Vester, and he took it seriously. It was just a passing idea on my part, but Vester believed in me and carried out the relevant experiments—and that, I guess, is what led to this Full Potion before me.

Which was great and all. But you know, not everything about it was great.

“I bet this could be a huge source of income for Tempest if we sold it, Kaijin. What do you think?”

He thought it over a bit, then shook his head. “Ooh, that could be tough, boss. If anything, this stuff is too good. The purity level’s so high that it’s not something you can use on a whim, y’know? This kind of quality, maybe some hero-class adventurer would bring it along now and then…”

Vester hmmed his agreement. “Quite true, I fear. I’m happy this resulted in the best quality you’ll ever find, but in terms of selling it? I’m not quite sure the market is prepared for it.”

So what the hell were we making it for? I kept myself from interjecting. But thinking about it, maybe I was wrong this whole time. I thought we could make this potion kind of the town’s flagship product, but Vester and Gabil were picturing it more as a potion of last resort, so to speak.

“Still, Sir Rimuru, there are not so many educated doctors in the Dwarven Kingdom. There are alchemists capable of mixing compounds together, but it is rare for someone to make his entire living off selling High Potions. The medicine you see in the markets is actually Low Potion, made by diluting High Potion with water. They just call it potion in the shops, however. Thus…”

Vester had probably noticed my disappointment. Listening to him, it was actually rather simple. Naturally grown hipokute was a rare thing to find. You almost never saw it bought or sold in the marketplace. There were some benevolent botanists who cultivated it themselves, but even they could only harvest a very tiny amount of it. Along those lines, our mass-production project was a totally alien concept. That’s why even diluted potion was considered a rarity.

Instead, Vester suggested this: “Perhaps we could negotiate with King Gazel to have them accept delivery of Low Potion from us for sale over there? I’d imagine he’d want us to take in those few medicine makers who work in the Dwarven Kingdom in exchange, but…”

“Yeah, that might actually work, boss. If they leave the potion making and selling to us, they can just buy in whatever they need for their own purposes. That may account for a lot of the motive behind their technology-share request, actually.”

Kaijin had a point, but that was fine by me. He and Vester began talking between themselves, figuring out how to best convince Gazel of the idea. It was hard to believe they came to blows not long ago, given how well they got along now. They must see eye to eye on a lot of things, deep down. Good thing, I thought.

One Full Potion could apparently be diluted down to a hundred Low Potions. If this idea gained any steam, it could be a pretty lucrative source of income. But no great need to hurry. I didn’t want to hurt any of the Dwarven Kingdom’s vested interests. We’d have to work things out so we’d both benefit from the deal.

So I decided to let the topic simmer for the time being and took my leave from the meeting.

The friendliness of our chat made me stay longer than anticipated. It was just a little bit into the afternoon, but I was sure the goblinas at the workshop were working their dress-up-doll magic on Milim, so I figured I better pick her up. Meals in Tempest were handed out in the morning and evening, but if she was up for it, I intended to get her something in between.

The moment I stepped out of the magic circle, the fracas was under way.

There was shouting, screaming, and a great pillar of fire coming from a plot of land near the center of town that hadn’t been built on yet. It was a pretty sordid-looking scene. There was no damage, thankfully, and no workers nearby got caught up in whatever it was.

Soei, realizing I was there, sidled up to me.

“What happened?”

“Well…”

He gave me a quick rundown, although once I reached the site, I found it easy enough to figure out for myself. While I was off to the cave, the town had another visitor—one who was positively livid with Milim.

I was guided to the center of it, where I found Shuna, Shion, Benimaru, Hakuro, and Rigurd with a few other hobgoblins. Rigurd was sporting a heavy bruise on his face; someone must have hit him.

“What’s up, Rigurd? You all right?”

“Ah, Sir Rimuru! This much is nothing to me!”

That was just an act; the damage was obviously fairly serious. I handed him some potion and turned toward where everyone else was watching.

“Did he get you?”

“Yes, my lord…?”

I didn’t need to check, but I did anyway. There was a dark-haired magic-born on the ground, apparently struck by Milim as well. His face was twisted in pain, his tongue sticking out of his bloodstained mouth. He seemed alive, but motionless, his eyes rolling into his skull. Around him were his entourage of underlings, frozen stiff and too thrown by this state of affairs to know what to do.

The fallen magic-born was wearing a fancy-looking outfit, dyed in black, and some rather expensive-looking armor.

According to Soei’s report, he identified himself as working for the demon lord Carillon, and Soei had hurried to the scene after the intruder set off his alert network, only to find this magic-born and his group coming down to the vacant lot from the heavens.

Rigurd handled them first since I was away, and things came to a boil pretty quickly afterward. Before Soei could even grasp the situation and report to me about it, everything was already done with. “I apologize for failing to inform you earlier,” he said to me, but I couldn’t find much fault with him.

First, the magic-born had begun by taking a self-guided tour of the city, going around like a would-be conqueror. This was when Rigurd had shown up, and the magic-born had this to say to him: “I am Phobio! The Black Leopard Fang! One of Lord Carillon’s Three Lycanthropeers, and the strongest of all in the Beast Master’s Warrior Alliance! What a fine town this is—truly one worthy of falling under the rule of the Beast Master himself, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Surely you jest—” was all Rigurd had managed before getting punched out without further comment. The visitor did not use his full strength, keeping the injury merely serious instead of critical. Soei judged him to be a formidably strong magic-born, and as he put it, a full-power strike could have killed Rigurd on the spot. Kind of hard to imagine, given how frozen and helpless he was now, but still.

But why was he on the ground? Simple.

Spotting the presence of the Black Leopard Fang Phobio or whatever, Milim flew in, saw that Rigurd was down, and got angry. Phobio hurriedly responded with a skill he called Panther Fang Explosive Chop, although nobody knew what it was supposed to be—it seems Milim’s force of will deflected it and sent it hurtling into the sky.

That was the pillar of flame I saw, and the fallout from that singed the cute dress she had just put on. No longer able to contain her rage, Milim plunged her fist into Phobio’s stomach, which brings us to the current scene before me.

So now what…?

“Ah, Rimuru! This freak was acting like he was the big boss around here, so I put him back in his place!”

Now Milim noticed me, and she was evidently proud of herself. Fishing for compliments. Should I take the bait? He started it, yes, but I didn’t want to spark a conflict with another demon lord quite yet. I had never heard the name Carillon before, and I had no idea what kind of force he had, even. But we just decked one of his men, and we couldn’t say we weren’t involved anymore.

I swear. Take your eyes off her for a moment—and all these headaches she gives me.

“…Didn’t you promise me you wouldn’t cause a ruckus without my permission?”

“Geh?! Um, I, erm… This, this is different! He’s not from this town, so it’s all right! Really!”

“No, it’s not! Still, you did help keep Rigurd safe. We’ll just say no lunch for you today and call it even—”

“You’re mean! That’s so mean! Waaahhhh!”

Well, that’s what you get for bothering me when I was just thinking about lunch. I didn’t need to eat anyway, and Milim must have been the same. What a glutton of a demon lord.

“Dammit, this is all his fault! And that Carillon, breaking his promise like that… What a scoundrel! One shot’s not enough—let me hit him again…”

“Wait, wait, wait!”

I had to spring over to keep her from punching Phobio again. His men turned white as a sheet of paper, terrified at her brutality.

“Look, how about we go somewhere else?” I pleaded to the bawling Milim.

This was really turning into a travesty, so I decided to try talking this out away from the carnage.

We were back in the old meeting hall. They had just finished taking Milim’s measurements and were preparing something new for her when all this happened, so her outfit was quickly replaced.

I didn’t want to spoil her, but we wound up serving her lunch anyway. This was partly because she had revealed a couple curious things during her wailing, and I wanted to follow up on that. She happily nibbled on her sandwich, once again in a good mood, so everything was fine with me.

The hall was draped in tension, though. Milim was about the only one unaffected by it. She definitely earned the “demon” part of her name, catching trouble the moment I wasn’t around. Perhaps this would’ve happened even if Milim weren’t here, but it wouldn’t have gotten so complicated this quickly.

…Well, no point dwelling on the past. The future was more important.

“So what are you all here for?” I said as I sized up the now-awake Phobio.

“Hmph! And I have to reply to you lowly would-be magic-born?”

Benimaru and Shion immediately glared at him. I motioned them to stay cool, and they reluctantly stayed there, watching things unfold.

It was just Rigurd, Benimaru, Shion, and me, along with Milim. Phobio had three of his own troops with him; we hadn’t restrained him or anything, which could be why he was giving us so much attitude. I figured I’d try to outclass him, tossing in a bluff or two for good measure.

“Call me lowly if you want, but I’m definitely stronger than you. Also, I’d advise you to just give me some answers. I don’t know this Carillon guy, but depending on how you act around me, maybe he’s gonna have to answer to us before long, okay? Think you’re ready to make enemies with the entire Forest of Jura?”

“Ha! Well, look at you! The most self-important slime in the world, eh? And this entire town carries out the orders of such a base creature? What a bunch of wimps you must have here. And just because Lady Milim likes you a little, don’t let that get to your head, boy.”

Magic-born, just like monsters, tended to flock to whoever was strongest around them. Reacting to all these barbs would do nothing but tire me out. Certainly, this guy was tough—one of the Three Lycanthropeers, the so-called Black Leopard Fang, whatever. And even without all that bluster, I could tell he boasted a fair amount of magical energy. Maybe no match at all for Milim, but likely stronger than Benimaru or Shion. Even I would’ve had trouble a bit ago, although not with the Orc Disaster stored in my Stomach now.

This was a powerful magic-born, one worthy of being categorized as a sub–demon lord. I was fairly sure I was stronger, but I was in no hurry to test that out. It’d just make things harder, and winning would accomplish nothing. It may even earn me the ire of this Carillon guy; we could seriously be at war soon. I wanted to avoid that, so I had to exercise my social skills to extract some info from him.

“A base creature?” Milim, done with her sandwich, raised her voice again. “You think you can pick on my friend like that?”

She was more than an ammo dump; she was explosive all by herself. Before I could even begin the conversation, I had a premonition she had ruined everything. But I was getting the hang of dealing with her. Lure her in with food, and she was easy to soothe.

“Hang on, Milim. If you do anything else, I’m seriously taking dinner away from you, okay?”

“O-okay. I’ll be good, I promise.”

Great. With that squared away, it was time to start the investigation.

“Well. First off, you’re right; I am a slime. But I’m a slime that rules over thirty percent of this forest, and if you’re rarin’ for war, then I’m willing to accept that. So I’d advise being careful in how you respond to me.”

I mixed a little Coercion in with my subsequent questions. The answers came surprisingly more readily than I thought. Milim’s threats must have hit home, after all—probably not my Coercion, sadly, but at least I got what I wanted out of him.

The pouting, sullen answers could be summed up as follows: The demon lord Carillon had ordered him to try to scout either the orc lord or the mystery magic-born that fought him, whichever had survived. The magic-born referred to us, apparently, which suggested that the demon lord backup Gelmud had hinted at wasn’t Milim after all.

I didn’t think multiple demon lords were involved with this, but thinking about it, I doubted Milim would bother with such a convoluted plan anyway. It was more natural to assume someone else was behind it.

Getting back to the subject, whoever won the fight between the orc lord and his foe was likely going to be an incredibly strong foe, so Carillon sent the Black Leopard Fang Phobio, a sub–demon lord in his own right, to check it out. Carillon had a good eye for that kind of thing, apparently, but Phobio was just too much of a moron for the job. If the demon lord wanted me on his side, he should’ve sent a more intelligent magic-born, one who could bargain with me and put an enticing offer on the table.

“Carillonnnnn… Breaking our promise not to get in each other’s way…” Milim was stewing next to me. Phobio, meanwhile, averted his eyes, as if afraid of her.

The proud sub–demon lord was just a pale imitation next to a real one. Feeling her seething next to me, I reasoned that just about anyone who came here would’ve wound up the same way. I’d definitely need to ask her about that promise later, too; that sounded important.

Now that we had gotten everything out of Phobio, I asked him to take his leave.

Milim’s presence meant that Phobio had no power here, so he glared at the two of us, barked out “You will regret this!” and took his crew out of the city. I told him to relay a message to Carillon, telling him to contact me at a later date if he wanted to negotiate with us, but I doubted he’d ever receive it. When I left that job to Phobio, I knew he’d only provide whatever info made him look good. It’d be better for him to tell the truth, given how his mission was a failure and all, but that was Phobio’s business.

I’d better get as much info as I can from Milim about this Carillon’s personality and other traits, so I can be ready to deal with whatever he’s got. But how to bring up the topic…?

“All right, Milim. I’d like some more details.”

“I can’t let you do that! We made a promise that we wouldn’t meddle with each other, so I can’t even tell you, Rimuru.”

Ah, thanks for revealing you’ve got a secret, then. Now we had a grown-up and a child trying to outwit each other—and honestly, I liked my chances.

“Oh no? Was this a promise that you’d keep things a secret from each other?”

“—No, nothing like that. Just not to meddle—”

“No? Well, it’s fine, then, isn’t it? I mean, Carillon’s obviously told his minions all about you, huh, Milim? Besides, we’re BFFs, and we gotta help each other out, y’know? And I just figured, I better know what I can about demon lords besides you, Milim. Plus, if I don’t know what kind of promise you made, how can I make sure I don’t accidentally start meddling, huh?” I put a special emphasis on BFFs.

“Yeah…but…BFFs…”

Just one more push. I decided to offer a toy to cheer her up.

“Oh, right— How about I make you a weapon sometime? I can’t help but worry about my BFF, so…”

“Wah-ha-ha-ha-ha! You’re right! Being BFFs is the most important thing, huh?”

And down goes Milim. Just way too easy.

I kept my lips from spreading into a maniacal grin as I nodded with the breezy confidence of a grown-up.

So I successfully extracted what I wanted from Milim—information on three other demon lords besides her, and what they all wanted; what happened just now; and what was happening behind the scenes. Quite a bit about the mysteries I was concerned about.

But—wow. Demon lords, trying to create a puppet demon lord of their own… Milim was in on it just to alleviate her boredom, but this was a pretty serious operation, wasn’t it? And if I’m getting in the way of it, then no wonder they’re after us.

“This…will soon involve other demon lords, will it not, Sir Rimuru?”

“A sordid state of affairs. We had best bring this up with Treyni at once.”

“Not a problem! With Sir Rimuru at our side, we have nothing to fear from any of the demon lords!”

All of us (save one) were holding our heads at this disaster.

The gale that blew in with Milim’s attack was growing in strength, and it was creeping ever closer to Tempest.