

CHAPTER 5

THE SUMMONED CHILDREN

He gave his visitor a warm smile, deftly showing him to a seat.

“Ay, what a pain! Our strategy ended in a complete failure. It might be a little while longer before Clayman awakens to become the first true demon lord, sadly.”

Laplace, the visitor in question, sat down and gave him the news. Failure, after years of effort. He didn’t sound too broken up about it.

“Hmm. And here I thought an orc lord on the rampage would guarantee us at least ten thousand or so deaths.”

The master of the room seemed to take the news pretty lightly.

“But I suppose obtaining the power needed won’t come that easily to us. There are other conditions to worry about.”

“Yeah. He’s strong enough, though, without having to dabble in any crazy stuff. Although I think he has it in for Leon, a bit…”

“He still has much to learn, that Clayman. So—was that all you came here to say?”

Laplace defiantly grinned at the room’s owner. “Oh, of course not! That was just a side note. I bet you heard all about it from Clayman already, hmm? All I did was help out a bit, so I don’t know the whole story myself. But enough about that—I’ve been going undercover to keep tabs on the paladins’ movements lately. They’re really out to start something, y’know that? Now that they’re pretty sure Veldora’s gone for good.”

“Hmm? You think so? Do you know what they’re after?”

“It’d be a hell of a lot easier for us if I did, huh? I tell you, the Western Holy Church is one mean group to get involved with.”

Laplace shrugged. The mask hid his expression, but despite his pessimism, his attitude was just as bold and invincible as ever.

“You sure are right. Passing themselves off as righteous guardians of the weak or whatnot. I highly doubt they’re acting out of sheer goodwill. They’re an enigma to me.”

“Yeah, aren’t they? But if they’re starting to get more active, y’know, that’s our chance to catch ’em by the tail, too, yeah? They’ve been around since time immemorial, so I can’t wriggle my way into the upper management. But in their current operations, I might have a way in, y’know?”

He smiled once again.

“So I’m thinkin’ it’s time for me to get a bit more serious about infiltrating the operation. That’ll probably put me out of contact for a while, but you okay with that?”

“No, fine by me. Oh, but if you do find out what’s behind the Holy Church, I’ll be glad to grant you a wish.”

Laplace greeted this news with a hearty laugh. “Really?! Well, that’s a nice little motivation!”

“I’ll bet. But don’t overdo it. I don’t want you messing this up.”

“No need to remind me! In that case…” Laplace stood up, preparing to leave.

“Oh, one more thing,” a relaxed voice said behind him. “The main cause behind your most recent failures is traveling in the Western Nations right now. Things are about to become rather interesting, I’d say.”

“Wh-whaaaaa—? What the heck for? That dopey-looking slime’s supposed to be the grand pooh-bah of the Forest of Jura! What’s it doing bumping around human lands?!”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha! It surprises you that much? You really are a unique little monster, aren’t you…er, what was his name again?”

“Umm… It was Rimuru, I believe.”

“Ah, right. Well, no doubt about it, then. He entered the Kingdom of Blumund several days ago.”

This stunned Laplace into silence.

“…Well, fine. Ain’t got a thing to do with me. I mean, I haven’t seen a monster who posed less of a threat to me in my life.”

With that, Laplace left the room.

The master of the room gave a contented smile.

“Given his strange behavior…he’s no normal monster, that much is for sure. Which means…maybe he’s got memories of his past life? Perhaps I can take advantage of that. It’d be worth testing out a little, at least…”

The Forest of Jura was surrounded by a number of nations. There was the Kingdom of Blumund, which I just left. There was Farmus, the much larger kingdom adjacent to it. Then there was Englesia and a number of other smaller countries.

All these nations came together to form what was known as the Council, which consisted of representatives elected by each country. Most important decisions affecting the region were managed by this Council. Each nation had its own methods for electing representatives, but for the most part, the seats were taken by lower-level nobility without much in the way of inheritance rights.

The Council of the West (as it was formally called) was originally founded as a sort of monster-fighting co-op, before growing into a force devised to keep the Eastern Empire in check. Not every nation in the area was part of it—the powerful Sorcerous Dynasty of Thalion was one of the exceptions, for example—but this was rare. In a world this brutal to its inhabitants, you had to pool your resources for a chance at survival, I suppose.

The Kingdom of Englesia lay at the core of this Council—and for good reason. Geographically, Englesia was the easiest central point for Council members to assemble at. It naturally followed that the Free Guild would set up its headquarters here as well. You could say that the most powerful Council member nation was the Kingdom of Farmus, but in order to prevent any one nation from having too much clout over the assembly, the nations agreed to set up in Englesia for logistical reasons.

Partly because of this, relations between Farmus and Englesia were apparently frosty at best. And there was another reason: Englesia was the only Council member nation that didn’t share a border with the Forest of Jura, giving it an extra measure of stability and protection from monsters. That was another factor that led to its selection as Council HQ.

But what does the Council do, exactly? To put it broadly, it acted as a mediator between nations, weighing each member’s interests against the others’ and managing them to prevent conflict. It held power in both economic and political circles, making it a strikingly influential group in this region—sort of like the United Nations of my old world, with a lot more force to take action.

Much like the United Nations, the Council had no standing military force. It didn’t need one. That’s because, in a way, the Council formed the higher bureaucracy of the Free Guild itself. The money paid to adventurers for slaying monsters came from Council funding—and in exchange, the Council had the right to give orders to the guild.

This funding came from contributions provided by each member nation, which varied depending on how much speaking rights each one had. Refusing to pay these meant leaving the Council. It was a way for the Council to gain a louder voice in local affairs, using the shield of security it offered members. Many nations relied almost wholly upon the guild for monster management, and that meant there was no choice for them but to support the Council.

Speaking of security, I heard another interesting story: The main thing that kept the Western Nations strongly connected to one another was religion.

In this world, where monsters were a real, tangible threat, religion provided more than just spiritual support—it was a sort of last bastion for survival. Thus, you had the Western Holy Church, the font of all regional religious activity, with Luminus as its sole and absolute deity. To put it another way, the Western Nations were the Church’s main sphere of influence, and the Holy Empire of Lubelius the “holy land” of the Church.

Confusingly, this didn’t necessarily mean the Western Holy Church ran Lubelius. It was an independent religious organization. However, the leader of Lubelius was called the Holy Emperor, defined to be the pope-like mortal spokesperson of divinity whose orders had to be followed without fail.

So was Lubelius a kind of puppet state for the Church? Yes and no. It was too complex for me to really get from what Fuze told me, and I’m not sure he really knew, either. “It’s just, you know, that sort of thing,” as he put it, and I guess he’s right.

The Western Holy Church wasn’t the only religion in this world. There were other indigenous ones that worshipped a variety of different gods and goddesses. But in terms of followers, Luminus had the overwhelming majority. And that’s simply because this particular deity had the paladins, the most powerful knightly warriors on this planet.

These formed the so-called Crusader groups, armies of knights whose strength went beyond A rank, and their numbers totaled over three hundred. They were considered the saviors of mankind, monster-slaying experts tasked with eradicating them all from the landscape. I was told they were formed by “virtuous” inspiration to protect the Western Nations, although I don’t know how true that is. Some people even gave them enough respect to call them defenders of righteousness.

The thing was, though, this Luminus apparently didn’t accept any other gods. The One God Luminus, as the full name went. As a result, practitioners of other religions were not qualified to receive his salvation. There were several Council nations that didn’t designate Luminism as their national religion, and paladins were never deployed over there. I guess I can’t blame them—if you think someone’s unworthy of salvation, then of course you aren’t gonna risk your life for them—but that didn’t sound too “righteous” to me. Just my take, though.

The Sorcerous Dynasty of Thalion, by the way, had no state religion. Its imperial family claimed to be the descendants of gods, so no other religion was officially designated. On the other hand, its people enjoyed full freedom of religion, making it a pretty unique nation in its approach. They also steadfastly refused to join the Council, making it a fully independent force in the region. Their borders weren’t entirely shut, but they had no interest in playing nice with others. It was really interesting; I wanted to check it out sometime, especially since it sounded a little bit like the Japan of my old life.

That rounded out the new knowledge I had gained from my time in Blumund. The Western Nations were propped up by the economy on one side, religion on the other, helping it form strong bonds from country to country. A pretty neat setup, I thought. In a world with so many things trying to kill you, I didn’t think you saw too many wars between human nations, though.

Oh, and I learned something rather surprising about Hinata Sakaguchi. It turned out she was the chief of the paladins, the main officer running the Crusaders.

I think Veldora mentioned that otherworlders often tended to gain special abilities when they came to this world. Maybe that power let her lead the greatest knight force known in the land? She was already a pretty tough cookie when she left Shizu—I couldn’t guess how strong she was now.

Thinking about it, I was a monster presently. If I just casually strode up to her, she might decide to target me. Better not try anything too untoward. I’ll just keep my distance, I think, until I gain a better grasp of who exactly this Hinata person is.

And to that end, I needed to gather some more information.

The journey to Englesia went smoothly. It was time to bust out the wolf wagon again. There was a road set up, although it wasn’t paved. Of course it wasn’t. It’d take a huge amount of time and money to pave every road around here…via normal means, that is.

I had Ranga pulling the wagon in slightly shrunken form. He didn’t look much different from a regular old black wolf, so I figured it wouldn’t be a problem. Having him sprint at full speed would break the wagon apart, so he was going at a light jog at the moment. Doing around twenty-five, maybe? We couldn’t risk going much faster on these unfinished roads. As Kabal and his gang put it, though, it couldn’t have been a more comfortable ride.

We encountered several mounted soldiers on patrol along the path. They all claimed that I wouldn’t expect to see much in the way of strong monsters around here. There were robbers and brigands to content with, but we never got involved with any. Which, I mean, twenty-five didn’t seem that fast to us, but it’s not like they could have caught up to us on foot. A horse could, but not for the long distances Ranga could pull off on a lark.

So things went well for the mere three days it took to reach the capital of Englesia.

The gate had an even stricter entry process than the Dwarven Kingdom’s. There were three levels of inspections, the first of which required identification. Anyone who couldn’t produce papers on the spot was forced to the back of a ponderously long line for level two; mess that up and you were on to level three, where you were all but treated as a criminal. By that point, once they were done with you, you’d seriously begin to wonder why you tried to enter in the first place. But a lot of people were willing to risk it. That’s how attractive this nation was.

Thanks to my guild papers, I didn’t have to care about any of that. Good thing, too. If I didn’t have them, I’d be waiting in line longer than I did for the dwarves.

My only complaint:

“Whoa, whoa, you’re an adventurer, li’l lady? This isn’t some kind of joke you’re playing on us, is it?”

The guards treated me like some spoiled girl.

“I’m not a lady, thanks. Just check the papers.”

“Heh. Guess you’re about the age when you wanna act all grown-up, huh? You got that cute voice, but between that mask and the way you talk…”

The griping continued as they ran the papers through some kind of magical device. Then their attitude changed.

“Oh, my apologies! Sir Rimuru, adventurer rank B? Welcome to the Kingdom of Englesia!!”

Well, that was easy. It sure didn’t seem so from the way Kabal’s party bumbled around, but being ranked B earned you a lot of social status, I guess.

“Don’t let it bother you, Boss,” commented Kabal once he was through. “The guards didn’t mean anything personal by it.”

I wasn’t angry in particular, but getting the “li’l lady” treatment struck me as needlessly cruel. But… My voice, huh? No wonder everybody mistook me for a girl. I didn’t expect that, given the mask covering my face and all, but my voice made me out to be a child, huh? It didn’t bother me at all before—although, come to think of it, I got similar treatment in Blumund, didn’t I? Maybe I should try altering the pitch on it to sound more mature? A bit too late for that, I thought.

Let’s just stick with the current one. My body was maybe four foot three anyway, so I’d try passing myself off as kind of a stunted young man. I was innocent at heart, after all, so it’s fine. A Masked Boy of Mystery would work just fine in this world. It’s already filled with demon lords and Heroes; why not toss in another fantasy trope while I’m at it?

The first thing that surprised me about the city was how advanced it was. It was fairly large in size, yes, but it was also surrounded by outer walls that seemed to extend to the horizon, with entry provided by only two gates. I couldn’t imagine how much time and cash it took to build a wall covering this much terrain.

Going inside, however, the view was even more stunning. There weren’t skyscrapers lining the streets, exactly, but the buildings were much higher than anything Blumund had to offer. I spotted five-story stone buildings all over the place, along with a variety of brick and wood structures. But more impressive than anything was the chalky-white castle that loomed in the center, easily visible from each of the city’s well-planned neighborhoods. Basking in its majesty made it clear that the capital had a legion of talented architects. That’s how beautiful it was.

Another thing that caught my eye was the castle’s location. There was a large lake in the middle of the city, and the edifice was built right in the center, making it appear to rise straight up from the waters. It certainly wowed visitors. Four roads spread out from it in each direction, connecting it to the rest of town. During emergencies, these roads could have their bridges removed to prevent outside forces from invading. It was an impressive sight, an ostentatious display of Englesia’s power. I had to hand it to them; it was awesome.

Security around the capital was handled by knights stationed at important points. You’d have to be pretty desperate to attempt a crime around here. I’d expect nothing less from the home of the Council, really. Any issues involving representatives would spark an international incident, so they couldn’t be lazy about that.

I had Ranga dive into my shadow before we approached the capital, sticking the wagon back into my Stomach. Something told me the guards wouldn’t like wolves running around the streets—I wasn’t that crazy, so I didn’t want to push it.

Thus, nobody bothered us as we walked around, taking in all the sights. It was our first leisurely stroll in a while—and as I discovered, the most amazing thing wasn’t the city views, but its culture. We discovered a large sports arena, next to what looked like an outdoor amphitheater. There was artwork prominently displayed throughout town—posters, apparently, for stage plays. Paper was relatively cheap around here, and I even saw people handing out flyers advertising this or that product or event.

The big city. I could taste it in the air, for the first time in ages. But the thing that really made me think “Are you kidding me?” were the glass-lined buildings I saw. Merchandise was lined up inside, a bit like a department store’s display windows. In fact, they were display windows—the only difference being the weapons and armor on the shelves inside.

In a fancier city block near the castle, I found a shop featuring dresses and other clothing. It sure wasn’t a place for the masses. Simply living inside the city walls probably meant you were at least somewhat well-off, but owning a house close to the castle was apparently a right reserved exclusively for the nobility. The disparity was like night and day. The more you paid in taxes, I suppose, the better treatment you got. Plus, being nobility usually meant a job inside the castle, so it was probably a given that you could enjoy first-class housing within walking distance.

Once we made our initial rounds, we looked for an inn to spend the night. Broadly speaking, the city was divided into four sections—commercial, tourist, industrial, and residential quarters. The castle was at the nexus of all four, with the rest of the city radiating out from it, and the closer you were to the center, the more upscale it got. Pretty easy to figure out.

Following Kabal’s lead, we quickly made our way to the tourist quarter, finding a wealth of inns (and alleyways full of taverns in the rear) to serve us. I could feel my heart soar, but sadly, we weren’t there to drink that day. I frowned a bit at that as we worked out room arrangements.

We set out the next morning for the Free Guild headquarters.

The closer you got to the city walls in the tourist quarter, the more tiny shops and public performances you ran into. There was a wide selection of food stalls on offer, too. Toward the center, however, you saw more diplomatic residences, conference centers, schools, and other municipal buildings. It was the most well policed of the four quarters, and toward dead center, we found the Free Guild HQ.

“Right this way, Boss.”

“Boy, there sure are a lot of people, huh? It’s like a real city.”

“Hey, watch out for pickpockets, all right? This place is crawlin’ with guards, but that’s how a lot of people get lulled into a false sense of security.”

Gido had a point, but all my important stuff was in my Stomach, so I was fine. If anyone needed to worry, it was Elen.

Kabal guided us closer to the center. The ivory castle’s overbearing presence made it impossible to get lost.

The HQ building was a large, grand, modern-looking structure, a far cry from the medieval norm. The US had steel skyscrapers with a dozen or so floors in the nineteenth century, back when Japan was still mostly single-story wood structures. That was how powerful a nation it was by comparison, and the Kingdom of Englesia started looking similar to me.

Adjacent to the guild was a tall building that had just as grandiose a presence, adorned with a statue of a goddess and a large holy cross on the roof.

“Is that the Church?”

“Sure is,” replied Gido. “The Englesia branch of the Western Holy Church—well, the headquarters of the whole thing, really.”

Ah, the Church—the one thing I had to be the most careful with around here.

“The headquarters?”

“Well, it’s a bit of a story, actually…”

As Gido put it, the official Church headquarters were located over in the Holy Empire of Lubelius. However, it was chiefly used for religious ceremonies and the like, with most of the actual work taking place here in the Englesian capital. “They don’t allow regular folks in here,” he said, “and I’m sure that’s the way the Church wants it in this city.”

I didn’t have any business with the Church—I’m an atheist, if anything—so I sincerely hoped I wouldn’t get involved with them during my life. They see monsters as the enemy, after all. And no matter how I wanted to approach Hinata, I couldn’t risk any moves that would attract their attention.

Kind of funny to see them right next door to the Free Guild, though. The mask was hiding my aura; I didn’t think I’d get spotted. No point worrying about it. If I did, I’d figure something out.

The guild HQ entrance was protected by a pair of glass doors that must’ve cost a fortune to install. Now that’s something I never expected to see in this world. The otherworlders around here must have been quite an influence—I bet they went out of their way to get these made, too. Where there’s a will, there’s a way, I guess. I still had a while to go. Instead of worrying about “can,” I should just “do.”

Something to learn from, I thought as I stood before the doors. As I did, I felt something searching about my body. At the same time, the doors opened. Holy crap, really? There’s some kind of sensor that automatically opens the doors? Talk about high tech being used for the most trivial things! Seeing this piece of Earth tech replicated here was a shock, especially compared to the wooden Church building next door with its plain old push handles. It felt like the architect just wanted something as different from the neighbors as possible.

“It sure has changed in two years,” Elen remarked. Well, I wasn’t gonna lose out. If this is what I’m batting against, I better start planning out a high-rise or two when I get home.

Stepping inside, we felt several pairs of eyes upon us. They all appeared fairly high-level at a glance. It was only natural that the HQ would be full of the best people they’ve got.

“Welcome! How can I help you today?” said a woman stationed by the door. Her greeting, perfectly timed between breaths, made it feel like the lobby of a five-star hotel. Not to be rude, but it was a far cry from the Blumund capital branch.

“Yeah, we’re here to see the grand master. Here’s our letter of introduction.”

I handed it to her.

“Certainly. Please give me one moment while we confirm.”

She stepped away as another man approached us.

Uh-oh…

“Hey, hey, what’s a kid like you doin’ in here?”

I knew it! Someone wanting to start trouble. First impressions were everything here. If I let them screw with me, I was done. But just as I was set to fire back—

“Whoa! Hey, Grassé! You reach rank B, too?”

Kabal spoke up, tossing him a few kind words. It made Grassé freeze in place.

“Ahh! Well, look at you, Kabal! Sure haven’t seen you lately!”

What a letdown. I was all ready to make him see how powerful I was, too. Of course, I had a tendency to screw that up anyway, so maybe it’s for the better.

A few other guild members were starting to notice my friends. Soon, they were all trading nostalgic banter with one another, which segued into retelling stories of past glories on the field, blah, blah, blah. I sat down on a sofa and waited. An attendant brought me some tea. It was all just too perfect.

Enjoying the aroma, I decided to ask about something bothering me.

“Hey, Kabal, how’d you know Grassé was a B-ranked adventurer?”

“Whoa, whoa,” Grassé shot back, “watch your manners! That’s Sir Kabal to you, li’l lady! You must be a beginner if you don’t know how things work around here, huh? How ’bout you show some respect to your elders?”

“Hey, I wouldn’t mouth off at Sir Rimuru like that—”

“You should really show some more discipline to that kid, Kabal. You know we don’t allow any guild members under rank B in here, and look at the attitude she’s giving off! If you keep spoiling her like that, what’s she gonna do when she has to fend for herself?”

“Knock it off! This guy’s here on his own merits! …I’m sorry, I’ll fill him in later, so…”

Kabal gave me a regretful bow. I didn’t mind as long as people stopped picking on me, but this “li’l lady” stuff was starting to get old. Ah well. This particular form of mine, magic-free and carried out strictly by my own body, was the most comfortable thing for me anyway.

“I’m not a kid, all right? Or a lady. Try to remember that.”

Still, Grassé did answer a few questions for me. Our IDs were all checked at the door to confirm our qualifications. Not good enough? Then you didn’t get in. I suppose that was why the HQ didn’t seem all that heavily guarded. As Elen explained, members below B rank used a branch office near the main entrance, which offered cheaper lodging and was more convenient for day-to-day activity. Good thing I went through all that effort to earn a B, then.

As all this unfolded in my mind, the woman from before returned. “Thanks for waiting,” she said with a smile. “I was told that only you were allowed in, Sir Rimuru, so if you would follow me, please…”

This sent a jolt of tension across the lobby.

“The grand master’s gonna see ’im…?!”

“So that letter was real…?”

“Real or not, how often does the grand master give an audience to some guy off the street?”

“That’s why I’m telling you guys, Sir Rimuru’s not some guy off the street!”

Kabal proudly boasted about me to the suddenly interested audience. I wish he’d stop that; it’s embarrassing.

“I’ll be back in a bit,” I said as we walked off.

The woman directed me down a deeper hallway before knocking on a certain door. There was no response, but she opened it and went in anyway, inviting me to follow.

Going inside, I immediately noticed a magic circle drawn on the floor, much like the one Vester had drawn. Probably from the same family. Invited to step inside, I stood alongside the woman, feeling her activate the magic behind it for just a single moment. We must not have been teleported very far.

This new room, a sort of informal reception chamber, felt airtight to me—that circle might have taken us somewhere underground. These were probably all anti-spy measures, I figured, and the thoroughness of it all left me with a lot to learn from.

The woman, well used to this procedure, gave me a bow before teleporting herself back. Left alone, I sat on a chair and waited. After a couple minutes, a door opened, revealing a single young man. He was fairly handsome, with black hair and black eyes, but there was still more than a trace of youth to his countenance—young enough that I’d believe him if he said he was in high school.

“Welcome,” he began, smiling. “I am grand master Yuuki Kagurazaka. It’s nice to meet you, Rimuru. I’ve heard quite a lot about you! Feel free to call me Yuuki.”

“It’s good to meet you, too. My name’s Rimuru Tempest, and I am the leader of the newly established nation of Tempest in the Forest of Jura. Just Rimuru is fine with me, too.”

Thus, I had my first encounter with Yuuki Kagurazaka.

After introducing ourselves, we settled down to a little Q&A session. It began with a bit of idle chitchat as we probed each other’s motivations and such, but it wasn’t long before I was totally at ease with Yuuki.

He was just a kind, good-natured guy, supposedly in his late twenties but not even looking out of his late teens. I asked him why; he said it was a type of curse. He didn’t obtain any special or unique skills on the way to this world, apparently, but the journey did grant him massively upgraded physical abilities.

“It was really just, like…” He scratched his head. “Like, what should I do? And really, it took me about five years until I realized that something weird was going on with me.”

His eternally boyish looks, among other things, meant he had never been in a relationship. I couldn’t help but laugh and cheer him up. I was starting to like the guy.

“Wow, really? Ooh, that’s too bad, ha-ha-ha! But, hey, you’ll get luck on your side eventually!”

“That’s really not helping…”

Yuuki sounded a little huffy about it, but I’m sure I was just imagining it.

Either way, we quickly broke the ice.

“Still, I have to hand it to you… A monster building an entire city?”

“Oh? It’s not that rare of a thing, is it?”

“Well, I mean, I sure haven’t heard of it…and I kinda doubt I will again, after you.”

“You think?”

“Yeah…”

We stared at each other for a bit. What’s the big deal with monsters building cities? Yuuki’s getting too bogged down in the little things. I let it slide as the topic turned to our current situations, and once that conversation ran its course, Yuuki brought up his main concern.

“So, Rimuru… You’re a monster, right? That’s how Fuze described you to me, but I’m pretty surprised that you went right through the barrier we have over the headquarters building. How did you transform yourself like that?”

“Mm? Oh. Yeah, I’m a monster. A slime, to be exact. Keep this between us, but I’ve got a skill called Universal Shapeshift that does this for me. I can imitate any monster I’ve consumed. That, and this mask contributes a lot, too.”

I removed the mask. I knew I’d be dealing with the grand master for a while to come. If we ever got hostile, I’d have a hell of a time getting accepted by people in this nation. This was a do-or-die moment. I couldn’t let him think my city was some house of horrors. Let’s just go out with the whole truth, right now.

“Imitate monsters you’ve… Wait. Is that Miss Shizu?!”

A murderous look crossed Yuuki’s face. A beat—and then he disappeared from the opposite side of the table. We exchanged a pair of kicks. The resulting shock wave split the table in two. It was a tremendous blow—heavy, furious, like nothing a human could launch. I might not ever feel pain, but for just a moment, my leg felt too numb to move.

“Calm down, kid—” I said, cool as a cucumber.

Looking back, Shizu managed to spot me purely on the atmosphere I exuded around her. A pretty amazing feat, now that I think about it. It took a lot of imagination to picture an otherworlder who wound up turning into a slime.

The rage was gone from Yuuki’s eyes, but he was still on his feet, ready to continue. “Could you explain this to me in detail?” he asked, his gaze fixed upon me.

We sat across from each other once more, leaving the broken table where it was.

“Well, all right. Look, to be honest with you, I’m an alien from a faraway planet—”



“What are you talking about? I want you to be serious with me! Honestly, I’m impressed you think this is a great time to goof off!”

Yikes. Yuuki looked pretty pissed. I figured a little joke would help ease the tension, but maybe not…

“All right, all right. I’ll be serious now, so just chill out a little…”

“You come all the way here, and that’s the joke you go for? That’s the first time I’ve heard that one. Are you by any chance…?”

Yuuki guessed it before I could even say it. I decided to start from the beginning.

“So…I was attacked by this guy on the street…”

I spent the next while going into minute detail about what happened.

“Ah… So you are Japanese, huh, Rimuru…?”

Heh-heh. Just as planned. I make a joke that only someone with my background would understand, and he was instantly on my side. It made him angry at first, but, hey, it worked! The quickest way to make him realize who I really was! (Whether he believed that was my intention is another issue, but, um, it worked!)

Once we got through with that, we talked about all kinds of things. What we’d been up to in this world. Our trials and tribulations. Shizu’s final moments.

“That’s how she decided to go…? I have to admit, she often told me about how much she didn’t like this world…”

Yuuki closed his eyes.

No point dwelling on dreary topics. I brought up other things from our old world. He demonstrated a particularly keen interest in how his favorite manga and anime wound up ending.

“Aw, come on! You gotta tell me what happened after that!”

“Hee-hee-hee! You wanna know? Well, guess what—? Pretty much all the manga and anime you mentioned ended by the time I left! And you know I kept up with all of it. A true gentleman always makes sure to cover all the bases!”

“That’s amazing! Please, sir! Please, give me your knowledge!”

He was starting to sound frantic. It made the woman from before almost drop her tray of tea and snacks when she teleported back in. Maybe I took it a little too far.

“Well, here, I’ll show you, then. Do you have a piece of paper?”

“Paper?”

“Yeah.”

Yuuki gave me a doubtful look as he provided me with one. I swallowed it into my stomach—

“There, all set.”

—and took out my finished work, handing it to Yuuki.

“Wh-whoaaaaaaa!! What kind of magic trick is this, sir?!”

I couldn’t blame him for his surprise. I had just handed him a neatly bound volume of manga.

This was the result of me wringing everything I could out of the Great Sage. I basically took the paper and copied the images I replayed from my memory upon it. Talk about a waste of a great talent. Real effective, though.

“Right! If you want to read more, I’ll need some more paper to work with!”

Without a word, Yuuki stood up and ordered another woman to bring some paper. His face was dead serious, so the woman quickly stepped up to bring a few reams down. I spent the next little bit burning all my memories upon them, making sure to keep the extra sheets for myself. Paper was still a high-end product—what I took was worth a small fortune. Never hurts to have some. I had some actual, non-stupid uses for it, too.

Plus, Yuuki sure wasn’t complaining. I bet not being able to catch up on his favorite series was a big disappointment for him. Getting that chance in this world, he had nothing to complain about.

“Thank you so much, sir!”

Of course, some of the series he requested hadn’t gone much of anywhere plot-wise, much less wrapped up publication. It sucks how those are often the most engaging series. I wanted to know how some of those turned out, too. Hopefully another Japanese otherworlder will show up in, like, ten years or so to fill me in.

“You know, Rimuru, I wanted to ask you…”

“Oh? What’s that?”

“When you signed on for the guild, how did you fill out the entry form? You didn’t have any time to learn the language in this world, did you?”

Oof. Talk about hitting you where it hurts.

“Hee-hee-hee! Well, about that. It’s because I studied this language, of course! After days of unbending effort, I should add!”

The Sage was deciphering and copying everything I needed for me, actually. But Kabal and the gang did teach me the basic alphabet, and the rest came quickly after that.

“Really? You didn’t use some magic cheat or anything…? Because learning the language was one of the toughest things I dealt with, coming here.”

“Oh, um, ummm, don’t be silly! No matter how old you get, studying never stops being important!”

I wavered a bit, but I think I managed to keep the facade going. It hurt a little, seeing Yuuki show me such respect, but I wasn’t strictly lying, so it’s all good. The Sage was what let me read and understand things, but, hey—that’s my ability. Just because I omitted that fact didn’t make it any less true.

Over dinner, our conversation drifted back toward more serious topics—in particular, about what we’d both do next.

“So you risked your life to travel here, Rimuru, because Miss Shizu said we’re both from Japan? I mean, I’d love to keep helping you going forward, but was that your only motive?”

“How do you mean?”

“Oh, I just thought you might have some other reason. Like, maybe you’re trying to find a way back home or something?”

Back home.

Yes, I had thought about it. But I gave up on it. I was already dead over there; I was sure they’d cremated my body long ago. There wasn’t really anyplace for me to return to. I’d just make everyone’s lives chaotic. If they thought about me now and then, reflecting on the good old days, I was okay with that. To younger otherworlders, however, I’m sure getting back home was their number-one priority.

“Do you think it’s possible?” I asked. I was greeted with silence. Not that easy, I guess. He would’ve done it already if it was. That’s about what I figured.

“Well,” Yuuki said, “it kinda looks like a one-way street. That’s because this world is…I guess you could call it semi-physical.”

He went into detail on what he knew so far. Essentially, our old planet was a purely physical world—a world free of magicules. The opposite of that is a purely spiritual world—one teeming with spirits, demons, angels, and other mystic life-forms; one full of mysterious and astonishing energy. The two were polar opposites but still retained some deep, important connections.

Which led to this world—a world of chaos. An extremely unique entity—one that shared properties from both the physical and spiritual worlds. Its atmosphere was packed with magicules, allowing fairies, ghouls, and other spiritual life-forms to manifest themselves—something Yuuki figured out via his own experimentation.

Traveling from a physical world to this one meant that our own bodies had to be broken down once, then rebuilt in semi-physical form. That, he explained, was likely why we couldn’t go back to a purely physical world again.

“However,” he added, “I don’t think it’s a zero-chance possibility. Japan’s full of stories about demons and monsters and things, and you see the same kinds of tales and myths all over the world. So if we’re able to get the conditions just right, I’m thinking that maybe we can, you know?”

He sounded right to me. I had my own thoughts about it, too. It all felt like a vague fever dream at this point, but I definitely remembered hearing the World Language from pretty much the moment I was stabbed. There was definitely some kind of connection between Earth and this world it had to ride on.

“Plus… You can cast magic, can’t you, Rimuru?”

“Yeah,” I replied to the sudden topic change, “I had a spell or two taught to me.”

Yuuki squinted at me, jealous. “That sure is nice… I was really excited about magic, too, at first…”

As he put it, when he first came to this world, he both lamented his plight and fostered a deep fascination for the unknown force of magic. I was the same way. Anyone who’s a fan of manga and anime must have wished they could toss around magic at least once in their lives.

“I wanted to learn some, but for some reason, I just couldn’t do it. I think it’s because of the way my body changed. It felt so, like, romantic, too, but no…”

Yep. Something adventurous to it, isn’t there? If something’s right there at your fingertips, of course you’ll wanna try it out. But Yuuki just didn’t have the right characteristics for it. Reality sucks sometimes.

“Still, I can perform research into it. And what I found was that in this world, magic is the power to interfere with the laws of nature. There’s a mysterious set of laws to this world—people call them the World Language—and when you earn a new power, or the value of your life rises in some way, like when you evolve, then that’s how nature tells you about it. Magic runs under the same rules as this World Language; when you cast the spell, it turns that nonphysical phenomenon into real life. And if you look at it the other way…”

Yuuki paused. I tried to guess where this was going. Look at it the other way…

“Everything has a cause and an effect, and if you figure out the laws behind all that, you might even be able to find a way home…is what you’re saying?”

I was familiar with the World Language. My skill, the Great Sage, used the term when talking to me. It was my familiarity with it that led me to that conclusion.

“…Right. That’s very good, Rimuru. I’m surprised… You understood a concept that I had to spend years researching.”

Take the concept of “returning home,” render it into a set of laws, and translate it into the World Language. Easy for me to say, but trying to discover those laws would take a lifetime of research. Even with that much effort, it may not be possible at all.

But if you were able to interfere with the World Language on a deeper level…

……………………………………

The Sage was silent. No, a skill like that’s just a fairy tale. Guess we’d just have to keep plugging away on that research.

Yuuki gave me a wry grin. “Of course, I’d never have enough time to uncover all of it, I guess. I’d have to decipher and evaluate each of the laws, one by one.”

And that’s probably his main goal. I’m sure he’ll keep up his research.

“Well, I’ll definitely help you with whatever I can, and I’ll try doing a little research on my side, too.”

I had to volunteer to pitch in. I just had to give a shout-out to his spirit.

“But anyway, if you aren’t trying to return home, what brought you here, Rimuru?”

Now he was getting back on topic. I figured he deserved a full answer.

“Well, if I can kick back and chill out a little in this life, that’s all I really want. I’ve got a town pretty well built up, and basically, I’m just in this to have fun with my friends. But there’s something that’s been bothering me lately…”

My other mission. I needed to purchase magic stones and check out the cities, figuring out how advanced their civilization was—that was important. But I hadn’t forgotten the biggest one. The children I saw in my dreams.

“…I see. Miss Shizu must have been really worried for them. But those kids are… Well, if that’s what she wants you to do, then I trust you are up to it.”

He then dived into a long story, telling me about the children I saw in detail.

After the end of our long conversation, I walked out of the guild headquarters, offering to treat my friends to dinner for making them wait so long. “Oh, don’t worry about it,” they all said, but it was already early evening—Yuuki and I had been talking practically from dawn till dusk. I wasn’t expecting the meeting to go on for so long, so I felt bad for them.

We went to a restaurant with a famed reputation across the city, a far cry from our lodging. As we greedily tucked into the gourmet dishes ferried to us, I went over everything Yuuki and I had agreed to.

“So yeah, starting a week from now, I’ve agreed to become a schoolteacher.”

“Huh?”

“Where did that come from?”

“You sure are a joker, Boss!”

Neither Kabal nor his cohorts were ready to believe it at first. Sheesh. Better start from the beginning.

“Basically, I’m gonna be living in an empty room in the school dorm starting tomorrow. I told you about the dreams I’ve been having, right? Yuuki thinks he knows them, so he’s setting me up to work as their teacher.”

They responded with several questions, which I answered in order. I had succeeded in convincing them by the time we finished dinner, although they still couldn’t hide their exasperation.

“Wow, Boss. A teacher, though, huh…?”

“Pretty hard to imagine…”

“I’m worried for those kids.”

What’re you looking at me like that for, Gido?

“Yeah, so as far as it goes for you guys, today marks the end of you guiding me around on this journey.”

“…Kinda sudden, Boss.”

“I thought we were contracted to stick with you until we were back?”

“Oh, I’ll be fine! That’s why I set up that teleportation circle, right? Because I figured something like this might happen. This way, I can go back to Tempest or Blumund in the blink of an eye. Gonna be a bit harder for you guys, though, huh? Good luck out there!”

“Whoa, whoa, are you serious? I thought we’d be taking that wolf wagon back, man…”

“Yeah, really! Ugh, just thinking about the journey now makes me so depressed!”

“Aw, c’mon, Kabal,” chided Gido. “And you, too, Elen. You guys are getting too used to life on easy street, aren’tcha? Not that I’m lookin’ forward to getting battered and bruised on a regular wagon again, but…”

These guys… One moment, they’re going on about how they’ll take responsibility and keep me guarded till the bitter end; the next, they’re whining about losing their luxury travel. It was certainly in character for them all, but still.

So the four of us proceeded to drink away the loneliness and regret until late that night. The next morning, just outside the city gates, I said my final good-byes to the extremely hungover trio.

“Drop us a line if anything happens, Boss!”

“Are you sure you’ll be fine without us…?”

“We’ll miss havin’ you around, but take care! Let us know when you’re back in town!”

“Sure thing,” I said. “I’ll let you know if something comes up.”

I whipped our wagon out of my Stomach. A merchant was already approaching us, two horses in tow.

“Uh, Boss… Aw, man, why?”

“You—you aren’t…?”

“Are you serious?!”

Ignoring their pleas, I ordered the seller to hitch his horses to the wagon. “All right, thanks for delivering ’em,” I said as I signed his payment form. Kabal and company had finally accepted the bitter truth by then.

“Yeah, so consider this wagon a parting gift for you guys, okay? Give it back to Rigurd if you don’t need it.”

“Uh, I think we’re gonna need it a lot, Boss!”

“You’re so nice to us, Sir Rimuru!”

“Whew! What a man. I wish Fuze could learn to be this nice to his people.”

They were all touched by the gift. I’m glad the surprise was a success. One more thing—

“Your payment’s inside the wagon, too. Check it out later—”

—later, if you like, is what I meant to say, but they were already scrambling to climb in before I could finish.

“Whoooaaa! Lookit this shield!!”

“Aaaaahhhh! This staff is incredible!!”

“Well, look at this! That’s one damn sharp-looking dagger. Wait, is this a magic weapon?!”

Man, they’re like hyenas. I was hoping they’d open up the boxes while I wasn’t around, but that idea sure went to waste.

“Sheesh, you guys… Ah well. That’s your payment. One Scale Shield for Kabal, one Dryad’s Staff for Elen, and one Tempest Dagger for Gido. Take care of ’em for me, okay?”

“Of course, Boss!”

“We’d be crazy not to! How did you know I was in the market for a new staff…? Thank you so much, Sir Rimuru!”

“But, um…these are all Uniques, aren’t they?! I don’t think I’ve ever seen a weapon as amazing as this one. Are you sure about this, Boss?”

“Sure, I’m sure. We didn’t pay anything for the materials. The staff’s a gift that Treyni was nice enough to supply, so treat it with care, got it?”

“Oh, yes, yes!”

Elen lovingly rubbed the side of her face against the staff. I was sure she’d treat it just fine without me harping on it. Kabal’s and Gido’s weapons were manufactured goods, but the Dryad’s Staff really was one of a kind, so. If she lost or broke it, Treyni would probably have my head for it—and I told her it was for Elen, too, so I was more worried than I should be, probably.

Kabal’s Scale Shield was another product from the mind of Garm, crafted from scales taken from the Charybdis—the same scales forged by Kurobe to make Gido’s Tempest Dagger, which was infused with wind magic to boost the holder’s physical speed. We still retained a rather large cache of those scales from the battle—I had given several hundred to King Gazel as a thank-you gift. The ones I had personally consumed were still in practically mint condition. We had researched putting them to use in battle equipment, and these two items were the first complete test samples. As Gido said, they were Unique-caliber weapons.

Thanks to the three of them ripping open their presents early, this was no longer any kind of lonesome, depressing good-bye for us. They were all in high spirits as I saw them off—which is fine. Nobody likes sad farewells. Besides, all the excitement seemed to cure their hangovers. And this is Kabal’s gang we’re talking about—they’d no doubt come groveling to me for help with some other crisis soon.

Thus, it was with an odd sense of satisfaction that I sent them on their way.

Once they were gone, it was time to kick off my big move.

All it really entailed, of course, was heading to the dorm and picking up my key. Once I filled out all the paperwork, I told the manager that I’d be moving in that night. As Yuuki excitedly put it to me, I’d get to enjoy “a dedicated staff dormitory, plus three meals and ten silver coins per day!” The manager confirmed that with me, stating they’d get the place cleaned up before the day was through.

The average salary in the capital, by the way, was seven silver a day. Educators were treated a lot better around here than I would’ve guessed. A night at our inn cost four silver, not including meals, and while it was nice inside, it still felt pricey compared to that joint in the farming village. It’d be much more economical to move into the dorm Yuuki had for me.

I also took a quick peek inside while I was there. It wasn’t a major step down from last night’s inn. I was happy with it.

Like I told Kabal and the gang, I’d begin teaching in seven days, although I’d need to report to school in six to manage the handover. Thus, I had five days to use however I wanted, although this particular day was mostly spent purchasing assorted household goods. I had the budget to purchase most of what I wanted and have it carted back to the dorm, touring around the city a little more as I shopped the day away.

I occupied most of the next day unpacking and organizing all the stuff I purchased. I knew I shouldn’t have sent those guys off so early. I regretted that now.

On day three, I decided to hit the library. I still hadn’t heard anything about, like, what I’d be teaching at school. Yuuki was working that out for me right now, but in the meantime, I figured I should brush up a bit on my core knowledge.

That and fulfill one of my other important goals—learning magic. I wanted to take this opportunity to read through as many magic tomes as I could in there. Access to the room with said tomes was restricted, but you could get in if you showed ID proving you were a B-ranked adventurer or higher. You couldn’t take any of the books out, either, and I wanted to read ’em all while I was in the capital, so that was job one for me.

This was the largest library in the city, but it wasn’t affiliated with the government. The full-on Royal Library was inside the castle, available only to nobility and court-appointed magicians. A-ranked adventurers who were official guests of the state could request access, perhaps, but that didn’t apply to me right now. Certain magic was treated as classified information by particular nations, so it wasn’t just a matter of walking up and asking for a library card.

For now, I’d have to be happy with this regular library. Besides, there were a lot of valuable books in there, filled with tales of forbidden skills and techniques collected by adventurers worldwide. Some of the more ancient tomes discovered during Free Guild work were gathered here, too. The collection is easily as valuable as anything the Royal Library might have, I thought.

It was wonderful. I felt lucky to be blessed with such fortune, so soon after arriving. I’m sure it was karmic repayment for all my good deeds.

I quickly began browsing through the magic tomes. There were so many here, you could never finish them in a lifetime if you read them any normal way. So, um, apologies to the diligent scholars out there putting in all that time in reading rooms, but I’m using the Great Sage to read these suckers.

If someone watched me in there, it’d probably look like I was just running a hand over a book, then meekly returning it to the shelf. But my hand was taking in the entirety of each book, recording it fully and accurately. Running the Sage and Glutton skills in parallel, I copied each magic tome into my mind at breakneck speed. I could take the time to pore over the contents later—or really, I could let the Sage do that. All I had to do here was pluck a book from the shelves, then put it back.

Would that be enough to let me harness the magic inside, though…?

Received. It is possible to thoroughly examine the contents with Analyze and Assess, then comprehend it with the All of Creation skill. Once comprehended and stored within memory space, the magic may be executed with Cast Cancel.

Really? Whoa. So all I gotta do is think about what kinda magic I want? What a crazy set of skills. There’s just no end to the wonders the Sage brings me.

In that case, it’s settled. I’m not even gonna bother reading the titles of these books. Just in and out, shelve and unshelve, over and over. Each volume converts itself into knowledge for me. The mere thought made me want to do this more than ever.

So over the next two days, I read those books until I was blue in the face, successfully memorizing every one in the magic-tome stacks. That was how I rounded out my little vacation. The other librarians and visitors gave me passing stares, like I was some kind of wacko, but I had no regrets. Before my lofty goal of learning more magic, that was just a trivial detail.

It was now my first day of work. After a few greetings, I was given a word or two of advice from the academy’s vice principal.

Yuuki had already warned me it would be hard work—in addition to being guild master, he was also chairman of this school’s board of directors. He called it more of an honorary title than anything, but I was still impressed. In the ten or so years he had been there, he not only built up the entire Free Guild but even set up an affiliated school for the outfit. In a way, he was the ideal all adventurers should aspire to.

This school was, indeed, a sort of training ground for would-be guild members. Like the guild itself, you decided on a department to specialize in—beyond the common courses shared by all students, there were also classroom-based lectures in magical and monster sciences, as well as on-the-field training in battle and survival. You were free to devise your own curriculum, not unlike the universities of my previous life.

My job, however, would be running a special class that was a tad different from what most students had access to. The S-Class, as they put it, was a group of students deemed to be problematic in one way or another. Ever since their previous adviser, the notoriously hard-line Shizue Izawa, left her post due to personal issues, the class had been left teacherless and free to wreak havoc however it liked. She was a Hero, the Conqueror of Flames, and I definitely had some big shoes to fill. I suppose I should get used to being compared to her all the time around here.

It seems this class was wild enough that it had already driven off several would-be teachers in the meantime, including a few B-ranked adventurers. The administrators were at their wit’s end trying to figure out what to do with them. The vice principal told me all this, much as Yuuki did before. It was composed of five students, as he put it a few days back—

………

……

…

“All five of these students are otherworlders,” he began, “people just like us. Let me ask you, though, Rimuru… Do you know someone named Hinata Sakaguchi?”

Why’s her name coming up now? I mean, I wanted to ask about her, but…

“I know the name, at least. She’s an otherworlder and one of Shizu’s old apprentices, right? Also that she’s stronger than Shizu and has a really great memory and stuff.”

“Stronger than Miss Shizu at her peak, to be exact, yes. And do you have much idea of just how strong Miss Shizu was?”

How strong she was? Well, strong enough to summon a high-level spirit like Ifrit and become “one” with it. The sheer temperatures involved were brutal. Without Cancel Temperature, I would’ve been a goner, for sure.

“Well, she wielded Ifrit, a monster who goes past A level, so…”

“Right. At her peak, Miss Shizu could bring Ifrit fully under her control. In terms of the scale I implemented for the guild, she’d be in the upper echelon of what we’d call A-plus, even. She was something special—but Hinata, at the age of fifteen, gained strength that even went beyond that. That should give you some idea of what I’m talking about.”

I nodded. Hmm. I didn’t have any idea at all, but I kept listening.

“You might be wondering why I’m bringing this up…but first and foremost, I wanted you to know what makes us otherworlders different from the people in this world. Some of us are gifted with incredibly powerful battle skills, like Hinata, but some of us, like me, don’t have any skills at all. You can’t put all otherworlders into the same category; it really runs the gamut. My favorite café in town is run by an otherworlder, and he’s powerless, so to speak. Most otherworlders have some kind of special ability, usually, but that’s not an ironclad rule.”

I see. So most, but not all, people gain a skill or two when they make the journey.

“However,” Yuuki continued, “the real key here is the difference between naturally traveling over to this world and being called over.”

Hmm. Veldora discussed that a little, too, didn’t he? Yeah, he did…

(Many otherworlders come here bearing special powers. Powers that are chiseled into their souls in the midst of their journey. The summoned will always bear one such skill—a unique skill, one exclusive to them and them alone. Unlike the otherworlders who come here by sheer accident, these people bear a soul strong enough to withstand the stress of the summoning process. The fact that said summoning process so rarely succeeds in this world otherwise proves as such.)

I think that’s what it was.

In other words, you need a soul strong enough to handle the summon process, or else it won’t work. I relayed all this to Yuuki. “I’m impressed you know that,” he replied, eyes wide. “That’s exactly what I’ve learned in my research.” Wasn’t really research for me; I’m just parroting what Veldora said, but oh well.

“As you say, Rimuru, the ‘summons’ that are called over here for some purpose are always granted powers suited for this purpose—for example, so they can become a Hero to give mankind a decisive edge in battle. During this journey, your body is disassembled and put back together in semi-physical form—in other words, it’s rebuilt. Without a strong enough will, I imagine you’d get swallowed up in all that energy and disappear into the black.”

Even Hinata, who came here quite by accident, was granted otherworldly powers. If she had been called here for some specific goal, I couldn’t imagine how strong she’d be then. I imagine that’s what Yuuki was trying to say—but what he said next sent shivers down my spine.

“…Now, what do you think would happen if you are summoned while still in incomplete form?”

“Incomplete form?”

“Exactly…”

What he then explained to me almost made my skin crawl. Normally, performing a summon under a given set of conditions required thirty or more summoners to work as a team. The ceremony took seven whole days to complete—and even then, the success rate was less than 1 percent. Even worse, once a ceremony was complete, the same summoners would need to wait for a certain interval before performing it again—an interval that took something like thirty-three or sixty-six years. The longer you waited, the more you’d be able to narrow down the conditions you wanted.

So what happens if you perform a summon without stipulating any particular conditions? That certainly loosened things up quick—there wouldn’t be anywhere near as much of an interval required between summonings. The same summoners could try it again and again—but the success rate didn’t get any better, and even if you pulled it off, you often wound up summoning children and the like.

Despite these disadvantages, there were still apparently good reasons for choosing this approach. But what about the children who were summoned? Their wills were quite strong, of course, their bodies now infused with energy in the form of magicules. But they did not obtain any skills to go with that willpower—and all that energy was a severe mismatch for an immature body. So much so, in fact, that given enough time, the energy would literally burn the body away, having no other outlet to release itself with.

“Huh? Wait, so are those five children…?”

“…Yes. As I’m sure you’re imagining, they were summoned.”

“Whoa. Is that, like, okay, or…?”

Yuuki didn’t answer. But his silence provided enough of one.

“Those children,” he continued, “were the ones not fully summoned. Attempts at crafting a Hero that failed.”

“A Hero? What do you mean?”

“Remember what I said? A Hero can provide a decisive advantage for the human race in battle. In this world, the monsters are much stronger than us—overwhelmingly so. It’s safe to say we’re under constant threat. The power of mankind around here is pitifully weak. They’re all seeking a Hero they can pin their hopes upon.”

“What, so they’re summoning people willy-nilly to find Heroes to fight ’em off?”

“Exactly, Rimuru. What this world has decided is that it’s worth sacrificing thousands if it means the birth of a Hero for themselves.”

Yuuki’s voice rang cold in the underground room. It was the world’s choice. I had a hard time coming up with a response to that. Did I have a right to criticize them all for putting their own beloved family above a bunch of alien strangers? If you’re presented with two people in danger and you could only save one, what would you do? If I was friends with one, of course I’d reach out to that guy first.

“These children are the results of failed summonings, conducted by multiple nations under strict secrecy. They were picked up by Miss Shizu, and she wanted to do whatever she could to save them.”

“Multiple nations? There’re governments involved in this?”

“Yes. It’s what the world has decided to do, like I said. In their eyes, instead of gradually investing in armies to fend off the monsters, it’s more efficient to stake it all on one otherworlder who can stand far above everyone else. And if you know how strong Miss Shizu was, you can see why.”

I suppose I could. A force in the tens of thousands would mean nothing against something like Ifrit. If an Orc Disaster stepped into town, they could pool Kabal and all the other B-ranked adventurers in the world together, and they’d never land anything close to a serious blow. If those were the odds, then having an otherworlder like Shizu or Hinata could make all the difference, once the people knew about them.

“The other thing is that it’s not like a Hero is born every day in this world. How I understand it is that it involves being willing to take on the crimes and sins of all mankind, in a way. Otherwise, you won’t be able to overcome the trials placed upon you by the spirits that rule over the land. Of course, there are some Heroes out there who are anything but. They’re willing to invite divine wrath upon themselves…”

Huh. The idea of just leaving everything to these Heroes sounded pretty irresponsible to me, but that assumes you had some Heroes to start with. Some real ones, with official World Language approval. And that’s why all these nations are willing to dabble in the dark magic of summoning, damn the consequences. Any successful ones were lauded as Heroes, and as Yuuki put it, each nation had a few on hand.

The demon lords held so much power in this world that, if you were foolish enough to take one on, you couldn’t afford to be picky with your methods. All these human nations scrambling to procure Heroes didn’t seem strange at all to me anymore.

“There’s that many around, though? I haven’t seen any in the smaller towns and villages…”

“That’s because these summoned otherworlders are usually ordered to serve as bodyguards for the nobility or people associated with them.”

Oh, right. Veldora mentioned that, too.

“So summons that have combat potential are branded with a magical curse in their soul,” I blurted out, “preventing them from defying their summoners?”

“You know about that, Rimuru?!”

I did know, yes. I knew, but I just kinda forgot. Yeahhh… No wonder Shizu wasn’t so crazy about this world.

“So what’s gonna happen to these kids?”

“…As far as I know,” Yuuki grimly reported, “the longest any has survived is five years. Those are the facts, when it comes to incomplete summons. We haven’t found any magic spells that can stave off the bodily collapse. If someone is summoned under the age of ten, they’re almost certain to die, being unable to obtain any unique skills.”

Then he gave a self-effacing smile.

“But at least each nation was kind enough to hand the children over to us.”

I’ll bet. No need to take care of children who’re useless in their minds, I’m sure.

“But the Western Holy Church doesn’t have a problem with that? They’ve got those crazy strong paladins and stuff, right?”

“You could say the Church gives it their tacit consent. To them, the total annihilation of this planet’s monsters is the major goal.”

“For real? And they’re the ‘defenders of righteousness’ or whatever? Gimme a break. And does Hinata think that way? She really doesn’t care about all these children from her homeland dying as long as she can beat the monsters?”

“Hinata, I suppose, is a realist. She takes the most rational of approaches to her problems. If something seems the most effective way to her, she’ll do it, I guess you could say, but…but it makes no sense to me, no.”

He knew for sure, at least, that Hinata wasn’t applying pressure internationally to put an end to these summonings.

“All right. So would anyone mind if I did something about these kids?”

“What are you thinking about doing?”

I looked Yuuki in the eye. “If it’s what Shizu wants,” I declared, “I think I’m ready to take them on.”

This must’ve been the work Shizu left behind. Something she regretted so much, she infiltrated my dreams to beg me for it. I saw no reason not to answer that. Too bad I couldn’t tell her “I got this” in real life.

Yuuki nodded. “By all means,” he whispered as he bowed his head. “I hope you’ll save them, if you can.”

Yes. I always do what I can. Always have, always will.

………

……

…

And so, I agreed to take care of these children in the school.

My role was more of an adviser than a traditional teacher. Instead of just teaching coursework to my students, I’d be living with them, enlightening them. In other words, I’d be taking all the same courses they were, in all subjects. I’d be eating with them, too—good thing food was included in the deal. If I could teach them about a subject, I would; if not, I’d help other teachers—but either way, my job was to watch over these special guys.

“…I’d love to put my trust in you,” the vice principal commented. “It’s not every day that the chairman makes a personal recommendation like this. But those kids were too much even for B-ranked adventurers. Plus, you’re practically a child yourself, aren’t you? Nobody’s going to hold it against you if you decide to turn the offer down.”



“Thanks, but I’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure? If you find you’re in over your head, be sure to tell me as soon as possible, all right?”

I appreciated the concern, but come on—these are children we’re dealing with.

Such were my thoughts as I kicked off the first day of class.

“Hey, guys! I’m in charge of you all starting today—”

My friendly greeting was immediately countered with the slash of a flaming sword.

“Sweet! Nice one, Ken!”

“Is that your finisher? It’s all done now?!”

“Kinda weak in the end. It didn’t even land!”

Without a shred of concern for me, the children carried on, clearly seeing me as the enemy.

Um, I thought these kids had, like, barely any time left to live? ’Cause they’re looking crazy healthy right now! A little too healthy! The blackboard behind me was now in flames, cut into two pieces. Hoo boy. Kids these days—what’s gotten into them? Why, back in my day…

Already, these kids were making me sound like a crotchety old man. I thought about throwing in the towel right there. We aren’t on Earth, right? Nobody’s gonna complain if I toss out a little corporal punishment, will they?

Before me were five children, the “summons” Yuuki had gathered from assorted nations. They were:

Kenya Misaki: male, age ten

Ryota Sekiguchi: male, age ten

Gail Gibson: male, age eleven

Alice Rondo: female, age nine

Chloe Aubert: female, age ten

They were still grade-school age, but I guess they packed a punch. With Shizu building them up, I was liable to get hurt if I went easy on them.

Honestly, I wasn’t expecting this. I thought they’d be a little more obedient. Watching the children as they returned my gaze with looks of sheer hostility, I felt my first pangs of depression in a long time.

They were all young, around ten years old. Gail was built enough to pass for middle-school age, but he was still only eleven.

I called each by name, looking over the files I picked up in the staff room. No reply. Um, I really needed some kind of response from these guys if I was gonna do this…

Ah well. Time to call upon my trusty assistant.

“Please give me a reply when I call your name,” I gently advised. Kenya was the first to voice his tearful complaints.

“Hey! What’s that dog—is that a wolf?! Get it out of here!”

“K-Ken, are you okay?”

“G-get away from me! This is crazy!”

“Ahhh! I’ll behave, I’ll behave!!”

“I am Ranga—neither dog nor wolf. My master demands a reply, child. Will you follow the order, or—?”

Whoa, Ranga’s a big hit. Look at him play around with those kids! It really warms the heart, doesn’t it?

“All right! Okay!” Kenya shouted, eyes tearing up at Ranga’s threat. There’s a good boy. He may not have liked it, but I needed some good behavior in here.

“There you go! Children must do as they’re told!”

I smiled and conducted my roll call.

Apparently, these kids had hit it off pretty well with Shizu. Apart from her, though, Yuuki was the only person they’d listen to. Given their circumstances, I should have expected that, but that didn’t mean I’d let them steamroll over me. I had agreed to be their teacher, and I had better drill that much into their heads real quick.

“My name’s Rimuru, and I’ve been appointed to be your adviser starting today. I ain’t gonna coddle you the way Shizu did, so you better be sure you understand that before anything else!”

I started things off by drilling into them the importance of polite greetings.

Right, then. They were no longer in a state of outright rebellion, but they were hostile as ever. The classroom was bathed in silence; I could literally hear one of them gulp nervously. Ranga loped back up to me, tail wagging.

“All right,” I said with a refreshing smile. “Take your seats, everybody.” Nobody moved. That sucked. The deep hatred they obviously had for anyone outside their group would make earning their trust a trial. If I were them, my thought process would probably be along the lines of “I’ll kill that asshole,” but I wasn’t. This world was all about survival of the fittest. If they couldn’t beat Ranga, their selfishness ended now. If you wanna hate someone for it, hate yourself for being so weak.

So—

“Okay, then! I suppose you’ve all got something you’d like to say to me. So how about we have a little test?”

“Hey!” Alice exclaimed first. “Why’s it gotta be that?!”

“A test?” Ryota asked the boy next to him.

“Blehhhh!!” replied Kenya.

“I hate tests” was the more direct assessment from Chloe.

“This is all too sudden,” the more intellectual-sounding Gail added. “I demand an explanation!”

Quite the protest. Children have such a wealth of personalities, don’t they? And no matter what world you’re in, nobody likes a test.

“Enough back talk. I know what you’re all thinking, but listen. What we’re about to do is something that’s necessary for each of you!”

“Why?! We’re all gonna die pretty soon anyway! What’s the point of studying ’n’ taking tests and stuff?!”

“Y-yeah… Our last teacher just brought in a bunch of toys and books ’n’ said we could do whatever we wanted…”

“We haven’t done any real classwork since we came here…”

“I wanna read more books!”

“And who do you think you are? Just because you’ve got a big dog doesn’t mean you can lord it over us!”

Ah, they’re bursting with energy. That’s great. But I wasn’t lying. This was necessary. And sadly, I wasn’t willing to compromise.

“All right, all right, just calm down. I called it a test, but really, it’s more of a fun game for you all to play. And if you don’t like it, you can complain about it as much as you want. So what you’ll do is take turns taking me on in mock combat. The rules are simple. Attack me with everything you’ve got. If you can beat me, it’s over. But if I can dodge your attacks for ten minutes, I win. Easy, right?”

“That’s it?”

“Yep. Easy, right?”

“Ten minutes?”

“Hey, I’ll spot you guys an hour each if you want.”

“Ha-ha-ha! If you don’t sic that dog on me, I don’t even need ten!”

“Great! I promise I won’t do that, okay? But it’s one at a time for you guys, too! No helping out your classmates, all right?”

“Okay!”

“Sure.”

“Heh-heh! I’ll totally win if that dog ain’t in it!”

“I just want to read some books…”

“So where’re we doing this?”

“Hmm, the gymnasium ought to work, I suppose. Do you all understand the rules? You can figure out the turn order on the way there.”

With that, I took the kids—my students—over to the gym. A few passersby gave us looks of horror on the way, which I ignored.

This was a simple sparring session. I wasn’t going to lay a hand on them—I just wanted to see what abilities they had. None possessed unique skills, making them unable to expend the magicules that threatened to destroy them from the inside. Would all-out battle be enough to consume them instead? I didn’t know, but I wanted to try. I doubted Shizu and Yuuki hadn’t thought of that, but with Analyze and Assess, at least I could observe them in closer detail than either of those people.

By the way, monsters were generally assigned strength ratings based on the amount of magicules within them. Adventurer ranks, on the other hand, were based on proven strength, meaning a C-ranked adventurer could bear more magical energy than a B rank. I found that kind of weird, but that testing I went through proved it to be the case.

Monsters, meanwhile, mostly fight based on instinct; there wasn’t much difference between individuals of a species in terms of technical level. This meant that magicule count was the handiest way to rank them. (Some individual monsters did have special gifts—a lot lived in Tempest—but whatever.)

One other thing I noticed was that, compared to adventurers, monsters often held a ton more magicules. That fact made it all the clearer how frail the human race was against them. A human could raise their technical skills only so far, after all. And again, that was the reason why nations were going through with these forbidden summonings. It enraged me; I couldn’t believe it was allowed to go on…but I could see the logic to it.

Getting back to these kids—one surprise I got from Analyze and Assess was its magic measurements. In monster terms, each of their magicule counts would rank them as A or higher. Chloe, in particular, had enough energy to put her up there with some high-level elementals.

This was weird. They’d be fearsome foes, if they only had a way to harness that force. But we’d see soon enough.

They had worked out the order of taking turns. Kenya stepped up first, all but bursting to go. He was only ten, but he was the most defiant of the group—kind of the boss, maybe?

“Hey, is it cool if I use this sword?”

Impudent little brat.

“Don’t you remember? I said to gimme everything you got. But if you lose, you better start calling me Professor Rimuru!”

“Pfft! No grown-up can beat us. We’ve never lost to anyone except Miss Shizu!”

“Oh, really? Why don’t you save your bragging for after you win?”

And so, the test began. I let the kids decide on a signal, providing them with an hourglass I’d bought the previous day and telling them how to use it.

Shall we, then?

“Umm, begin!”

With Ryota’s signal, Kenya began to run. For a grade-schooler, he moved well—he’d put most grown-ups to shame, really. But it was no sweat for me.

“You can do it, Ken!!”

“Don’t let ’im beat ya!”

Kenya strained his body, attempting to live up to the cheers. He tried his hardest to land an attack on me, but I didn’t even need to predict his moves. He was an open book.

He looked about ready to cry by the time the five-minute mark passed. He began shooting fire from his sword, but… Hmm. This fire’s pretty weak. The way he launched it without any chanting time was impressive, but it was simple to guess where it’d land. I didn’t bother taking any shots on my body, but the heat waves from the explosions didn’t feel very toasty to me. A notch below, say, the Fireballs a B-ranked adventurer like Elen could conjure. And considering Kenya bore A-level magic energy, his energy was being wasted on a massive scale. He wasn’t going easy on me, but it was probably just a trick he picked up by watching others. He wasn’t taking advantage of his power at all.

“Hey! Quit worrying about shooting fire. Just focus all your energy and try to hit me like normal.”

My advice fell on deaf ears.

“Shut up! Miss Shizu’s skills were awesome! I don’t need to listen to your crap!”

He really was an impertinent little bastard. And it cost him—he didn’t take my hint for the rest of the ten minutes. I won.

“And it’s over! Remember, Professor Rimuru from now on. Next up!”

Kenya’s shoulders slumped as he shuffled back to the other children, dejected. Though, really, I’d be far more shocked if I lost to a grade-schooler.

Chloe Aubert came out next—a ten-year-old with an uncommon hair color. Kind of black with silver mixed in—it gave her a bit of an enigmatic feel. Maybe she had some Japanese blood in her.

Off we go, then. If I lost to a girl as clearly mesmerizing as this, I would look so lame. Gotta keep my guard up.

“Don’t push yourself, Clo!”

“Yeah, don’t get hurt!”

The children were more focused on Chloe getting injured than winning. She didn’t look all that strong, no. In another moment, the hourglass was turned. What kind of attack would she spring on me? I could guess she liked books; she always had one or two in her hands. Was she gonna try to conk me in the head with one or give me a paper cut? Use them as blunt weapons? Seemed like decent grade-school logic to me. Or maybe not.

But as my mind wandered, I heard her chant “Flowing water, confine my enemy! Water Jail!” Instantly, a torrent of water pinned my legs to the floor. Sense Heat Source told me it was the real thing.

First Kenya, then this girl—they both had magic-controlled skills. Pretty neat. They might be natural prodigies. But now was no time to marvel.

The water current grew more violent, forming a large sphere that enveloped me. I tapped the outer edge with my finger, only to feel a cutting sensation. Much like my Water Blades, she circulated the water at high speed to make the ball retain its shape. Impressive—but what was she gonna do with it?

“I’ve transformed that magic to have it rain down constantly upon whomever it captures! Admit your defeat, and I’ll release it, but if you don’t, you’re gonna die!”

Damn! Scary little kid! She was all about keeping me in check, unlike Kenya—but sadly, it wouldn’t be enough.

“Pretty impressive, but it won’t work on me. You’re using it really well, though. I hope you keep up practicing!”

Stepping out of the watery dungeon, I patted Chloe on the head. Some dungeon that was. I could just use Control Magic to rework it any way I wanted. Seriously, even among my extra skills, it was wicked powerful. You could even get away with calling it a unique. Magic was all about controlling magicules to create phenomena. Interfere with those magicules with a stronger force, and it couldn’t be easier to break it.

Chloe sat on the floor, surprised. Her face reddened as tears came to her eyes. Sorry, girl. This is me trying to go easy, too. I need to show just how much more powerful I am. You would never listen to me if I didn’t lay down the law.

No longer interested in fighting, Chloe ceded victory. She rubbed her head where I patted her, looking oddly content as she smiled.

Let’s keep it going!

My next opponent was Gail Gibson, the oldest of the gang at age eleven. He was a large boy with brown hair and handsome, chiseled features. Give him a few years, and I’m sure his looks would put Hollywood actors to shame. I had no interest in crushing his spirit; I just wanted to show him that the world can be cruel sometimes.

“Don’t hate me if this kills you, all right?”

Gail immediately greeted me with an unhesitant, full-force blow. Seeing the previous two rounds must’ve changed his views about me. It was a fairly fearsome ball of magic, potentially lethal even for a B-ranked adventurer. Hey, I had a lot of trouble learning that one, too…

He probably put every ounce of his energy into that blast. It was the right thing to do—but he chose the wrong adversary. Projectile-based moves didn’t work on me. I used Glutton to scarf it right down.

“Wh-what was that?! That’s dirty!”

Yeah, it sure is. I think so, too.

“Listen: Grown-ups are dirty people, all right? They’ll do anything and everything to beatcha! That’s how they work.”

Kind of an immature way to put it to a child, I guess, but I didn’t want to leave anything off the table. There were other tactics I could’ve taken, but I wanted to both win this and make it look easy. It was actually kind of hard.

Gail bit his lip in frustration, then focused his energy upon his fists to strike out at me. I was impressed he didn’t give up, but there was no path to victory left for him. The rest of the battle went just as it did with Kenya.

Ryota seemed like a wimpy kid to me. He was always by Kenya’s side, ever cheering him on. Opposites attract, maybe. Beyond that, he seemed like just a regular child.

His ability, though…

“Get ’im for me, Ryota!”

His eyes lit up the moment Kenya started egging him on, and he attacked with… Magic? No. It was closer to Shion’s Strengthen Body skill. With zero spell casting, he instantly doubled his strength and speed—maybe even more than doubled. His magicules briskly converted themselves into fighting force as he protected himself.

A very impressive power-up move, though I had to take points off since he couldn’t activate it by himself. Losing your cool in combat was, nine times out of ten, a net negative. It meant tossing away your intelligence, the one advantage you could rely on over a monster.

Ryota’s skill wasn’t Strengthen Body so much as a Berserker-style transform. It was useless as is. I’d better help him hone that. He did move well, though. If he weren’t fighting me, he could’ve fended for himself rather well.

But—oops, too bad! I effortlessly dodged him for the entire ten minutes.

That just left Alice Rondo. Youngest of the group at nine, she had shiny, straight blond hair that ran down her back and made her look just like a doll. Very fetching—but unlike the reserved Chloe, she had a mean tomboyish streak.

“About time my turn came up,” she boastfully declared. “You worthless idiots better take a lesson or two from me!”

And here I thought Kenya was the boss of the group. It might’ve been the youngest one, after all. Or maybe she was the secret boss? Whatever she was, I needed to show her who was in charge, or else this whole effort was a failure. Better brace myself for anything. Plus, I couldn’t help but notice that we’d been attracting an audience of students and teachers. As much ruckus as we were causing in this gym, it wasn’t weird that we were building interest. Well, bring ’em on! It’d be a good chance to show the school that I had this. That I was treating these kids as real students.

But what’s Alice got in store for me? The girl gave me a bold smile, then tossed the assorted plush toys she carried behind her back up in the air.

“Okay, guys! Take that freak down!!”

I looked up, confused, only to find a small army of living, breathing toys closing in on me—dogs, cats, birds, even bears. They packed a surprisingly heavy punch.

Alice, it turns out, was a Golem Master, something she must’ve stumbled upon as she saw Shizu and her spirit skills. It was astonishingly creative, especially for a child. If fur and foam produced this level of attack, she’d be packing some serious heat if someone gave her some steel robots or something. She might be the strongest of the five, even.

But if all I had to do was avoid them for ten minutes, that seemed doable.

“Hey! Quit running away from them, you wimp!!”

I heard her complaint loud and clear but ignored it. I had a passing thought of incinerating them all as I danced around…

Report. Chances of the individual Alice Rondo bursting into tears…one hundred percent.

…but resisted. Not with those kinds of odds. It’d be even harder to placate her after that, and I’m sure the crowd would think I was a bully. So I kept running and running until the clock ran out.

Well, at least I managed to save face. I had now shown what I could do to all five of my students.

“Wow, that adviser in the mask is amazing! He doesn’t look older than ten or so, and he just dominated those little hellions!”

“That was a B-ranked adventurer? No way. Strength like that has Shizu written all over it!”

With that kind of commentary from the crowd, I felt safe assuming my reputation around school was now secure.

These kids were powerful, but their skill sets had a sort of patchwork feel. If I had to guess, it wasn’t because those were skills they were aiming for—they just tripped over them as they imitated Shizu.

Plus, I had made a vital observation. I theorized that letting them fight all-out would sap their magicule count a bit…but all it did was skim a bit off the top. The energy at the root of their bodies didn’t drop at all. That much was clear from the generally weak performance of all their magics.

I guess there was no fixing the imbalance that way. Beyond that, I thought about using my Deviant unique skill to separate the energy from them, then Gluttony to either consume or isolate it. But if I had to guess…

Received. Energy fused with an entity’s soul cannot be separated from it.

Nope, guess not. I had noticed as much as I observed them in-depth during combat. So I’d have to make them obtain a unique skill—or figure out something else.

There wasn’t much time left. If five years was the maximum Yuuki knew about, these children would be lucky to have twelve more months. I had to find a way—any way—to drain the magicules from them before the power destroyed them from the inside.

But while it didn’t exactly come by the gentlest of methods, I now had a full grasp of their situation. I weighed my options as we cleaned up the gym and returned to our classroom. Physically exercising their skills didn’t solve anything, but helping them release some magic would help delay the inevitable, at least a little. We’d need to hold these “treatment sessions” regularly as I worked out a way to address the main issue.

Back in class, I sat the kids down and addressed them.

“Now. As you’ve all just experienced, I am, um, kind of strong. But I promise you: I am going to help all of you out. I swear it by my mask here.”

They sat quietly. I felt like they were paying much closer attention now. There’s one victory for the time being, then. We needed to connect this way, heart-to-heart, or else they’d just tune me out—but now, as much as I had to force it, we had that connection.

“Um…is that Miss Shizu’s mask?”

“That’s right, Alice. Shizu gave it to me…and when I accepted it, I guess I agreed to take you guys on, too.”

Not until I started dreaming about it recently, technically. But that didn’t matter.

“All right,” Alice said, nodding her satisfaction. “I believe you.”

“Um, m-me too…”

“I believed in you from the beginning, ya know!”

Alice, Ryota, and Chloe were willing to open their hearts to me, at least.

“Oh, come on, guys… In that case, I guess…”

“Yeah, Kenya. I think we can trust in this guy, too.”

Kenya’s and Gail’s consent sealed the deal. I had their trust. They recognized me as a teacher now.

Speaking of that mask, though… I feel like something just jogged my memory. Shizu had tasked me with the mission…of striking the demon lord Leon. Not kill or defeat, but strike. Did she not really want revenge on him, after all? Maybe not. If she did, she would’ve attacked him back when she was at the pinnacle of her strength.

But…hang on. She said she came here before she was even ten years old, I think. So how did she survive? I needed to think. We didn’t talk for very long, but I felt like she might’ve hidden a hint or two in there. I always found it weird that she’d abandon these children for her own mission. Why did she suddenly see fit to take action on them now, of all times?

—Hurry!

Ah, I see… She headed for Leon because she wanted to help them out. Striking Leon and saving the children—these both connected to the same goal.

—The demon lord Leon knows how to rescue the children. I know, because he rescued me.

Was that her line of thinking? But…how?

I hooked myself up to the Great Sage, pondering over this with everything I had. As always, it didn’t let me down. Whether Leon deliberately saved Shizu’s life didn’t matter. The only question was how.

Received. Inferring the demon lord Leon Cromwell’s method for saving Shizue Izawa… Complete. This is an inference based on collected circumstantial evidence, but…

The Sage’s answer rang in my head. It would be a gruelingly difficult road for these children—the long bet to end all long bets. To me, though, it was an easy ordeal to accept.

The only issue was…

“Listen. I promise I’ll save all of you, but to do that, I need you to trust me and act like good boys and girls. All right? Shizu’s entrusted me with you, and I’m not going to abandon any of you!”

Confidence spread within me as I spoke. I couldn’t show any anxiety in front of these kids. They rewarded me with their calm, resolute stares.

“““Thank you, Mr. Rimuru!!”””

Mr. Rimuru. I liked the sound of that. Well, you’re on. I was Mr. Rimuru to them, and that meant they were as good as saved. I swore it in my heart now.