Wicked Deity

by Venithil

Summary

A world in which creatures formerly identified as monsters are now primarily interested in sex, romance, and relationships, this recent change still hasn't managed to remove neither the thrill nor dangers of adventuring. With plenty of dangers other than monsters to make people who want to be heroes risk much more than their virtue, from a dungeoneering experience that should've made them enemies... Can a group arise to help in truly making this world a utopia the new ruler of monsters dreams of?

Notes

This story is set in a world based on Monster Girl Encyclopedia, but altered. The primary change is inclusion of creatures other than monsters/monstergirls, and altering of some creatures that are currently recognized as monstergirls in MGE, as a danger to both humanity and potentially even monsterkind. This leads to a greater degree of violence, number of fatalities, and serious injuries as well as to-death fights than in the original MGE, but the basic
premise is the same, and monsters (despite their attitudes and habits) are in general not the "evil" side of the conflict.

Other important alterations are the change of pantheon and the relatively recent change from monsters to monstergirls. In Kenkou Cross' Monster Girl Encyclopedia, it's suggested the change took place hundreds of years ago. In this story, the change is only several decades back. The overall story and geography of the land, while strongly inspired by MGE, is also different. These changes are slowly explained in-story, but eventually I'll be posting information-only chapters as links, as chapters of this work, or as a separate entry.

Please recognize that while Kenkou Cross' Monster Girl Encyclopedia is designed primarily as something of an escapist fantasy filled with happy ending, this story is designed to enable serious adventuring and dangerous conflict in an overall similar environment still. As a result, it goes against that designation in several points. However, it is not at the same time meant to be highly tragic: The primary story arc will be filled with a balance of happy, sad, angsty, peaceful, and testing moments. For many intents and purposes, this is the story of your traditional fantasy world in which it just so happened that recently most of the highly dangerous creatures changed into highly sexualized and feminine creatures instead.

DISCLAIMER: Monster Girl Encyclopedia belongs to Kenkou Cross. This story is an alteration highly based on it, and a non-profit fanwork. I do not gain or intend to gain any sort of physical or monetary benefit from this story, ever. Most of the characters in this story are original, but based on ideas from Kenkou Cross and MGE.
The two young men approached the cemetery’s gate. Looking around carefully, they stepped through, their motions those of people used to conflict. Gravestones poked out of the ground all around them, many worn away by the elements to the point that no words could be made out on them. Some had even crumbled away. Scattered in amongst the graves were burial slabs and small crypts, along with a few dead looking trees, but dominating the area from the crest of a small rise in the ground was a much larger and more ornate crypt, easily the size of a small cottage.

Under that crypt was their destination.

- Why do you think it’s called the Crypt of the Black Moth anyway, Deryn? - The taller of the two young men addressed the other.

- Conall, if you really think I’d pay much attention and thought to why exactly it’s called that and not anything else, you’re... well, you’re mistaken.”

- I’m just making conversation here. And, there’s probably some kind of reason.

The shorter man sighed.

- I suppose the first monster resident was an insect-like creature of some kind. Since the first guy who saw it thought it resembled a black moth, voila. Black Moth’s crypt.

- Do you think that’s what inside? Insects?

- Not really. To best of my knowledge, the insect-like monsters aren’t all that social, smart and dangerous. Not to mention, the folks claim to have seen a few undead occasionally, so it has to be something else. With magical power. Maybe it’s not even a resident, but an item that’s causing the trouble. Besides, it’s been called Black Moth’s crypt for years, you’ve heard. If it was just a single insect monster, Order’s vanguard would’ve kicked it out of here long ago.

- We’d be rewarded if it was a magic item and we brought it to the Order.

- They’d just destroy it anyways. ‘All magic not approved by the Divine Teachings and not of deific descent must be contained or destroyed’.
Still, it’d be worth the time to bring it to them. Some of the Order’s priests already take care to study the dark magic items before destroying them, especially given the pantheon revolution.

Deryn just shrugged his shoulders. Just wait till they declare those who study the items dangerous heretics. I’m really starting to believe the Order is overdoing this.

Well, the monsters and the Demon Lord are probably more powerful than ever. Of course the Order will become more cautious.

And, apparently, so should we.

In front of them a construct quite fitting for a cemetery appeared; a pale upper body of a human woman encompassed by bones shielding it, and using other bones to form arms and legs, releasing some very pale, faint, violet light from the joints.

The duo didn’t wait for a long time; after all, if there were more of these creatures, they couldn’t afford to get overrun by them.

The duo grabbed their weapons and prepared to finish it off quickly. The taller, Conall, used a polearm - a partisan to be precise - while the shorter of the two, Deryn, fought with a classic one-handed sword and a flanged mace. Most people in the nearby village probably couldn’t even count to numbers equal to the amount of fights Deryn and Conall participated in together. There weren’t many flaws in their teamwork when ganging up on a single monster, especially of the more popular types. The skeleton’s foot was immediately trapped by a swift, well-placed stab through the metatarsal bones by Conall’s partisan. A stab through the creature’s chest by Deryn’s blade was mostly to help him aim what was intended as a finisher… a series of blows with the mace, to crack all the bones and finish the creature off.

Deryn honestly disliked beating up something he knew didn’t work consciously, but more by instinct or on someone’s magically sent orders, and he didn’t like fighting women, either. However, he got into dangerous situations enough, even at his very young age, to achieve and maintain the kind of focus that simply allowed him to shove these regrets and dislikes aside when the situation called for it.

So, he just started battering at the skeleton’s body till he was sure it couldn’t move anymore. He was pretty sure the magic powering it up wouldn’t be enough to make it put itself back at its current energy amount, either. Just in case, he delivered a few more slashes and bashes to damage it further. Conall didn’t ask questions, but spoke after a moment.

There’s little point in staying around here battling more of them, right? If we just take the item or beat the creature that’s causing all this, they should be taken care of, right?

Deryn just smiled. Conall was, at the core, a simple guy who didn’t exert his mind all that much, though he wasn’t exactly stupid either. But, when in a battle that required tactics, or when it came to dungeon exploring, his mind suddenly sharpened. Of course, this was a pretty simple deduction, but it wasn’t the limit of his thinking capabilities in such situations, either.

Yeah. Let’s just quickly go down and take care of this.

They sheathed their weapons and quickly ran towards the crypt, looking around in case more monsters appeared. Seeing or hearing nothing, They jumped in moments later.
- No visible entrance, so there ought to be a hidden one. Let’s start pushing them damn stones.

Deryn just nodded again and started exploring the walls in search for a movable stone or a switch.

- Why do they never make entrances clear and dungeons non-trapped? It’d be so much easier if we just had the beasts, golems, undead and whatever to take care of.

- Yup.

- I mean, practically, the dungeon exists only for someone to get through it and rob it anyway. Sure, people fail, but there are so many heroes someone’s just bound to beat their way through it at some point, right?

- Yup.

- I get it that them beasties are trying to prove themselves smart, but I’d rather they just proved themselves honourable and stood and fight like proper warriors, you know that I mean?

- Yup. Found a switch.

Without thinking much, Deryn pressed it. It was the correct one, as a wall near them suddenly shifted, exposing a path that moved lower, to beneath the floor level of the crypt.

The problem was, they were still separated from that path by a metal gate of sorts.

- So... we need to find another switch?

- I’m not... sure really. This appears more like the creator or original resident made that path for when they wanted to get *out* of there. It’s an exit, not an entrance.

He looked around with a curious, inspecting gaze.

- Come to think of it, there’s no reason for an entrance to be obvious nor something a sane person would try to find. If there’s a resident, it might’ve used that exit to lure people in, and getting a tactical advantage over the already weak villagers or adventurers.

- Your point being?

- Check the graves.

- Seriously?

- Just check them!

It didn’t take long for Conall to follow that ‘advice’ and they started opening the coffins. Some were empty or filled with just bones, but finally, the taller youngster shouted - You were right! It leads to under the floor right here!

Pleased, Deryn approached, looking for something in their backpack.

- We need a rope. I assume we may be able to open the proper exit, but it’s better to have a way out. Ideally, we’d also have a person stand guard here, but the undead at the Cemetery aren’t likely to
be able to undo the rope. Let’s make the bindings extra hard, just in case. Well, you’re not all that light, either.

- I’m heavier than you because you’re so short. Don’t flatter yourself.

- Inch and a half taller and you feel like a big man. Come on, help me tie that rope properly.

Soon enough, the rope was secured to one of the pillars in the crypt, and they jumped through the entrance that one of the coffins turned out to be.

Already on below-ground level, the duo of warriors looked around the area, making sure no one was around and they were safe.

There *was* someone observing them, but it was highly improbable that this peeping tom would be detected.

Conall was the one with the slightly sharper perception, so despite the relative darkness and risk of such behaviour, when he claimed he sees no one, Deryn simply believed him, squeezed his belt tighter and spoke matter-of-factly.

- Let’s go. Slowly. There could be traps everywhere.

Conall responded with a nod of his own and the pair moved forward with cautiousness.

The one that observed them didn’t have to be all that cautious. This dungeon was her home.

As Conall and Deryn were slowly moving through the dungeon, disarming the very occasional trap they came across, the thing that spied on them was already in the very heart of the dungeon, ready to make its report.

- A... Gargoyle? Seriously?

- It shouldn’t give us any problems… Conall cut into before Deryn managed to start ranting. - They usually have a limit of activity - either night only, or up to half a day in the darkness. We don’t even know if this is just a statue or an actual gargoyle.

The pair slowly approached, trying to give the statue as wide a berth as possible.

- Why do they even put breasts on these things? It’s not like it works as additional armour!

- Like many creatures under the current Demon Lord their appearance is meant to distract heroes battling them. They’re still dangerous, but as I said, the limit on the activity time still applies to them.

- But regardless which one applies to her, it was already dusk outside when we entered. Meaning we *are* in danger, aren’t we?

- It’s not attacking. The two other Gargoyles I’ve met in my life would both react at that distance.

- Let’s just get out of this room. It’s freaking me out anyway, whether you had an experience with
these things or not.

The construct entered the chamber of the more-or-less ruler of the dungeon, surrounding cemetery and a begrudgingly accepted top-of-the-pyramid as far as the non-humans nearby that cemetery knew.

If the golem Kirika was to voice her own opinion, her owner didn’t care much for rulership of anything. Staying in the dungeon and waiting for nobody knew what was the only thing her Mistress was ever doing that she knew of… except for the occasional read and talk with the few other truly intelligent residents of the cemetery and surrounding grounds. Kirika occasionally discussed issues with her owner as well, being more-or-less the construct with the greatest intelligence and most complex personality in the dungeon, but compared to some of the other residents she was still unintelligent and base. At least her speech patterns were completely implemented and she could give the full report.

- Mistress, we have two intruders in the crypt. They appeared to have taken course through the guardian’s room and seem to be intelligent enough to find their way around this place.

- Oh? We have guests? And they’re already in my dungeon. I’m going to have to check if the cemetery guarding squad is still intact after this, it would seem...

- I’ll see to it that they’re properly counted, Mistress. But, about the intruders...

- Well, I can’t sense them yet. Nothing to be surprised about, at such a distance, if their spiritual energy isn’t something special, then regardless of focus... Describe them for me, could you?

- I’ll try my best, Mistress. They are a pair of males, no visible sign of aging, so presumably young, both short of six feet tall, one taller than the other. One was armed with a polearm, I was unable to study the weapons of the other. They had fair skin and dark hair, the shorter one had them black, like the Mistress’ marking, and the other had them in a colour similar to wood.

- Two young men? Suddenly, they started falling from the sky or something? Well, it still doesn’t matter at all unless they reach this point here.

- What shall I do about them, Mistress?

- Send Deborah at them straight away. Have Annah release the Slimes. All of them. In case Deborah fails, just place them so they have to run into them before they come here. Once Annah gets back from releasing them, simply guard the neighbouring room together with her. If they can’t just take you one on one each, there’s no point in even having them see me.

- Of course, Mistress. What shall we do in case they attempt to escape?

- I’ll take care of that, there’s no need to worry. People usually don’t leave my dungeon unless I want them to. I’ll take care of cutting them away... However, since they’re young, in order for the test to be fair... make sure to use fighting protocols before any other protocols. Understood?

- Yes, Mistress. I’ll carry these orders straight away.
- Thank you, Kirika.

There was no need to thank her, as Mistress was her owner. The thought... was appreciated. After hearing ‘Thank you’ and at times even seeing Mistress smile, Kirika managed to learn the concept of appreciation.

Which is why if Mistress did not want to see these men, she would not let them get past her.

Conall and Deryn just fought what Deryn referred to as a ‘long delayed welcoming committee’. Two skeleton guardians posed little challenge to the talented fighters, however, so the victory wasn’t exactly earned through a lot of effort. This caused Deryn to speak up.

- For a dungeon, it’s really pitifully protected so far. I mean, a few traps, a few undead at the cemetery, two skeletons here, a gargoyle that doesn’t even move and now this...

- They came through the sides when the corridor appeared to be only one-directional. That proves that, at the very least, they were tactically placed.

- The skeletons here sure seem to lack the empowering energy, though. Kind of like they were not really cared about or maintained. Perhaps they’re usually not used?

- That is possible, though that would suggest that the resident of the crypt is either having to conserve their energy already, possibly dying, or really overconfident, thinking they do not need guardians. My first guess would be vampire.

- Vampire? Conall, are you kidding me?

- Sure, I haven’t fought one, and people claim they’re very powerful, but just think about it. Nearly no people have been at this place for years, it’s a cemetery, guarded by some undead creatures... It’s very possibly an old or malnourished vampire that has to conserve energy and doesn’t share it with its servants due to the lack of blood sources. Also, they’re usually very confident, from what I’ve heard, so it makes sense.

- If it really is a vampire of legend, we have to make sure that we’re well prepared and cautious.

- Yes, we’d better... Look out!

In the last moment, Conall managed to push Deryn out of the way. He, himself, was a victim of a pretty vicious charge, but at least managed to prepare himself for the blow.

A feminine figure, taller than both of them, with a body seemingly composed of something mid-way between mud and flesh, with short, apparently green-tinted hair was the attacker. She was protected in places by rune-covered stone tablets, shaped to look like bracelets and over knee socks.

This would be tougher than the skeletons.

Kirika opened her eyes upon hearing her Mistress’ voice again.
- Deborah has already engaged the intruders. I will now tend to cutting off their path of escape. You should just wait in the neighbouring chamber for Annah, Kirika. If anything changes about the situation, come and give me a report. You or Annah can monitor their progress when they enter the room with the slimes, but just in case, don’t engage them on your own.

- As you wish, Mistress.

The tall, black-haired golem left upon receiving these final orders. The dungeon’s owner decided it’s time to use the magical jewellery and her other contacts.

Opening a small chest next to a not-so-small bed, she pulled out a shining pendant and put it on. After playing with it in her hands for a few seconds, slowly pouring in magical energy, the gem in said pendant started to shine.

Two telepathically connections were immediately opened. One was nearly blank. The other was been immediately flooded with excess information.

- Auntie! I haven’t heard from you in this way in quite some time. To what do I owe the pleasure of receiving a message from the great Black Moth herself? Is it something fun fun fun? Or more like damn stupid boring work that bores the crap out of other people? Tell me tell me!

- Be silent for a moment, Cybil. I need your help, sure, but you may actually get some fun out of it.

- Eeeehhh? Helping you fun? The only way helping you would be fun was if this damn crypt of yours was suddenly assaulted by delicious boys! Has it? Has it?

- We do have two intruding adventurers. They seem to be handling themselves so far. Kirika claims they are rather young, but unless they’re talented, I don’t see them prevailing here since I’ve already sent out one of my golems. However, it could be that they’ll try to escape, so I need your help gathering up my remaining skeleton constructs and zombies and cutting their way out of the cemetery.

- Eeeehhh? Do I really have to run around gathering those ugly smelly corpses?

- I’d do it through my servants only, but all of the golems are in the dungeon, I’ve only just released Glaw and the other slimes and have them set up an ambush, and you know Uroku has only developed rudimentary intelligence so far and it’d be hard for her to gather all the other cemetery guard on her own.

- Sure thing that big-assed corpse only has rudi-whatever intelligence! The fact that she picked that ugly dumb name on her own proves she’s stupid as all Hell!

- I’m displeased by you talking about my servants like that. Perhaps I should punish you by not letting you play with those boys once I capture them.

- Nooooo, commmeeern!!! You know nobody normal has your patience with that stuff, Auntie! I’m not like you, I need to play and extract some energy once in a while!

- Your remarks about my age and the abnormality of my ‘patience’, as you call it, are equally displeasing as you badmouthing my servants, Cybil. Better just get to work.

- Sure, sure, just lend me a boy when they’re caught, willl yooouuuu?!
- Your stance on that matter will be considered.

- Hiihihi! Thanks, Auntie! I’ll get right to it.

The ‘Black Moth’ shifted to the other telepathic connection.

- Urokfu? Urokfu, can you hear me?

- Huh? A... Voice?

- It’s me. You Mistress. Can you properly receive the connection?

- Yes, Mis-tres..s. I... can.

- Very well. Urokfu, I need you to gather all my other servants you meet on your way and have them guard the entrance to the crypt. There’s a chance people will try to *leave* it. Unless told otherwise, try to stop them, will you.

- Yes, Miss...tress. I believe... that can be done... by this Urokfu.

- Excellent.

The owner of the dungeon took off the pendant and practically threw herself on the bed, holding it up.

- How exactly one is supposed to be completely content with all this? Only Kirika seems to actually be developing at a normal pace. Glaw would escape if I let her wander around, and Cybil’s childish, fickle, and a pain in the ass.

She did not allow herself a sigh. It was too soon to be that bothered.

Deryn quickly got back on his feet and counter-attacked the construct, or what he guessed was one, that attempted to follow up the charge on Conall. He tried to use the mace, but the golem was fast enough to dodge and respond with a quick punch. The black-haired youth also had enough reflex to move to the left.

Right next to his lying companion.

Conall moved his legs and Deryn connected their feet. The taller man kicked with his legs and propelled his companion upward and forward, allowing him to place a quick blow with his mace straight at the golem’s head. Conall, in the meantime, could prepare his own strike, stabbing his partisan straight into the golem’s chest.

Once Deborah regained her balance, however, she grabbed at Deryn’s hand as he attempted to slash at her back, and threw him at the nearby wall. The raising Conall received a powerful kick right to his chest, also sending him away a few feet.
The duo quickly regained their composure and struck at the golem from both sides, working in unison to take it down, striking several blows until Deborah managed to grab Conall’s polearm and use it as leverage to strike Deryn with his own partner’s body.

Conall used the golem’s own strength against her; grabbing the polearm hard, he pushed himself up using it and the golem’s strong hold and kicked Deborah straight in the face. While falling, he delivered a kick with the other leg… straight into the wound he inflicted on the golem earlier. As he tried to land awkwardly in this pose she extended her knee and dealt him a vicious blow to his back. He *almost* heard a crack in his back and fell down onto the ground. The golem was ready to continue with the assault, but Deryn was all set to return the pain he received, rapidly striking with him mace from the side.

The strength of the blow stopped her from potentially knocking Conall out, and before she managed to turn to the new attacker, Deryn was already assaulting her with a flurry of blows. She was well protected, but had to back away from the attacking warrior, waiting for him to run out of gas at least a bit before countering.

But she never got the chance. Suddenly, Deryn ducked, making way for a quick throw of a short sword from Conall. It stabbed her straight in the stomach, and as she reacted to the damage, the shorter of the two fighters kicked at her legs, causing her to fall down and preparing for a wonderful follow-up attack by Conall. Again, a common tactic between the two; stab them into place with Conall’s partisan and have Deryn finish them off with his two weapons.

It’s not that Deborah’s fighting protocols were advanced enough to try and prevent this. She simply was most suited to attacking, so, when falling, she kicked Deryn away, making that plan impossible. Instead, Conall did stab her to immobilize her into the ground, but instead of having his companion help him, took a small buckler from his back and started to rapidly strike the golem’s head with it, before rising in order to ‘finish the job’ with the partisan if it was necessary.

This time, the Black Moth did allow herself a sigh.

- Deborah’s combat functions... sensory functions... movement functions... fluid level control functions... It’s no use, they’re all shut down.

Putting her hands on her shoulders, she made up her mind.

- She was the least emotionally developed of the three, but, still... A golem’s not a toy. No need to have mercy anymore with these guys. I won’t be stopping the slimes or Kirika from doing what they want to them when it comes down to it.

She put the pendant on again and activated it, deciding to check if the other servants are in position and ready.

- I wonder what reason these men even have for adventuring and fighting monsters. Kirika said they seemed young. Probably some mommy or daddy-implemented idealism. Or racial purity. Whatever.

She stretched, and started to move around her room, waiting for more reports.
The owner of the tavern ‘Under the Ebony Rose’, in the nearby town of Brasmos, was pretty sure no more clients will arrive that late at night. Yet, suddenly, he heard steps just outside the tavern, and some voices talking to one another.

- **Damn, that was some serious monsta-plant burning, amirite?**

- **Never would’ve guessed a honeybee will come around and help the freakin’ plants, though. Well, whatever. Done a good job haven’t we, Sir Knightey?**

The doors suddenly opened. A man with a short beard, dark blonde hair, just above six feet tall walked in, followed by a duo of rather similarly looking, somewhat darkly-skinned, auburn haired fighters… a man and a girl. The man in the front was clad in knightly armour, visibly a member of the Order, probably on some monster-slaying mission. He had a large crossbow on his back and an impressive bastard sword by his belt. The last man who walked in was seemingly younger than the knight in the front, but his age compared to the rest of people in the group was hard to guess. He was of the same height as the taller one of the adventurers that asked around about the Black Moth Dungeon the very same day, but appearing older. His look was infinitely more grim, with a visible scar under his left eye, just under the slightly prominent dark bags under his eyes, contrasting his pale skin, and with a head full of grey hair, as if age was already taking its due on him.

They walked in to the bar, all scanning the area with their own expressions. The darker-skinned ones seemed pretty relaxed, but quite the troublemakers. Both of the other men however had expressions that pretty much meant business.

Deryn was disturbed. Suddenly, this was going downhill from no injuries to pretty beaten up by a single opponent.

- **Conall, maybe we should turn back for a while to figure out a way to open that exit path, in case we have to withdraw...**

- **Withdraw? Don’t be ridiculous. This obviously was some sort of elite guardian. We’re nearly there. I can tell.**

- **Didn’t you advise caution? I mean, if it really *is* a vampire, just getting a little bit of our blood, it could immediately spring back to greater strength. It would be risky to not even have an exit ready!**

- **I’m pretty confident we can...**

- **You’re always pretty confident. You know how defeat tastes like, so maybe we should try being cautious after all.**
Come on, Conall. We’ll both feel more relaxed if we do this.

Fine. Let’s turn back to where we came from for a while.

But, as they turned, the path was already closed.

Something very gooey, somewhat translucent, red, and quicker moving than one’d expect was sliding across the wall, closer and closer to them. As it approached, it started taking on a shape… at first somewhat humanoid and androgynous, then more and more defined, ending at a very feminine shape with visible, nipple-less breasts of slime.

When they looked behind themselves, they realized there were two similar, but blue monsters approaching them from that side as well.

Basically, it was between a rock and a hard place.

Deryn, I think we’re gonna have to fight our way out of this...

So it would seem, Conall. So it would seem. I’m taking the blue ones.

Conall readied his partizan and prepared for battle. Deryn turned to the two approaching blue slimes. The read slime in front of the taller warrior suddenly seemed chirpier, as it attempted to clap its gooey hands, then gave him something clearly resembling a smile, and then, put one of its - her? - fingers between two other fingers encircled in the air.

Conall had enough of a grasp of innuendo to catch on that.

I shall not do anything to strengthen the lord of this dungeon willingly, monster! Run or prepare to fight me!

The red slime pouted, visibly dissatisfied with that resolution. Suddenly, two pseudopod-like structures fired at Conall. He was quick enough to dodge, duck, and roll towards the red slime. The slime girl herself suddenly bounced in place, then slid onto the wall, propelled itself off it and hit him with her entire, concentrated mass, sending him quite strongly onto the other wall and covering him with some slime in the process. He felt the slime covering him suddenly tighten over his limbs and neck as the creature reorganized its structure again and had its main body approaching.

He quickly shook off as much slime as he could from his body and swept his partisan, tearing off a large chunk of the slime in the process. The slime girl was surprised, but immediately made an attempt to recover. He slashed again, but this time, she ducked under the attack, and sent her own punch to meet the warrior’s body. It hurt, but suddenly, her other hand pushed forward, grabbed his hand and threw him against the wall.

A wall that was already covered in much of her slime, which immediately grabbed his body and tried to engulf as much of it possible.

He could feel it sliding against his naked skin, a lot of the slime making a *very* rapid move towards
his groin area. The slime girl’s face lightened up again as she gave him a mocking, open-mouthed face. Twisting his body and freeing it of the slime, he kicked her in the head immediately, before stabbing, and again slashing, with his partisan. Changing to one handed style, he also grabbed his buckler to better protect himself against more attacks as he felt the slime slowly retreat from his body.

The slime girl pouted again and sent numerous pseudopodia to strike at him from different angles, but he was already protecting himself with the buckler and methodically stabbing her with his partisan, looking for weak points.

But there seemed to not be any. She could pretty easily recover any damage dealt to her, and actually *damaging* the slimy body required tremendous strength and velocity of the strike, at least in case of piercing or slashing. Bashing her with the shield worked if he was quick enough to act before she tried to liquefy herself further, but seemed to almost not do any damage at all, just knock her back.

- Damn it! Damn you! How can you regenerate so easily? What can I do to win?

He noticed her excess substance has thinned very, very slightly during their battle and realized that regeneration actually wasn’t like breathing to the creature. Attempting to deliver stronger, more critical strikes, his focus increased. He started to put all he could into the fight, dodging skilfully and blocking the slime’s pseudopodia.

A few sharp strikes and groin strokes later, the slime seemed to be at the end of its patience. Just as he blocked another one of its attacks and struck for the body’s ‘neck’, the slime’s face snarled. Her body arched, and the two clearly breast-resembling growths on her chest suddenly shivered, bulged, and expanded with tremendous speed. The first, left one smashed his shield to pieces and wrapped around his arm. The other struck his body, but the fact that the first one held him so closely increased the strength of the blow. After the strike, the other boob-podia stayed and tried to wrap itself around his waist.

Conall groaned and grabbed his partisan both-handed again, putting all his strength into moving it towards the slimegirl, then sharply breaking off as much of her slime as possible before going out with a full-power assault.

Repeatedly and with incredible speed, he stabbed, slashed, smacked, stabbed again, picked at and tried to run through the slime girl with a flurry of attacks with his polearm. The slime girl backed away and actually covered herself from the repeated blows, her ability to regenerate obviously not keeping up with his speed and strength.

- Finally, you’re going down! Take this! And this! And that! I will prevail!

Suddenly another mass hit Conall’s back, with significant power. He felt appendages somewhat cooler than those of the slime girl he fought against so far wrap around his body and try to get under his clothes as they wrapped around his body strongly, trying to cause him to cease movement. The slime in front of him didn’t missed its chance, curling up before propelling itself forward, head-butting strongly into his stomach while throwing her entire body at him.

Conall bent over his stomach, and then fell onto his knees. If one of the blue slimes was already attacking him, it meant Deryn either lost, or was being overwhelmed.
The situation suddenly took a turn for the worst as he felt his consciousness somewhat fade.
Chapter Summary

With Conall and Deryn down for the count, what will happen to them?

Chapter Notes

In stories where I don’t make separate chapters for sexual content, I tend to mark it somehow in order for the person involved to realize some sort of a scene is approaching and avoid getting into reading something they may honestly dislike. If the next several paragraphs are going to be sexual in nature, I mark a section by separating it with a string of "*******" signs. By reading the end of the old section or the start of the new section, you should be, most of the time, able to predict the pairing and sometimes the nature of the scene, allowing you to read or avoid it.

The group of for just finished their talk with the owner. They rented three rooms for the night, no more - which already kind of surprised him. The knight in the armor turned to the gray-haired man. The owner realized that his age was *very* hard to guess - the grim expression on his face and the bags under the eyes told a tale of much struggle, and so did the scar, but the exposed skin of his neck, youthful build, and face otherwise untouched by time suggested he might’ve been, in fact, pretty young.

- So, Mister Haneo, are you sure what you’ve said during this mission is final? Do you wish to receive your part of the payment and leave our company?

The voice of the other man was unsurprisingly calm and quiet, but surprisingly youthful.

- Yes, please. I wish to do something else now.
- I see. Very well. I was surprised when my blacksmith friend told me it’d be wise to hire you, given your age and lack of renown, but I’m pleasantly surprised. You’ve held your own.

The woman suddenly spoke.

- Yo, Kei, how about you give us some of your share, and we have some fun instead? To make this evening memorable and stuff.

- Not interested.
- You’re such a stick in the mud at times, you know?

The glare he delivered next kind of ruined the cool, collected image he seemed to project. It was... rather angry. Hateful, even. The girl backed off, as the knight simply handed him a bag, probably full of coins or gems.

- Mr Haneo, thank you for your professional input into the success of these last two missions. I’ll remember you in case I require similar services in the future.

The man called Haneo nodded. The knight repeated the gesture first to him, then to the inkeeper as he moved to the staircase leading upwards to their rooms.

The gray-haired young man approached the owner.
- Good evening to you.
- Good evening, mister...

The innkeeper nodded and rubbed his chin, as if lost in thoughts for a moment.
- Pardon me, Mister, but you don’t really look like you’re from Zipangu all that much.
- Two of my grandparents come from this continent. Since I’m of mixed blood, it’s natural I may seem like one of the natives here.
- I see, but you are from that continent. Then, I should refer to you as...
- Keita’s fine. I’m used to first name basis and lack of honorifics already. And your name?
- Arnold, mister Keita.
- Well, mister Arnold, I’ve been hearing some people here have sighted undead and similar odd creatures. While the gentlemen and lady I’ve just separated myself from are certainly interested in killing monsters, they’re mostly here on business and don’t have time to investigate such things. Is it true that you’re having some pretty dark-ish problems in these parts?
- Ah, yes. Indeed. Many claim to have sighted monstrosities in the nearby abandoned cemetery. It’s said to be a location once inhabited by a powerful monster, and our elders confirm it.
- Tell me of this monster.
- There actually were two adventurers here who have specifically asked for this place. I don’t know all the details myself, mister, except that many people refer to a crypt in that cemetery as “The Black Moth’s crypt”. During a certain drinking party, a retired hunter from here claimed that it was once the most dangerous place in miles. Even today, no one really goes there, partially because of these undead sightings, but the atmosphere in this place and a nearby small forest is just... creepy. On the other hand, it doesn’t seem like this place was dangerous for that long. A decade, maybe two.
- It may be just the kind of atmosphere I’m looking for. Where can I find this cemetery?
- Are you sure you want to go there, mister? You seem pretty tired, and even your companions went to rest, besides, those two adventurers earlier could’ve...

That glare again. Upon being treated to it, the owner explained how to reach the cemetery. And has done so quickly.
Once the man has left, he realized what made his glances seem even more disturbing.
Each one of his eyes’ irises had a different color.

Kirika heard the sounds of battle before and now decided to see for her own how the two intruders fared against her Mistress’ slimes.

The creatures were the only ones held in the dungeon against their will, or so it’d seem; however, they were also the only ones allowed to immediately act on their monstergirl instincts upon running into a male; other creatures were to test the various abilities, strength, or potential of anyone who “visited”. If such potential was measured to be too low, which meant just about every visitor to the dungeon, they were allowed to use the man as a source of energy.

Practically all males survived trips to the dungeon, for reasons that were Mistress’ alone, but through her allies, they were transported elsewhere in order not to reveal the secrets about it to other adventurers.

Kirika did not know for how long this situation has been taking place, but she suspected it was the case long before her creation.
There was something empty about that existence, but as a golem, she had troubles completely figuring that out.
As she moved past the last corridor, she detected sounds that couldn’t be mistaken for anything else, which nearly surely meant that the Slimes either won or tempted the two adventurers into giving in. Just to make sure, she looked at the scene before her, and indeed, the fight was already over.

The two young men were both lying on the floor, pieces of their armor removed, undone, or floating inside the slimes that were already on top of them.

Kirika currently didn’t want to watch, as she was pretty low on “fuel” and it might awaken those strange... “stirrings” inside of her. Not to mention someone had to inform Mistress that the adventurers failed to defeat the Slimes.

********************************

Deryn was lying on the floor, pieces of his clothes already spread all over the place. The slime floating about right over him was oddly satisfied, with something resembling a bubbly, innocent smile on its lips and was visibly anxious to have access to his naked body.

- Co... Conall, help!
- I’m kinda down, too! You couldn’t hold this one off and it took me down...by surprise...

[“Damn it”, Deryn thought.]
- Why... are they taking our armor? What are they gonna do to us?
- I’m pretty sure there are only two possible outcomes of this situation.
- And you mean what outcomes, exactly?
- One, they search for a cut on our bodies or similar opening and suck out all the fluids and moisture from our bodies through it, since Slimes have a taste for human bodily fluids from what I know.
- I don’t like that outcome! What’s the alternative?!

Conall sighed, and spoke with some resignation.
- We’re going to get raped.

Something crawled inside Deryn’s underwear and the slime’s “smile” broadened as said piece of clothing was stretched by goo to the very end of stretchability until it tore and gave way. At the same time, the slime quite rhythmically rubbed against Deryn’s so far soft piece of meat.

His eyes darted open at both the sensation and Conall’s prediction of the outcome of the situation.
- What do you mean raped!? I haven’t even done it with a girl before! Not to mention, I’m a guy, so how they’re gonna rape us? No, wait, they’re gonna put something IN THERE?!

Conall was already erect and the slime practically threw itself over him, splashing on the sides and covering his body with somewhat cool, viscous, moving fluid.

His member was dipped in formless slime that initially didn’t seem all that pleasant at all, other than the overall sensation of being engulfed.

He noticed the red slime that fought him had already regenerated her injuries. She was pouting, clearly not satisfied with the outcome but willing to let the blue slime temporarily take over and have her way first. He realized that whichever slime “got satisfied” first would lead to a rather rough resolution - the guy who satisfied said slime was going to get raped by the red slime awaiting her turn, thus being forced to produce more fluids than the other one. That being said, there were three slimes and only two guys, which meant technically they could switch around almost endlessly till
they’ve both run dry or passed out, and *no one* could guarantee that’d be the end of their problems.

The slime moving on top of him suddenly forced her innermost goo to somewhat change shape and start massaging his erection, rather chaotically but not uneffectively. He heard Deryn shouting “No! I don’t want to!” but there was no way for him to help the younger companion now. [“It’s really sad you have to lose your virginity to a monster in a place like this, pal... Now I wish we never tried exploring this dungeon... but it was a risk we took, and it’s still better than dying. At least, you’ll know it can feel pretty good so maybe finally you’ll take a more active interest in girls”].

Deryn, on his part, was pretty confused at the sensation of being completely coated by something from all sides and then taken inside while the rather liquid-like rest of his “partner” was mostly spread all over his body, coating, dripping over and around his sides, hips, balls, everything. Initially it just felt...wet. But when the slime’s machinations bared his glans completely and coated them with thick, cool, “alive” ooze, he shivered for reasons different than the coolness of the slime. It ran right over his slit, encircled his glans, run down and glued itself to the bottom side of his crown, and started massaging, gently at first, but at an increasing pace. He instinctively arched his back, seeking more of the consuming pleasure, thrusting his hips deeper into the goo regardless of any morality, ethics or doubts he may have. The slime bobbed on top of him somewhat cheerfully and gave him a smile while sliding her excess substance under him, supporting his hips and sliding over his back in a gooey embrace as she pressed her breast-like chestgrows against his own chest. Despite the sleek wet embrace, he could feel his skin getting somewhat more dry as he realized the slime absorbed the sweat he released from all the running and fighting today, but did not seem to force him to generate more of it or try and dry up his skin. Instead, she gently grabbed his face and traced his cheeks and neck while repositioning herself, making the feminine shape that composed most of the slime slide it’s “ass” right over his own hips. She dropped them onto him, slowly, spreading more of the thick, sticky liquid that composed her over his own body. He suddenly realized his penis was twitching furiously from the caresses, and also that so far, she’s been teasing him only with her breasts and her excess substance - for some reason, she had more of a dripping, pond-like area around her feminine lower body than the other two slimes. Suddenly, his member was drawn into something that seemed marginally more solid, and somehow both more active and more sticky than what she’d been using to pleasure him with before.

Being somewhat of an intellectualist that tried his best to be composed and control his urges, and also never having all that much awakened sex drive to begin with, Deryn masturbated four times and had two wet dreams during his 17 years of life. Only the best of the orgasms themselves were comparable to the feeling of being dipped inside something that he guessed was supposed to imitate a vagina made of slime and *nothing* in his life was as pleasurable as the sudden pulsing and twitching of his member at the moment of “insertion”, the tip of his penis expanding as it started to pump his semen inside the slimegirl.

Deryn couldn’t help but moan from mind-numbing pleasure as his balls contracted, a shiver ran down his spine and his member pulsed and twitched while releasing his own thick, sticky liquid into the oozy female on top of him. The slimegirl’s smile broadened again and she seemed to hug him closer to her chest with her arms, pressing her breasts against his chest, flattening them and engulfing his rapidly hardening nipples in her own boobs. She pressed her mouth against his own widely open one, sharing something resembling a kiss, only more awkward and weider due to her absorbing his
saliva like her life depended on it.

He didn’t care. He almost couldn’t even think at the moment - the potential embarassment of the premature ejaculation, the amount he was leaking straight into the hungry monstergirl, the increasingly pleasurable sensations of her inside as the slime around his cock contracted, tightened, flew around his dick and squeezed it affectionately but firmly to milk all of his sperm, all this barely even mattered - it was one of these moments you want to last forever.

When Deryn finally came to, the slime was still on top of him, white, cloudly liquid spread from around the tip of his penis to just under her breasts, dissipating slowly as her slime-pussy again started moving over his cock, giving off a squishy sound as her lower body flew over his, mixing with the sweat of his body and rest of the sperm dripping from his cock as it started to feel like a small, thick, viscous slimy whirlpool that existed only to milk his cock rode on top of him.

Deryn’s cock didn’t even think of becoming soft. He felt his hard pumping and head becoming slightly lighter as he got a harder erection than he ever thought possible. The slimegirl’s excess quickly flew over his body into the general direction of his cock, reacting to the hardness, heat and the semen that which’s flow was now slowed down to a dribble. It hit from all sides, squeezing him affectionately, then hard, then like a vice before forming *an actual whirlpool* of slime mixing around his cock.

In no time at all, he felt another orgasm coming.

Conall wasn’t a virgin like his companion; he couldn’t say he was very experienced nor had he ever tasted sex with a monstergirl, but he could endure the machinations of the slime for a while. He got to taste the pleasure of being dipped in what was a slime’s equalivent of a female’s vagina before the pleasure he gained from the act became to overwhelming and made him feel light-header.

He could feel the squishy, malleable, sticky and moving almost in sync with his heartbeat pseudo-ridges of a slime-pussy before his body gave up. The slimegirl bounced up and down on his happily, seeping his pre and draining his sweat as the incredibly jiggling body on top of him worked to make him ejaculate as quickly as possible before starting to work harder in order to have him jizz inside her many more times that would normally be possible in such a short period of time. *No* mortal pussy could caress a penis’ glans or accommodate a shaft so perfectly like a slimegirl’s; no amount of feminine lubricant could grant one the incredible, sublime feeling of dipping and then drowning one’s cock in a sometimes just sticky, jiggling fluid and sometimes moving, flowing mix of a slime’s insides.

His pride wounded from the fact he couldn’t endure, but still quite some time after he heard Deryn’s moan, Conall’s own balls drew closer to his body and prepared to shoot off.

The gelatinous girl on top of him suddenly squeezed hard and caused him to groan as his seed was drained from his body against his will, a thicker glob of male essence immediately soaking her depths and being absorbed, her slimy pussy instinctively working to make his dick cum like it was the most important thing every accomplished.

Men with more stamina and experience wouldn’t last against such an onslaught of sensations and his cock immediately gave up, shooting of a warm, creamy flag of surrender into the cheerful slimegirl.

At the same moment, as Conall barely noticed, the red slime moved from her so far stationary pose...
Kirika entered her Mistress’ chamber again. The barest hint of excitation she initially had from the situation was long gone.

- Mistress, the intruders have failed to overcome Glaw and the other two slimes. Right now, they’re being fed upon.

- Oh?

- Mistress?

- It’s nothing, Kirika. I am just kind of... disappointed, to be honest. I mean, win against a pretty well modified for combat golem just to lose to a bunch of slimes and get raped. That’s just kind of... sad.

- Any orders?

- Glaw may try to escape, so I’ll have to contact Urokfu and Cybil for a moment. Stand by...

- Of course, Mistress.

The connection was immediately established.

- Cybil, Urokfu, the situation has been brought under control. Since Glaw will be roaming free under the situation, she may try to leave through the crypt. If it happens, stop her. I’ll keep my necklace active so if anything out of ordinary happens, contact me immediately. Understood?

- Have them leave one of the boys good enough for me!

- Who’s... Glaw?

- Ahh... just make sure no one lives without my say so! Do the two of you understand!?

- Yes!!

- Ye...s...

- Excellent.

Then, Black Moth turned towards the servant already in her room.

- There’s a chance the slimes will try to continuously rape these guys to numerous spawns or that Glaw will attempt to take one for herself for a longer period. Both of these situations should be prevented. I don’t know who these people are, what their views are or how well they can perform sexually, but overfeeding a slime may not be safe and Glaw will be completely out of control if she gets a mate. Not that I disapprove, but I’d like to at least know who’s she's going to try and take for one.

- Understood.

- We should, however, give them a bit of privacy for now, not to mention the situation may yet
change and then we’d have to give you new orders, wouldn’t we? Come here, sit down.

Her Mistress seemed oddly concerned and serious at a time like this.

- Is something... wrong?

- Well... it’s been quite some time since you’ve refilled your tanks, hasn’t it? Sure, I’ve made you operational on magical energy as well and you’re not so often employed as to drain you particularly, but you must’ve already experienced some of the drawbacks of running on low fuel.

- I.. do not complain, Mistress. There’s no need to concern yourself. I have the utmost trust that as long as I’m helpful I can count on your aid in keeping me energized and running properly.

- Of course Kirika, but that’s not what I was referring to. You’ve witnessed these two young men in both full state of dress and perfect condition as well as defeated, beaten, and about to be fed upon. What did you feel? Most importantly, did you feel a preference for which one you’d like to use to refill your tanks?

Kirika truly wanted to sigh at the moment.

It was one of *those* talks.

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What happened next to their respective situations was barely even conceivable to either of the two would-be dungeon explorers.

First came Conall, with a blue slime on top of him. Then, as it apparently attempted to squeeze more semen out of him, it was literally tackled from behind by a red slime.

Blue and red jelly sprayed on top of him and mixed. The expression on the blue slime’s faced changed from one of cheerful pleasure to one of surprise, then something like pain, disbelief and even anger. The two slimes jiggled and squished on top of him until some of the ooze was utterly unrecognizable as originally belonging to either of the slimegirls, purple in colour and twitching chaotically. The pressure on his member lessened and intensified in mad exchange as the two slimegirls either fought for control, devoured each other or simply forgot about him and engaged in furious slime-mating - he had no idea.

But the irregular rubbing of his member was making him frustrated.

When he got the idea to get up and try to take matters into his own hands - although he wasn’t completely sure that he’d try to get free rather than trying to sex up the slimes - the purple, red and blue goo at once slammed him down into the floor and kept him there for a few moments, gently, but firmly. They both squeezed his member like a vice and pumped him at a few angles at once, the weird slimes both trying to get him off in their own way, but it appeared the red one was *way* better at multitasking. Suddenly, the large chunk of blue slime started turning purple and then being ejected at the side, blue again. Finally, a mix of a splashing and gurgling sounds was heard as a large chunk of feminine body simply fell at his side and then started reforming into a proper slimegirl - a blue one.

There was a red one on top of him now. One that eagerly encircled his hips with her ‘thighs’ and
drew him inside. There was a sharp contrast - this slime apparently kept her body temperature *higher*, which contrasting both the previous slime’s machinations and the cold floor magnified the pleasure he received from the first, affectionate squeeze of her slimy vagina that immediately brought an orgasm.

Gratefully and gleefully absorbing his semen, the slime on top of him released something that *definitely* could be mistaken as a purring sound.

*[Just what the hell?]*

Deryn’s situation ended up being similarly odd. While approaching orgasm way too fast, even though the thing on top of him was not a human girl or even thought similarly to a one, his manly pride was injured by having been brought to orgasm almost immediately, kept going, and then put on a way leading to another release almost immediately - not to mention, he lost his virginity in a filthy dungeon to something that apparently didn’t even think.

He tried to focus his mind, gather his thoughts and numb the sensations coming from his groin as the girl’s jello body bounced up and down on him. Of course, being young, he immediately found his eyes lured to the sight of her almost unnaturally jiggling breasts, and then, the entire focus and meek resistance he was able to start putting up came crashing down. He started panting as he realized that most likely the slimegirl would not end their coitus at his second orgasm. She probably intended to go until whatever it was she hoped to achieve was satisfied.

*[They probably don’t understand our bodies have limits at all...]*

At the very least, the slimegirl herself was in a good mood as her jelly body suddenly started to explore his own. He felt her cool slime rub the small of his back, put pressure on and in-between his buttocks - he thanked the Chief God she didn’t get any weird ideas while doing that - and over his chest. Both the stimulation and the coolness made his nipples near-painfully hard, a sensation he was unfamiliar with. She seemed intent on molesting the entirety of him as she half-methodically but creatively devoured and toyed with his manhood.

As he tried to delay his ejaculation again, suddenly her excess slime shifted, starting to gently but insistently press on his taint and roll his balls within the flow, as the insides of her squeezed, pumped, flower around, tickled, poked, jerked, teased, explored and sucked on his manhood all at once.

At seventeen years old and a virgin until the last hour of this day, there was only that much a guy like him could take, even if it was to be his second orgasm in a row.

This time, he groaned through clenched teeth, trying hard to stop or postpone his orgasm to the very last moment, but to no avail. He was squirting about as much as he did the first time, and the slimegirl on top of him obviously wanted him to give her even more as she squirmed on top of him, excited that she gets to be fed with so little effort.

Moments later, her squirms became more sluggish and almost... painful. He realized that something appeared around his groin area, clearly formed from the slime. A large, oval bulge that was largely increasing in size and somewhat changing shape...

*[Just what. The. Hell.]*
Keita wasn’t affected by the atmosphere in the cemetery in the least. Seeing as there appeared to be only one larger building in the vicinity at all, he approached it with way more silence and caution than his predecessors.

Then he saw the welcoming committee. Three zombies, four skeletons, and a fairy-like creature.

[Excellent. Apparently, nothing can ever be simple. The undead alone are a problem; I can’t even predict what the little thing can do.]

His confidence hasn’t evaporated completely, though. Far from it.

[I just need to take the most potentially risky element down first.]

Keita was well versed with all three weapons he most commonly used. He preferred the single sword style, to be honest, and fighting in close quarters, but there were situations that called for adaptability. If he wasn’t adaptable at birth, life taught him how to be, but honestly, he could no longer remember the times when he didn’t need that ability. The times before he undertook what he perceived as his mission were cloudy at best; happy, cheerful days corrupted and painted grey and black in his mind by the events of *that* day.

He reached for his kusarigama, a weapon of his homeland consisting of a long chain with a weight at one and a militarized sickle at the other. He disliked most long-range weapons, but having something like this, capable of serving for multiple purposes and styles of fighting even if it was mid-range at most suited him well.

This time, he’d be using the chain as a help for using the sickle at longer range. Grabbing the weighted end, he prepared for a quick strike. He’d only be getting one shot, two if he managed to be quick enough before getting swarmed by zombies.

Surely enough, he approached as quietly as possible. He couldn’t just start rotating the thing around immediately since it would produce too much sound - this had to be a very quick strike. Admittedly, he didn’t think he’d pull it off, but there was a chance and it would be a good combat opener, anyway.

With a quick flex of his hand, arm and body, the sickle-part of his weapon darted towards the not even child-sized fey creature. It noticed at the last moment, but he doubted she’d have time to dodge. Unfortunately, his expectations about the creature may have proven true, as its response wasn’t an attempt to dodge, but a violent gust of very chilly wind blasted right against his weapon. The zombies immediately turned towards him, so he changed his grip on the weapon as he also approached closer, grabbing the scythe rather than the chain and throwing the weight of the chain against the fey. This time, she dodged and returned the blow, sending something that looked like a rapidly flying icicle back at him. Fortunately, his movements threw its aim off, and the icicle went over his shoulder to disappear somewhere in the graveyard.

Again, he pulled the chain back and grabbed it mid-air, turning to the closest approaching zombie. He threw the chain giving it a spin, wrapping it along the creature’s neck and upper torso, before immediately stabbing it with the sickle part. He then proceeded to draw his blade and decapitate the creature with a sharp slash straight after getting it out of the sheath.
Unlike many of the swordsmen he met or trained with at Zipangu, Keita never even *faked* a preference for the more traditional katana. It was a good weapon, just not truly suited for him - he needed something versatile, good for defence, good for slashing with both sides and stabbing; thus a tsurugi resembling the western broadswords was most suitable for him. The skills he observed and gained with the more traditional katana were useful when he used his secondary close-range weapon, a wakizashi gained a long time ago from his teacher; yet even when using it for a long time, he always got the sensation that something was missing.

Practically spinning around at fierce speed, an attacking’s skeleton’s hand was immediately chopped off as the Zipangu swordsman was suddenly next to it, ready to continue the assault. An approaching zombie hurled itself at him just in the manner he hoped for - kicking the creature in its abdomen caused it to bend forward even more. Dominating it with quicker reflexes and greater agility, he put his foot onto its head, then jumped onto its back only to propel himself to the fey, kicking it away into the wall of the crypt just before a gust of wind again hit him, sending him flying in the opposite direction.

The skeletons were quick enough to try and take advantage of that, but kicking the feet of the first approaching one sent it onto the ground. The other managed to throw itself at him and press his body into the ground, but the situation wasn’t to last long.

*I thought I was in trouble, but... this thing... It's honestly low on energy, isn’t it? Or merely created by a lousy mage... Nevermind that.*

With a violent thrash underneath the skeleton, he freed his wakizashi from the sheath and stabbed the creature through. The released arm with a proper sword immediately followed, and soon, the two blades were pulled in opposite directions as he shredded its torso, leaving it with only a bit of muscles connecting the main, non-bony body. Kicking it away, Keita immediately got up, in time for more fun with the undead.

Underneath the crypt, the creature that was responsible for the adventurers’ respective situations felt an incoming surge of messages from one of the magical earrings connected to her pendant. She let them into her mind.

- *Auntie! Auntie! We have a situation here!*

- *What is it, Cybil?*

- *A very violent guy came along! He’s seriously crazy! He tried to slash me with some freaky weapon as hello and then kicked me into the wall, and he’s making very short work out of your so-called ‘guardians’!*

- *One person? Did my skeletons deactivate or something? I haven’t re-energized them in some time and there was nothing to have sex with them, either.*

- *There were like three zombies and four skeletons here before, Auntie! Now it's pretty much down*
by about a third of that! I think I’m gonna be going for now, I didn’t sign up for this! He seems seriously intent on killing us if we don’t let him through!

- Do you think you can beat him?

- I’m not sure. This guy seems to have a very violent attitude, Auntie! He looks scary! His mom and dad probably got divorced and took their problems out on him! I presume a past devoid of lovey-dovey stuff and filled with street-fighting, alcohol, bruises and possibly drugs! He must hang out at night that far from cities because he’s afraid he’ll start killing fellow humans or something!

The chief resident of the Black Moth dungeon shook her head and raised a hand to her forehead at all these theories.

- Okay, okay, I get it. You can get away from there if situation is dangerous. Tell Urukfo that she may stop trying to stop him! There’s no point on losing servants to an Order fanatic if they’re not at full strength!

- He’s not an Order fanatic, Auntie! There’s something totally... weird about his spirit energy and stuff?

- Just let him get down to the dungeon!

There was some delay, but after a few moments, Cybil responded.

- I’ve had the zombies spread out, but you’ll pretty much have to sew Urokfu and another one back together! Also, congratulations, you now have only a single skeleton at your command, so you may just name her and be done with it! I’m getting out of here, lest this psycho tries to follow me!

The Black Moth sighed. She spoke, half to the air, half to herself.

- Since when I am this popular?

Kirika stayed silent for a few seconds, but eventually answered.

- Maybe this is just a well-known area?

- Kirika, this is a god-abandoned cemetery, rumoured to be haunted to add to it. People got buried here, but even that activity was ceased.. They don’t come here recreationally. Apparently, some old faggots at the village started spreading news about a big bad dungeon, and now we get young wanna-be heroes and psychotic freaks coming down here testing themselves against my poor servants. I mean... damn, are we attractive to mental cases or something?

Kirika again was silent for a few moments before speaking.

- M... Mistress, it is night already. Should we animate the statue?

The owner of the dungeon got livelier at that suggestion.
- Ohhh???

- M... Mistress?

- This is the first time you’ve came with your own initiative about methods to defend the dungeon, Kirika.

- I, I’m so...

- Don’t ruin the impression and apologize. I’m proud of you. It’s proof that you’re developing.

Her Mistress closed her eyes and seemed to be deep in thought for a few moments.

- I regret to turn down your idea, but no, we will not be doing this. I’ve kept Akasta sealed for nearly all the time since I’ve beaten her and bound her spirit to gargoyle form. If Glaw is somewhat uncontrollable, Akasta is a completely random element. In fact, I believe she’d do the complete opposite of orders or what is expected of her, trying to rape those boys that were stopped by the slimes rather than take care of the current threat. Even if she did, there is no gain in giving up the possibly strongest adventurer that came here today to her as food. It’ll just make her more uncontrollable and he may end up getting petrified for the day, or even for as long as she wants to play with him. That guy may just be one of the other adventurer’s family or something, coming here because they’re in danger, out of worry, attacking from desperation. We cannot judge that so quickly. I don’t want to make the mistake of sentencing someone to a cruel fate for no known reason.

- I... understand, Mistress.

- Thank you for your idea, though. I am proud of you.

- Th... thank you, Mistress.

- Now, let us wait and see why the visitor is here. Go and defend this room together with Annah again. I’m giving you a new, equal-priority order, however.

- Yes, Mistress?

- Your new two priorities are preventing this man from coming to this room without testing his abilities and making sure he’s worthy of it, as well as preventing him from deactivating you *or* Annah. Do you understand?

- Aren’t these priorities... possibly conflicting, Mistress?

- I trust you will make the right choice when it comes down to it.

*******************************

There was no denying it - Right over Deryn’s crotch, there was a *very* humanoid-looking head sticking out from the slimegirl’s excess, connected to her ‘thighs’.

The head beamed him a smile. She looked somewhat... young compared to the other slimegirl. The
new ‘figure’ squirmed on top of him, trying to bend her head backwards. She managed to do it somewhat, getting it sideways as she pushed a pretty long tongue out, clearly trying to get a taste of his manhood.

Deryn had no idea if he was freaked out or turned on anymore. His penis seemed to avoid the issue completely or simply had no problem with it as it twitched inside the ‘mature’ slimegirl riding on top of him, the look on her face changing to something similar to adorable surprise and excitation. Apparently, she didn’t predict she was going to have another slimy head stuck to her during this encounter, but didn’t have a problem with it.

The girl’s focus returned to him when he groaned and arched his back. His lower head had gotten somewhat softer but still had what could only be described as a pretty intense erection; the problem was, it has gotten rather sensitive and the slime covering and surrounding it was still teasing his glans mercilessly. He could feel the slime flowing around the back muscle, the lower glans, slowly, gently and without any seeming intention of seeping inside, over the urethral opening, more harshly and with a lot more of squeezing involved, and over the base of his penis, but it started feeling *too* pleasurable and simply irritating and intense at some point rather than simply sexually satisfying like earlier. He could almost swear the slime noticed his discomfort as it leaned down, grabbing his cheeks and gave him an intense kiss, this time, curiously, with a lot less saliva absorption involved. Then, his torso was suddenly yanked up as his head was pressed against her breasts and his hair was being... stroked by her slimy hand, even so as the body connected to said head and breasts was still riding him mercilessly, attempting to squeeze more semen out of his cock. The slimegirl head emerging from the mature slimegirl found a new target instead of his penis, of which she has gotten a lick or two by that point, detectable by the intense prodding of a somewhat different-consistent slime from one side that felt differently from the penetration of the mature slime.

It started licking his bellybutton. She was rather caught up in it, too. He hissed, then giggled, then hissed again as the slimy matron pressed him stronger to her breasts and started squeezing almost violently, differing the stimulations, hoping to push him over the edge of orgasm again. He groaned and whimpered, but she was relentless. He could practically feel himself being pulled into her, inside, with the entirety of his body as his head sunk slowly into her breasts and his erection was being pumped aggressively by the slime. Suddenly, the sensation provided by the creature on top of him utterly changed. The so far completely fluid pseudo-vagina become a lot more stable and solid, and the slime around his testicles, rather than randomly rolling them, coated them in a thicker layer of something cool as it very gently squeezed an massaged them in nearly disciplined fashion. Just as he thought he was going to get something that resembled actual sex, since he guessed normal girls couldn’t do that many things inside their vaginas, Deryn realized the sensation of something touching his cock in multiple places. It felt like a very short wet finger, or a tongue... then three of them... seven, thirteen, twenty two, then he lost count. Numerous cilia came out of the freshly created proper ‘walls’ of the slimy pseudo-vagina that for a moment resembled a real one and started teasing his cock in a more solid fashion. He squirmed in the slimegirl embrace, then groaned as her walls clamped down on him, constricting his cock with the wet walls as the exploring micro-tentacles wrapped around his shaft, under his crown, teasin the tender, sensitive ‘muscle’. It wasn’t under his control anymore - cum rushed up his erection and shoot inside the slimegirl, rope after rope floating into and inside her body. She hugged him more strongly at that point, the tip of his nose and his lips liberally coated in her sticky slime. He couldn’t resist tasting her - it was a mild, pleasant, slightly sweet taste, but with an aftertaste of something more repugnant.

Suddenly, a pair of additional arms encircled his waist, his eyes darting open as he realized what was
wrong, shaking him out of the trance that the new pleasure delivered by the slimegirl and magnified by the orgasm provided. He felt this wondrous, jiggly, wet and soft bosom separated from him as the twin arms at his bottom run up and up his back, covering his skin with more slime.

He looked down and realized that in place of the mature slimegirl, a much smaller one was present. She had petite chest growths, but couldn’t be really called “flat”, and had a more youthful face than what he guessed was her mother, already separating herself and moving backwards, her breasts pulled as she tried to release them from being mixed with the little slimegirl’s back. Finally, she managed to break free as the slimegirl on top of him instead threw her entire bottom, chaotic layer of goo all over his groin.

A thought of escape run through his mind, but the mature slime approached him from the side with a serene but more serious expression. One hand on his shoulder, the other between her ‘daughters’ chest and his, the now seemingly slightly smaller but still well-endowed mature goo-woman insistently pressed him down back onto the floor as the smaller slimegirl attempted her best to stimulate his penis.

This girl was more chaotic in her caresses and seemingly less careful, but it appeared much was shared by instinct in these species in ways of sex and everything else was quite quickly learned. Of course, even after learning which stimulation provided better results in the first minute or two of riding atop of him, the slimegirl didn’t even approach her mother in the intensity or pleasure of stimulating the male sex. The mature slimegirl looked worried for a few moments - this one appeared to have at least a shred of maternal instinct, which surprised him.

It was past his third ejaculation. The stimulation to his bared penis felt strongly irritating, although he couldn’t deny the pleasure. Still, it’d be better to be inside the bigger slime... She was more varied in her attempts and far gentler, not to mention he had come to like being pressed against her breasts.

[Wait... what the hell am I thinking about? This isn’t even consensual! I need to... free myself!]

Suddenly, he felt something wet and soft touch his things and then testicles.

[The other slime is molesting me, too? I mean... seriously... come on...]

- This is just too unreasonable! I can’t! I... can’t...

The other girl immediately pushed her hand against her open mouth, gathering his saliva and shutting him up immediately, but the mature one seemed to give her a poke in the back and she stopped. Instead, she leaned forward and started to lick on his nipples as her ‘mother’ stroked the inside of this thighs and licked his balls and the base of his shaft.

The younger slimegirl started to bounce up and down more energetically, her small breasts jiggling with uncharacteristic strength for such a size as she tried to wring his semen out of him. Her mother aided her efforts by providing additional stimulation. Deryn was going crazy. He was just too sensitive. The one time he tried to ejaculate twice in a row when masturbating, he gave up quickly because he was too sensitive and it irritated him too much. Now, he had these light-headed feelings, a sense of emptiness in his loins but fire in his member, a fire that was increased by the rapid movement of the energetic young slime and the single-minded molestations of her mother. He ceased trying to resist - rather, he hoped that the orgasm would come quickly so they’ll just leave him alone.
He finally felt the sweet release as his balls contracted again and fired a much smaller stream of semen into the smaller slime, one that quickly slowed to a dribble. He felt the mature slimegirl withdrawing upon getting that reaction, letting her daughter feed alone and with her own ability, apparently the maternal instinct limited to ensuring that the smaller slime at least gets a meal in this case.

But the new-born slimegirl did not want the eating party to end. No, for her, it was just beginning. She gained even more energy upon getting her first meal, and she proved it by increasing the flow of slime around his member.

He screamed. Loudly.

Conall, in the meantime, couldn’t exactly process the fact that the red slimegirl now on top of him made a clear sound of pleasure the moment he ejaculated.

- What the h...

Her ‘finger’ touched his lips, silencing him as she just gave him a smile before leaning in and planting a kiss on his lips. This one was a genuine kiss lovers or couples might share - she tried to play with his tongue, explored his mouth and even ‘nibbled’ on his lower lip with her slimy ones, occasionally giving him a very low throaty sound that seemed to indicate her enjoyment of the act. Subconsciously, after a few moments, Conall also got into it. The slimegirl then broke the kiss and gently pressed down on him, but even that behaviour was different than with the others - he felt her excess slime gently shift under him to protect his head from bumping against anything and giving him something relatively soft to lay it on.

This girl’s apparent array of emotional responses, behaviours and intelligence seemed like they were on entirely different levels than the other two. She seemed to be able to make nearly-human sounds and expressions and appeared to care for his pleasure and comfort in the act, unlike the other one, who just seemed pleased she got to ‘feed’ on his fluids.

Raising her ‘hips’ from him and leaving just the tip of his penis immersed in her slime, she cocked her head and looked at him half-expectantly, half something else. He returned the gaze. It appeared almost as if she had hoped her gestures made him willing to engage her in sex. He sighed. It was certainly better, but this still wasn’t how he preferred his sexual encounters to play out, though he did not have that many. He shook his head no, and she looked worried for a moment. The slimegirl took his hand and pressed it against her chest, as the other stroked his cheek. She gently and slowly pushed a bit more of his erection inside and started shifting her insides to massage it. He pulled his hand away without squeezing her gooey breast and turned his gaze away from her, hoping to make the message clear. She pouted adorably and waited for a few moments, but apparently, frustration and instinct took over and, in a few moments, she started riding him like the other slimegirl did.

Conall had limited experience in sex with either human women or monster girls - the blue slime moments before was his first monster girl, in fact - so he couldn’t exactly compare the sex with this slime to either side of the spectrum... however, he was pretty sure this approached the best intercourse he ever had when the slimegirl started to modify her inner parts. Apparently unlike the
previous one, this one was creative rather than chaotic. She formed something of a tube of more solidly melted slime inside of herself, with gooey, flowing liquid regularly dripping down the walls, giving a sense of wetness far greater than any human girl could hope to give. The warmness of her walls, in his books, proved better than the cool if pleasurable feeling the previous slimegirl offered. It was when she started modifying that magnificent slime pussy-tube when Conall started to get worried she may drive him crazy with the unique sensations.

Basically, the reddish slime formed three inner rings of rather gooey consistency but increasing tightness. When she moved on top of him, he penetrated those rings and was drawn in deeper and deeper, his member squeezed with increased tightness and all the while being coated with thicker and thicker lukewarm red jello.

The sensation he got from being drowned inside the slime that offered more and more tightness and sticky wetness the deeper he got was almost sublime. Indeed, soon after, he found that his hips were pushing back up against the slimegirl, instinct and pleasure overruling reason and ethics. His partner was quite pleased with his reaction, stroking his chest softly and even cupping his cheeks. Her emotional response and intellect seemed dangerously close to something he could consider human, and this coupled with the great pleasure she was bringing him and her apparent care and desire to please him were turning him on.

As he slid through the three additional rings he could reach with his erection, he could feel her inner jelly coating his member generously as she squeezed him affectionately, his glans ecstatically tormented from all sides as her unique tightness, wetness and consistency were just too much to resist. His testes were drawn closer to his body as the tip of his member slowly started expanding within her inhuman 'folds', giving in to the desire and the base instinct to spill his seed into the creature that was bringing him such pleasure. His own arms finally moved, travelling up her body, one resting on her buttocks and pressing her closer, savouring the strange feeling of her body as another touched her breast, finally offering her the gesture she asked for not long ago.

The slimegirl released something of a pleasured if slightly gurgled growl of excitement and pleasure as she felt him get closer and closer to feeding her the best kind of fluid a male could give to her kind. Pounding into her from below, he gave in, unable to show anymore resistance to the caress. It was like he was drowning in a lake of pleasure: his member twitched and his balls started pulsing, shooting off warm, seminal fluid deep within the confines of her multi-layered goo and fluid-lined pleasure box. She squealed as she felt him cum inside her, providing more and more stimulation to his ejaculating cock, the rings of slime-flesh milking him at separate rhythms as the long orgasm threatened to dry his balls completely. He panted, groaned and gasped at the feelings of her exquisite 'pussy' drinking his offering.

He felt his muscles relax as his erection became more sensitive, but was also slowly softening. The red slime raised a hand to her own mouth and pressed a slimy finger to her it... And her insides started to massage his erection again.

- ...N..no. Wait. That's... enough, right?

The slime smiled behind her hand and intensified the movement of her pussy 'ridges', the rings of slimy flesh squeezing and pumping up and down his cock. He twitched, then slightly trashed beneath her, the slime finally revealing her greedy, less caring side by pressing him down and starting to pounce up and down on his erection, trying to maintain it at as high hardness as possible.
The red slime leaned in, mashing her soft, slick, jiggling breasts again his chest and giving him a positively passionate kiss. Her taste was wrong, like a mix of warm fruit of one kind and raw fruit of another kind, he couldn’t exactly pinpoint yet, but it was not unpleasant. He felt his member stretch and strain as blood pumped there again, making him light-headed and maintaining him at something more than semi-erect state.

She was now rocking her bottom into his hips by pushing her own back and her breasts were laying spread onto his chest, the slimegirl looking at him with a scary amount of sentience. Suddenly, he heard a gurgling sound, then like something wet being ripped and stretched until, finally, the red slime *spoke*.

- Hey... do you want to feel... even better?

Once Conall processed what just happened, he realized what she meant as he felt her inner cock-sleeve like tube morph again.

- N...no! Stop! It's too sensitive, stop! Come on, be reasonable, please!"

- I will empty your balls... Make them so light, and it will feel really good when you cum in me. Give me more tasty fluids, okay? I like your... pen... pee-pee and your fluids.

Her vagina stopped morphing. There seemed to be slightly less fluids inside and the two bottom-most, shallow parts seemed less tight. Then, slowly, small, tongue-like protrusions attacked him from all sides. He groaned in sensations so intense they bordered on anguish for a moment.

- Yes. It gonna feel good. Make you cum... I will... you will cum a lot more for me.

[Well, she can talk but it just sounds weird! Why won’t she just... let me go!?!]

The strange, inner growths inside the slime’s cunt started to lick up and down on the member inside her. After three orgasms, even with an incomplete erection, it felt both like a delight and a torture. There were no breaks - he was being used as food and that was it. The slimegirl apparently got more frantic and hooked on feeding the further their ‘intercourse’ went, no longer as cautious or ‘caring’ as before. She started rocking her hips to the sides, no longer bouncing in his lap but the jiggling to her breasts was still oddly energetic every time she wasn’t leaned so close over him that they were pressed against Conall’s chest.

Instead of the rapid pumping between her increasingly tightening folds, now it was the squeezing of the slime-rings themselves and the teasing caresses of the protrusions inside that were providing most stimulation. He wasn’t sure exactly how well-controlled or independent of each other they were - sometimes, he could feel them as individual caresses, at other times, they seemed to all work in unison and yet at other times the specific areas of her pussy worked uniformly but in a different way than the others. The somewhat chaotic ‘squeezing’ also made the small flexible protrusions mash against his cock and caress it even more intimately. He felt them squeeze around his erection, get under the head of his member and tease there, as well as massage the head itself; he was being rubbed and squeezed all over. He was panting heavily now, no longer even thinking about helping the slimegirl stimulate him to another orgasm, mostly wanting this to end.

- Stop already! This is enough! It’s driving me crazy! I’m too sensitive, okay? A guy is not
supposed to ejaculate multiple times in a row anyway!

There was a weird sound again, and the slimegirl again spoke, pouting slightly.

- But you will just do it again soon. I can tell.
- It’s just a reaction! It gets worse everytime I do! Stop!
- I like you. I would like to keep you.
- Wha... ?!!

She started to rock in his lap again, while having her breasts pressed against his chest and kissing him every once and again. Conall was mostly groaning and trashing below the slimegirl, who seemed to single-mindedly try and bring about another orgasm. The stimulation of being rapidly stroked by her walls as well as teased and jerked by the soft, tongue-like protrusions inside while feeling her different levels of tightness and being liberally coated with wet sticky jello was getting a bit too much. The rhythmic squeezing, the incredibly flexibility and stretchiness of her insides, the increasingly ferocious and passionate attempts to get him off repeatedly - all this was what was making Conall apparently ignore the natural limitations of his body as it was being pleasured. He could only imagine how it felt for Deryn, who was a virgin before.

Her bouncing was increasing in its pace as it seemed the red slimegirl was getting pretty into it. With a corner of his eye, Conall noticed the slimegirl that was the first one to rape him also move, although it wasn’t towards him - it was into the corridor they came here from.

The distraction proved enough. Suddenly, the red slime’s inner vagina lost cohesion and he felt the increasingly formless slime roll all over his member. The change of stimulation was enough for him to spill his seed again. This time, there was little shooting inside - the smaller amount of seminal fluid than before simply flew out of him and into the slimegirl, but when what remained of her inner cilia started stroking him along his length, trying to ‘taste’ the semen, immediately his orgasm intensified and, pulsing, pumped out more semen than it probably ‘intended’ too. Conall felt drained and empty, his member deflating rapidly as if protecting itself from any further assault. The slimegirl seemed disappointed by that reaction.

- Ohh, ummm, buuu, it is going soft.
- Look, I have no idea how much you know about humans but we have limits. I can’t go anymore.
- You are tired?
- YES! You finally get it!
- Okay.
- Then, umm, could you maybe, like, get off me?
- No. But since you are tired, we are just going to do this until you cum once or twice more, okay?

Conall truly wished he could’ve smacked his face at that point. Or her face.
The red slime bent over him and snuggled up. He hoped she’d be satisfied with that, but moments later, he felt her insides morphing again.

[Damn it.]

The Black Moth was meditating in her own chamber. Usually, her meditations’ purpose was to calm down her unattended body or help her increase or better control her powers. This time, the purpose was to sharpen her sense so she could detect the intruder and judge his level of spiritual energy… and what exactly Cybil found ‘weird’ about it.

The mentioned intruder had already passed the chamber containing a female stone gargoyle - although why would anyone bother to craft just a statue or put an inactive gargoyle in a place like this was beyond him - and now found the chamber containing a body of a defeated golem.

[It’d appear there indeed were some adventurers here. And not long before me. Am I too late? Or will this turn into a rescue mission?]

Passing another corridor with a duo of defeated skeletons, he started hearing a weird sound. After approaching closer, he realized those were two separate sounds, quite similar in nature.

And then, suddenly, just before the end of the corridor, something rushed out of the room in front of him and attempted to attack.

[A slime? Are these guys feeding them willingly? Or is it a forced feeding?]

Slashing vertically with his blade, he gave the slimegirl a pause. Apparently, she fed quite recently and found it rather easy to regenerate from the attack.

[The best way to defeat a mature and well-grown or recently fed slime is to either use powerful attacks with a blunt weapon, throwing her body parts around and making them harder to put together and regenerate, or produce rapid attacks that quickly exhaust her regenerative abilities. Well, they’re most easily beaten with magic, but that’s a pointless note for me.]

In his case, the best way to increase the attack speed was to use both his tsurugi and his wakizashi swords at once. So, he pulled the smaller blade out and prepared to attack.

The Black Moth’s eyes darted open.

- What is someone like that even doing here!

After that exclamation, she calmed down somewhat.

[Why would a person already infested with a monstergirl’s demonic energy explore my dungeon? Shouldn’t he be busy having sex and ascending to an incubus form?]
This was weird.

[What are his circumstances? What am I even supposed to do with someone like that?]

The slimegirl was made short work of. Compared to the bunch of undead in front of the crypt, a single blue slime was nothing.

He entered the crypt to witness an odd scene.

One slimegirl was simply wandering around the place like it was nobody’s business. She seemed pretty large - probably lived for a time and spawned a few other slimes.

The other two slimes were busy feeding on two guys on the floor. Keita wasn’t too good at figuring age by looks, but they seemed a little younger than he was and clearly adventurers, based on the pieces of armour and weapons thrown around the place.
The struggle ahead of Keita will succeed or fail in bringing him to the heart of the dungeon. What awaits for him there? What is his secret and his motivation, and how does the Black Moth look upon those?

The slimegirls did not even pay him any heed, continuing to feed on the guys beneath them. There was a pretty high chance this was without said guys’ consent, he figured, so he decided to stop the situation. Walking to the nearest slime, a red one and ‘selling’ her a brutal kick to the head.

The slimegirl rapidly crawled away, recovered and turned to face him. To his surprise, after a few moments of apparently shifting her innards, it spoke - he never met a western slimegirl that could speak.

- Why are you interrupting?"

- Right back at you. Are you raping that person?

- Wrrr... There is nothing wrong in feeding on and bonding with a fine guy, is there?

- You, spiky hair. Was this consensual?

The young man on the ground seemed to feel odd at being called “spiky hair”, but primarily because of the entire situation.

- No. The slimes... beat us. This one seemed to make sure I don’t get hurt while she fed, but the result you see is because we lost a fight.

- I see. Then, there is no reason for me to hold back on you, talking goo girl.

Rushing forward with both of his blades unsheathed, Keita sidestepped a rapid short of goo the slimegirl fired at him and cut it off her main body. Before she managed to recover, he was already upon her in a hardly believable burst of speed, slashing at her repeatedly. After being cut apart nearly beyond recovery by his furious assault, she finally managed to retaliate, smashing him with a pseudopod that sent him away, the swordsman barely retaining his footing. The slimegirl growled lowly as she withdrew into the shadow, running away.

The other slime apparently noticed the commotion and approached Keita with a curious expression. She raised a finger to her lips and fondled her breast as if in an invitation, but he just approached her with the same grim expression. Noticing he was intent on attacking, the slimegirl nearly curled in a ball, clearly somewhat scared, before withdrawing quickly, trying to flee the scene. Keita did not pursue her, more concerned with one that was raping the other guy on the floor. This one seemed even younger than the other, and they resembled one another somewhat, although their hair length, shape and colour were different. The slime on top of him was petite compared to others - no excess
substance, less complete feminine physique, smaller, less developed pseudo-breasts and a somewhat younger face. It was quite possible she was spawned during the act with one of the other two blue slimes. Keita was concerned - this guy might’ve been quite exhausted if he was fed upon by a slime to the point of spawning. Equally concerning was the fact that he was shuddering beneath her, his hips twitching - apparently, even after being fed on for some time he was again ejaculating inside the slime.

He decided to interrupt the younger slime immediately but non-lethally, again kicking her with full force, causing her to lose cohesion and much of her substance flying away from the top of the boy. After regenerating, the young slime noticed she was alone against three men, one of which was in almost perfect condition. Scared, it started to run away.

Keita didn’t think pursuing the youngest slime when the others probably already ran away was worth it.

The young, black-haired guy he just saved from a small slime was lying on the ground, panting, apparently very drained. The older guy, previously connected to a red slime managed to sit up.

- Who... who are you?

- Before asking someone about their identity, it would be proper of you to reveal your own.

- Yes, of course, you are right. And regardless, you did help us. I am Conall Amberwing, and this is my younger brother, Deryn. To make the story short, we learned of this place, called the ‘black moth dungeon’ or something along these lines, mostly because I’m into making the world a better place and Deryn claims to like the thrill of adventure, so we ended up here. We’ve defeated a few skeletons and had a lot of difficulty against a golem. After defeating it, we were ambushed here by those slimes and fell.

- I see. It would appear you’re in too bad of a condition to continue fighting, yet we are in danger, still. My name is Keita Haneo, as a native here would introduce themselves. I came here because I thought it may bring me closer to a solution of a certain issue I’m trying to deal with. Yet, it seems like just another distraction, if possibly one worth the effort.

- What issue? And, do you mean you expect there are still more opponents to fight with here?

- Exactly. We may discuss my own problem later, adventurer, but now I must press on. The fact that there was a working golem girl and the place is defended by the undead themselves suggests that there is a mage or a powerful monster at the bottom of all this, both of them possibly the kind of threat to humans that I’m trying to fight with. I can explain the details once that issue is dealt with, that is if you really need to know.

- Do you think it’s really a good idea to go forth on your own? There were two of us and we finally got defeated, who knows what else lurks in there... Maybe we should withdraw and return here later together to...

But Keita was already walking past him, and also past Deryn, who was apparently either too shocked by the rape or too tired by it to really bother engaging in the conversation.

- I finish what I start. I wouldn’t worry. It doesn’t seem like I’ll run into any serious problems before I meet the lord of this place. I’m rather confident in my skill.
- Many people say that, but end up needing help anyway.

- I’ve run out of my quota of ‘needing help’ for a decade or so at least. Don’t be worried. I’d also suggest getting out of here once you can.

Without listening to Conall anymore, he left to move further into the dungeon. Conall moved to his insensate brother, crawling.

Some time later, Keita walked into another, very large chamber. In front of him, on the opposite side of the chamber, there were two feminine golems similar to the one he had seen defeated before.

Maybe he told this Conall person that he had confidence in his skills with a bit too much haste.

Approaching, he noticed that the two golem girls were quite different from one another. The one on the right was a carbon copy of the one he saw destroyed by the two Amberwing brothers, with short green hair, taller than him but not all that much. It was over six feet tall, for sure, but probably below six and a half feet. The other golem was bigger - the hair on its head was slightly longer and black, her legs seemed longer, her body was curvier and somehow more solid, and she definitely outgrew six and a half feet. It was the taller golem who spoke immediately.

- We do not know what is your purpose here, human, but I’d advise that you leave now.
- I wish to speak to your owner.
- Then it is unfortunate. Visitors are not allowed to see Mistress until they battle their way to her. If you insist on moving forward, we will have to stop you from doing so until you manage to defeat us or weaken us enough to break free of the fight.
- Really? I should warn you that I will not pull back any punches. I may damage you both… Maybe even destroy you.

The other golem suddenly spoke.

- That’s enough Kirika. Why are you even talking to him? We are supposed to beat the guy so he can’t reach Mistress, that is all!
- Annah, Mistress had certain ideas about why he might be here. I saw it fit to give him an opportunity to leave. But very well, human. If you insist, we will fight you properly.

The golem certainly didn’t joke when saying that, initiating with a strong kick that Keita had to jump back to avoid. She had remarkable speed for someone of that size, and the size itself combined with the fact that she was made of magically enhanced materials, not flesh, probably made her stronger than nearly any human - trying to engage in a battle of physical strength was simply foolish. The golem called Anna didn’t waste any time, either, and charged at him immediately. His blades were ready. Pirouetting out of her way, he slashed alongside the bared part of her back before stabbing his curved wakizashi in her back and withdrawing it.

The problem was, Kirika predicted his movements and already tried to punch him straight to the face. He managed to dodge, but only move quickly enough to weaken the strength of the kick that
followed. Air was literally beaten out of his lungs as he lost contact with the ground, flying towards the other golem who grabbed his hand and threw him towards the ground a few feet away.

Normally, a person would at least stop to consider saying ‘ouch’, regardless of how strong a warrior they were. This fight demanded quick reflexes and a high pain tolerance, however, and Keita did have these traits. Getting up before Annah stomped onto him, he slashed at her right after, but his pain-numbed body was still way too slow to react to Kirika’s next strike, an upper-hand punch that sent him onto the ground again.

- He’s kinda weak, ain’t he?
- Well, it is two on one. And he had to get through Urokfu and Glaw to get here, Annah, so don’t announce our victory just yet.

Keita was right back on his feet during their small talk.

- Damn right you shouldn’t. How about you come here and I’ll give you some of your own medicine.

The golems did approach, but he already parried two of their strikes while stepping back. The situation repeated itself, with Keita having to withdraw and parry constantly for a few times, until Kirika attempted one of her deadly kicks again. He dodged to the side and kicked the other golem’s punch away. Despite the pain in his leg, he struck out immediately against Anna with both swords, cutting through her originally mud-based body and causing her to step back for a change. Kirika regained her balance and stepped between the two with another kick, but this time, he dodged under it and cut her leg before falling onto the ground and sweeping her down with his own. With Kirika on her back for the first time, he transferred the support of his weight to his arms, before propelling himself off the ground with a powerful kick straight into Annah’s face. He wanted to continue with a flurry of cuts but Kirika was on her feet already, attempting to shoulder-tackle him. He managed to dodge again, withdrawing at the same pace as the two golems turned to another position, before charging at him together.

Kirika was well aware the human could think in two categories at that point - he’d either use his speed to his advantage by trying to strike at Annah, the weaker of the two, or he’d take advantage of her own limited mobility in the charge to strike at her legs again, limiting her speed and ability to use one of her main weapons - her ferocious leg attacks - in order to make the battle easier on himself.

In the first case, she’d have Annah bend so she could use her back like a catapult to deliver a kick into the stranger from above. In the other case, a different plan was already formed in her mind.

He picked the second option, dodging to Kirika’s side. He was already behind her back when he struck at it with his wakizashi, the longer blade indeed aiming at her leg. But she was prepared. Grabbing his wakizashi-holding left arm, she swirled over the chamber, with him being carried with her movement before throwing him at Annah with tremendous strength. Annah was also ready, re-sending him back to Kirika with a kick of his own.

Kirika was running at the flowing Keita, grabbing him mid-air and throwing both of their bodies onto the ground, with her on top, her arms clenched around the smaller human who was being trapped under her body. She squeezed harder, trying to cut his air supply short. He struggled to break free, but this wasn’t an equal chances fight in this case. Clenching her arms around him, he
found it difficult to breathe. Kirika believed victory was theirs. Not wanting to be cruel, she decided to immediately inform Keita of his fate.

- Forgive me, but once you’re immobilized we will have to use you as an energy source. We’re running pretty low on fuel and we don’t get many visitors that often. I truly am sorry, but it’s a necessity.

Keita for his part, heard her quite well despite the cloud of semi-unconsciousness already trying to take him over.

He remembered a situation like this not truly long ago. There were also two of them. Two vastly different bodies on top of his, one after another. One deprived him of both confidence and innocence. The second crushed everything there was left to crush.

First one cutting his body up for amusement. The other second one seeping vile fluids into the wounds inflicted by its predecessor. In his haze-covered vision, obscured additionally by Kirika’s body, he could clearly detect the shapes of the limbs of these tormentors of his, forming behind his back and slowly crawling into his field of vision, eager to grab him and take him into that nightmare again.

Thinking little of it, he acted.

Kirika wasn’t sure what the human attempted to do when he bit into her neck. Her precognition of pain was completely different than a humans and it meant little to her, but it surprised her enough to lighten her grab on his own body a little. With a sharp move, his blades were buried in her sides as he flipped them over, suddenly being on top of the golem. His strength at this moment was frightening - matching her own, and sheer surprised allowed him to overcome her. The human’s gaze still appeared like he was drifting off into unconsciousness when his differently-coloured eyes - Kirika only now noticed his left eye was a nearly metallic grey while his right was green. With a speed unbecoming of someone who was just subjected to this much punishment - in fact, faster than he ever demonstrated during the fight up to that moment - he was right at Annah’s side, attacking her with frenzied strikes she had trouble defending against. Her body was repeatedly cut. Kirika recognized the danger and quickly got back on her feet, despite actually feeling her own manner of pain at that point. She struck against the human swordsman from his side. He dodged, but his movements suddenly seemed less sharp, and his counter was also blocked by one of her rune-covered arm protectors. She responded with a short kick of her own, which send him stumbling away, his burst of speed apparently over.

The Black Moth was in her chambers, somewhat nervous, when the entire odd event happened.

[What was that? Magic? A surge of demonic energy, a burning of a human spirit’s strength and something odd... And I could feel it without meditating. Was he taught magic by a monster in return for sex, and that’s why his spiritual energy is already marked by someone? Or is it something
She crossed her arms around her chest, stroking her arms with her fingers, nervously.

*If he can use magic, he could remove my runes from Kirika and Annah and possibly turn them against me... or destroy them beyond repair more easily. I didn’t ask for someone to make me nervous today. But, wasn’t that change too short and not drastic enough to be a spell? I’m not sure... Damn, I should’ve kept meditating, maybe then I could be more sure...*

Keita had more of an idea of what happened with his body, but a little less of an idea what happened in the fight itself.

*This again. If only I could claim such strength for myself for more than a few seconds and without nearly blacking out, I’d have such an easy journey...*

He prepared for another combined attack of the golems.

*But I still have no idea what the strength associated with this memory costs me... I mean, those bursts of strength and speed are unnatural, so there has to be a cost...*

The pair rushed at him, but this time, Kirika was the slower one. However, this was a ruse - she reached out and gave Annah a lift, and the shorter golem jumped over him. As she landed on the other side, his blades were already switched to her side in his hands and he stabbed her without looking, pushing his arms back. Then, he immediately sent himself forward against Kirika, twisting his blades in Annah’s body and swirling them in the run before clashing with the taller golem. He dodged her strike and stabbed her side, pirouetting again and trying to slash or even cut off her arm with his wakizashi. But Kirika was prepared for that move. Stepping to the side and grabbing his arm, she lifted one of her own. Suddenly, her runic arm protector ejected a stone, dagger-like blade she brought down onto his own sword. A metallic clash resounding in the room as said Wakizashi was broken by Kirika’s superior strength. Annah charged at him in the same moment, his hand still being held by Kirika. Not thinking much, Keita jumped acrobatically, putting his legs onto her shoulders before running his other blade through the golem’s face. He sharply tore his hand out of Kirika’s grasp as he swirled his sword in Annah’s skull, increasing the damage before pushing himself away from the golem’s body. At the very edge of losing balance, he immediately propelled himself forward, slashing at the golem’s falling body to ensure he damaged her to the point of inactivation, but it was a somewhat Pyrrhic winning move as he was suddenly kicked away by Kirika with furious strengh.

*Annah... You killed Annah! She was... Annah was like one of my own! First Deborah, now Annah... what sort of grudge do you humans have against our Mistress’ loyal servants?!*

*When engaging in a fight, one has to accept they may be crippled or their lives may be snuffed out. Sometimes, that choice is taken away, but you insisted on fighting me despite my warning, didn’t you? You’ve made a mistake. You should’ve used that stone dagger to remove my arm, not destroy my sword.*
Suddenly, Kirika’s other hand also formed a stone dagger from the runic protector. She stood in disarray, ready to charge at any moment.

-We can’t, you bigot! We’re to avoid crippling humans and are not to kill them other than on Mistress’ direct orders! I crippled only your attacking power, but you went and deactivated Annah altogether! We were testing you, not trying to kill you!

- You would attempt to rape me upon winning because you’re ‘low on fuel’. If you managed to do this, to us, humans, it’s sometimes as bad as death.

- But we have to do this to keep running! You don’t have to kill us to survive, do you?!

- You’re telling me that no harm would come to me if I lost, on your Mistress’ orders, and the only reason you planned to rape me was to survive? And the fight is merely a more or less ‘harmless test’ from your mistress?

- Yes, you idiot!

- Then either you are a fool, and a toy, or I was wrong. Let’s finish this.

Kirika was upon him immediately, stabbing with her stone punch-daggers. He dodged and tried to stab her as well, but she shifted and used her hips to throw him back a few steps, just in a position for another well-aimed kick. It connected, but Keita was ready to continue fighting, blocking her stone daggers and delivering a kick of his own before slashing her vertically with his sword. He withdrew and parried her other strike, and jumped away from a follow-up kick. The pair charged at one another, but this time, it was Kirika to use acrobatics, jumping high in the air and landing in the spot Keita just vacated, cracking the floor. With a rapid flurry of slashes, he finally increased the amount of serious damage dealt to the golem girl, and she bent over in pain. He prepared to stab her right through the torso from below, but was stopped by a headbutt.

Kirika grabbed his body and threw him once again, charging while he was getting up. He was prepared - dodging to the side, only one of her thrusts stabbed his body, and he was in an excellent position for a counter thanks to willingly letting her do that, running her body through with his blade. Kirika was taken aback by the force of the attack, the pain and the fact he willingly allowed himself to be stabbed, but he was already prepared for more, following up by tearing his blade out of her, slashing her horizontally and then vertically. He then jumped, delivering a powerful kick to her head just as her fist flew to the side, also striking him as they both landed onto the floor.

Keita was back on his feet almost immediately. Kirika was struggling.

- I... am losing? I haven’t lost since test runs against other golems... Never to a human. I … I dislike that feeling.

- Just give up. There’s no reason for you to join your friend. You’ve outgrown her by far and it'll surely be a messy, painful finish to a fight if you keep this up, but you’ll probably lose.

- NO! I am supposed to stop unworthy humans from seeing Mistress! I will not give up!

- You’re misunderstanding the whole idea. You just said you’re not a guardian, but a test. If nobody gets past you, your Mistress will never have any visitors at all, right?
- What are you trying to say?

- If nobody gets past you, you’re as much of a failure as if anybody did. At least, in the purpose that this Mistress meant for you. You’re supposed be a wall the ‘worthy’ visitors can pass. It doesn’t mean you have to get destroyed in the process. If your opponent is clearly winning, and you get deactivated, wouldn’t that mean the end of you and just bring more problems and worry to your Mistress?

- Yes, but... I’m supposed to...

- Put up a good fight. You did. If I wasn’t lucky and if you wanted to bring me serious harm, this would probably be either my loss or a draw with both of us dying. But it is like it is. I see little reason to destroy you without learning why your Mistress put you up here as a test in the first place. So let me pass.

- Can you promise... You won’t bring harm to my Mistress?

- I only attack monsters that oppress humans in very specific ways, are deadly, incredibly malicious or attack me first. If your Mistress isn’t any of those things, I need not harm her.

- Mistress is... wise. And calm. And caring. Please don’t try to harm her. She’s too beautiful and precious to be harmed.

- That may be just your point of view.

The Mistress herself was even more anxious in her waiting. She already knew Annah was deactivated, over and done with. Now the question was what would happen to Kirika. She was worried about meeting a person that had the ruthlessness to slay her servants one after one without a second thought upon fighting them. At best, it’d mean a strong survival instinct, at worst... it’d mean a vendetta against monstergirls.

But then, the doors to her chamber were being opened, and Kirika’s functions were still above slightly above minimum, not turned off, as indicated by a plate with small gems pulsing with light whenever she sent her golem-girls to fight intruders processing and showing what was the state of their overall functions. It was possible she was still conscious... no, she could probably move, maybe even fight. That meant she was going through the door because she won, or...

The Black Moth turned from said function-table of her last golem girl and saw someone who decidedly wasn’t Kirika. She could tell at first glance the man was young, probably in his early to mid-twenties, despite the grey hair. His height about two inches short of six feet, and with slightly exotic facial features - perhaps he was of mixed descent. There was a scar under his left eye, he was clad in dark grey thin leather armour covered by a layer of black, studded leather vest. His left arm was entirely covered, while his right arm had a much shorter glove and a steel shoulder protector. This gave his armour an asymmetrical look, but it wasn’t bad at all.

What Keita saw surprised him even more.

- Black Moth’s Crypt... *You’re not* the Black Moth, are you?!
Yes I am. Is it somehow surprising?

The creature in front of him was humanoid from the waist up, and female, at least by human standards. She had long, flowing hair parted long by spiky ears, resembling ones elves are said to have. The locks in front of her ears were black, as were some of the roots at the top of her head, but the bangs that fell onto her forehead were a pretty green colour, similar to really light leaves. This colour pattern adorned most of her head; black was secondary and from his position, none of it was visible at the long hairs flowing down her back. Her face made her age hard to figure out, especially since Keita was bad at that to begin with. She was clearly an adult and seemed older than him in terms of facial structure; which by monster age could have meant she was several times older.

That human-like upper body, however, did not have a humanoid colour at all. She had a rather pale, grey-violet hue. From the waist down, the woman had a snake’s tail instead of legs. The upper part of her tail had a dark blue coloration with silvery blue spots on the sides and a black, irregular but rather symmetrical linear shape running down the middle of it that somehow resembled a pillar of flames. The bottom side of her tail was white or a very light grey and segmented.

I just... I guess I expected something remotely insect-like. A lamia-kindred... This is rather surprising.

It’s an alias. If you had the courtesy of looking anywhere else other than my face or my tail you’d figure it out quickly.

He did give her another look over and he noticed; her breasts, covered by a red top, were of a pretty generous size. They’d probably draw an ogling stare or two from any healthy male, but Keita wasn’t one. Between them rested a mark that did resemble a moth’s wings, although much was obstructed by the top itself. Lower were her waist and her hips; on each side, she also bore marks, clearly picturing an entire black moth with red spots on top of her wings.

I see. But, if it’s an alias...

Alessa. My name is Alessa. Yours? - the snake-woman answered.


I see. I regret I must put it so bluntly, but what are you doing here, mister Haneo? I thought you may be friends or family with the guys who came here earlier and came here to rescue them, but then, you’d already have grabbed them and taken them away from here. That means you’re here either to purge this dungeon or you decided to see me. And you’re a very unexpected type for a person to attempt either of which.

I fail to see how this information would benefit you if we were to fight.

Alessa closed her eyes for a moment.

How many of the residents of this cemetery and my dungeon have you killed to get here?

Let’s see... Two zombies, three or four skeletons, one slime, and one golem.
Why kill some and not the others? – the host and lady of the dungeon inquired.

There was no reason to kill all of them. The undead withdrew, the slime stood in my way to stop her fellows from raping my fellow humans; said other slimes withdrew upon being attacked. The golems decided to fight me seriously and threatened to rape me when I lost. One was killed in the battle; I had no reason to kill the other. Upon establishing myself as the apparent victor, I convinced her to give up and let me pass. – was the swordsman’s answer.

Convinced Kirika? Why would you do that, and how? What are you even doing here if you don’t slay the monsters one by one given the chance? – Alessa responded with surprise clear in her voice.

You tell me. I don’t know your motivations for filling this dungeon either.

Alessa frowned.
[*This is odd. He decided to fight for some reason, but didn’t kill all of us. That makes no sense, especially for someone already marked with another monster’s demonic energy. This mark is odd, too. It seems... ruined and rather old. His entire spirit energy signature is pretty screwed up for a human, even ignoring the monster influence...*]

Opening her mouth, the monstergirl spoke:

Let me guess. Give me two or three chances. First, let me tell you that you bear a certain mark; a mark that suggests you either had intercourse with a monster, or were in a way specific to a kind of monster marked as one, possibly as a later mate candidate. But, since you’re here, ready to kill monsters, there is a distinct possibility that you have a vendetta against us, probably due to the circumstances you gained this mark in. My first guess would be that you had a human lover you’ve hoped to marry but were seduced or raped by a monster, and your human lover couldn’t accept you after that. However, the mark seems old and incomplete, thus leaving you in no danger of ascending to be an incubus.

That’s not the truth.

Hmmm... Wait, you’re not telling me it’s the reverse? You loved a monstergirl and she died, and now in misplaced vengeance you think some of the monster-kind or all of us wronged you for not helping her? – Alessa asked, surprise and curiosity in her voice.

That’s even further from the truth. – he said matter-of-factly.

You’re pretty hard to figure out, you know. – The woman answered, sighing.

I’ll tell if you’ll explain yourself. Why hide in this dungeon, why is it guarded, what do you do with those who fail to meet up with you and what do you intend to do with those that succeed.

I see. Very well, I am curious enough to tell you these things.

Keita didn’t comment. Alessa continued.
As you correctly deduced, I am a monster classified as a member of the Lamia family. Specifically, I’m an Echidna, one of the highest, strongest varieties of Lamia-kindred, at least here on the main continent. The reason why I set up a dungeon and make it hard to explore fully is the same as it is for many Echidnas, even before the current Demon Lady took over our united races. The reason is procreation. Echidnas instinctively seek to test potential mates and usually said test is a dungeon. Those who pass generally get our interest as potential mates and are seen as worthy to attempt to reproduce with. Those that don’t... well, that depends on the echidna in question. Since we were taken under our current Lady’s wing, we instinctively abhor killing them other than if there’s no other way. Me, specifically... I use them to either increase the number of slimes I keep as pets or to recharge my golem-servants’ or undead’s energy. Order members, who as you know all want to kill us, are given instead to my ally Cybil, so she can dispose of them by making them her own, or die in the process of exploring the dungeon, either from exhaustion of fighting, by accident or when attempting to kill me or my golems. Cybil is of the Fey race, a Pixie. Those who are caught here are either given to one of my more distant allies for safekeeping or to her so they can be teleported to a different place through the Fairy Realm, although I suspect many end up being stuck in said Realm. Especially all Order sympathizers have to be sent far away, lest they reveal what really lives in this dungeon, and its overall secrets. Well, there was an incredibly small amount of people who succeeded to meet me, more an effect of the dungeon’s not so popular location than the power of my guardians. I am a monstergirl and an echidna, so its instinct for me to attempt a mating with them.

- You *will* try to rape me? - Keita’s tone was sharp, harsh.

- No! No, no, definitely not. I... dislike forcing males. Especially since a certain… event. Alessa said, reminiscing some event of her past. - Not to mention this could be dangerous for me, given you succeeded in coming here and I’m a bit short on energy from going without a mating so long. You’re marked by another monstergirl’s demonic energy as well, which normally works as a repellent for us. However... Now she looked him over appraisingly. - ...to be honest, I would try to *seduce* you, and if for some reason you find yourself interested in that outcome for your journey you’re welcome to mate with me, but I’d like to hear your own backstory first. Depending on what it is, I think any attempts at seducing might be doomed to fail.

Keita closed his eyes and sighed.

- I see. Then, essentially, I wasted my time here and killed your servants for nothing, because unless you deem me something you need to destroy, we will not do battle. - His sword, held loosely in his hand, was slid back into its scabbard.

- I would be interested in hearing your own story, though. You did agree to the exchange.

- Very well. I come from the land of Zipangu. As you may know, many of the more civilized monsters live there in peace with humans; only true extremists, those indoctrinated by the Order from this continent or those with personal vendettas are really opposed to that. There is a class of monsters that even after the changes to the True Demon Lord and the Zipangu Dragon Lord are deemed dangerous to humans. They’re widely called monstrosities; they have inhuman traits, are more violent than other monsters, less caring, often attempt to rape people against their will and aren’t too gentle when doing that.

- I see. Please continue.

- This was about a year and a half ago. - Keita’s eyes became unfocused, as if he were looking into the distance. It was obvious that he was reliving his past. - I was still young, not even nineteen, and an adventurer eager to prove myself after training with a couple of masters. I wanted to eliminate a
monstrosity in the vicinity of a town my friend lived in, but I’ve run into one of the worst of them all. That was the day I did gain a reason for revenge of my own.

- So, you want to eliminate monsters that are violent and rape humans that are unwilling? Is that it? You do realize it’s more complicated here than in Zipangu, right?

- You’re correct, but that is but a secondary purpose of mine. Hear me out. I ran into a powerful monstrosity; an arachnid-like creature, called Ushi-Oni. What I did not know at the time is that even when you attack one of them, their blood directly transfers the monster-like qualities to the human whose skin or body it directly touches. Even after just being touched by a drop, my will was weakened, I felt an odd attraction to the creature and my lust was fired up. I still intended to fight it, but it was superior to me in all ways. I was defeated easily and surely enough, the Ushi-Oni started to rape me like it befits one of her kind.

Alessa swallowed.
- I... So... It’s like that That explains the spiritual mark, and would give you a reason to...

- It’s but a part of my reason. The Ushi-oni is but a trauma anyone fighting a monster should prepare themselves for, although I admit I ran into a vicious, sadistic specimen that left me with many scars and wasn’t delicate in the least, getting off on her partner’s pain, or maybe the screams.

Alessa felt a shiver run down her spine [This... is horrible. How could any monster affected by Lady Lilith treat something precious like a human male that way?]

- But it’s not the monster-kind my vendetta is against. I battle monsters who rape humans into unwilling servitude, take them into slavery, mistreat them or are violent with them. I do realize there can be and are human and monster couples that fit none of these criteria. I’ve killed them, too, by accident, to repay my debt, or later occasionally as a way of living, though I make a point not to kill mated ones that don’t mistreat their human mates. My vendetta is against something else. You see, the night the Ushi-Oni defeated me and took out it’s sexual frustrations and sadistic desires on my body was just after the descent of the Umbro Star.

That shiver turned to ice, freezing Alessa stock still. [D... don’t tell me...] Unaware of her thoughts though, Keita carried on, his eyes becoming even more distant, his tone almost emotionless.

- A powerful spawn of this unholy fiend found its way to the cave where I was being raped. I believe the ushi-oni was its target. It managed to distract her and they engaged in battle; the arachnid monster was pushed down a cliff, probably to its death. It wasn’t the end of my anguish. The tentacled horror decided I could be a good enough recipient for its lust, even though most tentacle beasts attack only females or have a preference for them. I was again violated by something even less human than the ushi-oni before. My wounds from the fight and mistreatment were infected by the tentacle horror’s vile secretions, as was every major orifice in my body. I would have definitely died regardless of its intentions, but the cave was found by a group of western Order’s missionaries, probably searching for monsters. Seeing a human in peril, they attacked and finally freed me. I was a mess, a wreck; their healer took me under his care. I insisted I wanted to go with them to their continent, undergo full treatment in his hands and then repay my debt to their organisation, and so I did. While the treatment had... consequences, physical and psychological, I was slightly stronger
and much tougher than before the ordeal.

He paused for a moment.
- For a time, I served the Order having to kill you monsters indiscriminately, but I found many of you are not different from the civilized ones in Zipangu, so while opposing some I stopped killing you without a thought unless I really *had* to earn money that way. I never killed a ‘married’ monster in knowledge of it, however, unless they reminded me of monstrosities from my home land.

- So, your revenge...- Alessa spoke, silently, almost breathlessly, trying to watch for any hint of emotion in her voice.

- It is against the Umbro Star and its spawn. I need a way to slaughter them effectively or a way to weaken Umbro Star itself. I am no megalomaniac. I realize I stand little chance in a battle against something on par with gods; but I want to do the most I can. - Keita’s tone was firm, absolute.

There was no room for doubt in his conviction. - This is also the reason I will neither kill you nor mate with you. That night left me frigid to the lure of physical pleasure. I am completely not interested, and will fight any attempts to force such mating on me even if they are doomed to fail because of my condition. His tone was filled with finality.

Alessa’s thoughts were a mess. [This is horrible... Raped by one of my own kind without any care, in a brutal, sadistic, physically and mentally scarring manner... only to be violated further, poisoned and ruined physically and mentally by something that is a danger to both monsterkind and humankind, and the greatest direct threat to our Demon Lady’s allies in Zipangu? He’s not interested in human women, and most monstergirls will reject him, not see him as a potential mate because of the mark inflicted by the Ushi-Oni. Those that will... They will be rejected for trying a way that is doomed to fail with him. He’ll never know the touch of a woman that cares for him, nor romantic love... and he’s even younger than I thought, only about twenty! This is just too sad!] A well-spring of compassion opened up within her, connecting with thoughts and ideas she’d had before off and on, but never taken up.

- I see. Then I promise to respect your will. I will not also do any harm to you. Your stance is fair and far more open than that of many humans here. – she finally said, a decision almost clearly made in her head.

- Then I guess the only issue left is whether you’ll allow me to take my fellow adventurers out of here. - Keita’s stance relaxed a little as his eyes refocused.

- I will, under one condition.

- If it’s reasonable. - He crossed his arms over his chest.

Alessa hesitated for a moment, before speaking. - You will let me come with you on your journey.

The frown returned to Keita’s brow, along with the tenseness in his body.

- That isn’t reasonable and I have no idea what brought that up.
Despite the situation Alessa felt a small bubble of humour bubble up from within.

- Oh, don’t be silly. It makes a lot of sense. You want to fight what brings harm to humans and your main enemy is a threat to humankind and monsterkind. If I come with you, I can help you battle the Umbro Star’s faction, other threats to our precious human males and I can control the damage you deal against monsterkind, making sure it’s not excessive or unfair.

- I’m still not sure what’s in it for either of us. - The tension had faded somewhat from his frame, but the frown was still there. Alessa decided to lay out nearly all her cards.

- Basically, other than what I said I get to travel with you and do something that doesn’t bore the crap out of me like sitting in this dungeon. I get to make a difference in advantage of monsterkind, I get to help someone who has been mistreated by both my allies and enemies, thus repaying our debt to you. You get my knowledge of monsterkind and my magical powers. I assure you that when it comes down to it I can be quite dangerous in battle, even as deprived of sources of spiritual energy as I was from years of sitting here. I will aid you against any humans that threaten you, any and all tentacle beast and similar creatures of Umbro Star, other threats to humanity and probably the most extreme monsters. I will not turn my powers against my fellow monster kind, though, unless in rare and extreme circumstances. I promise never to turn against you nor attempt to violate you. You also get to watch a powerful member of monster kind making sure it does no wrong, and you also eliminate any threat posed by my dungeon. Doesn’t that sound like a good deal? - She said, her reasoning appearing sound and true. And they were, mostly. She did honestly want to help him, and travelling with him brought the possibility of helping him with more than just the tentacle horrors.

Keita, again, closed his eyes and sighed.

- How can I be sure I can trust you?

- You can’t. I can’t be sure you won’t give me away to the Order or murder me in my sleep, either. It’s a matter of faith. Know that I really do want to aid you. - She replied honestly.

A moment of silence fell as Keita thought hard to himself.

[I’m going to regret this, but her powers and knowledge may be useful.]

Keita opened his eyes to look her in the eye.

- Fine. But I’ll have an eye on you.

- I’m a woman. We like being watched. - Alessa smirked at him, obviously satisfied with his decision.

Once Alessa had gathered those belongings that she wished to take with her – a surprisingly small amount, Keita thought - the pair left her chamber, coming upon Kirika and the corpse of Annah in the next one. Kirika jumped up from her seat on the floor at sight of Alessa.

- Mistress! You’re okay! And you finally had a worthy visitor! Did the visit go well? Did I do the right thing letting him meet you?
Alessa smiled at her servant, her worry of how much damage was dealt to her evaporating.
- Yes, Kirika. You’ve done a great job. I’ve decided to come with this man, in fact, so you’ve done marvellously.

Kirika’s facial expression became worried.
- Then, Mistress, please, if you let me rest a bit, I will follow straight away.
- That won’t be necessary.

A light shined from Alessa’s hands, flowing into Kirika’s body. Substance flew away from Annah’s corpse to the other golem, regenerating her. Kirika shuddered as she felt her energy levels jump much higher than they had been for quite a while.
- There. That should give you quite an energy boost for a while and take care of your injuries.
- Then, Mistress, I will come wherever you go.
- No, Kirika. That is no longer necessary either. - Alessa said with a warm look in her eyes. Kirika seemed to panic.
- No, Mistress! Wherever you go, I have to follow! That is my...
- No, Kirika. Such an arrangement is no longer necessary for either of us. I have my own things to do and you’ve done your job. When forming a monstergirl golem and giving them fighting skills, I was worried I’ll effectively make it impossible for them to develop true personalities like some golems can. But you’ve proven that wrong. You think. You’re creative. You take action on your own. You realized that letting a worthy man meet me was your true purpose, and you didn’t throw your life away for a fake one. I’m proud of you, Kirika. - The smile on Alessa’s face became almost maternal.
- But... But I want to come! You’re important. My mission is to protect you!
- Not anymore. You should be free now. Kirika, my last order is this. Go out into the world. Explore it. Find a man you can love. Redo the runes that bind you to me, and make him your owner if that is your will. That’s the way a monstergirl should live her life. The energy I gave you will keep you running for a time even without seminal fluid as your fuel. Make sure to avoid *forcing* men into giving more to you, and try to only take it from the men you like. Do you understand? - Alessa stressed the last part of her command, leaning forwards a bit.
- Yes, Mistress. But... are you sure?
- I am. I hope we’ll meet again. Maybe you’ll have someone precious then. I could meet them, give you my blessings and tell you you’ve made me proud again. But please, follow those orders to the letter. Never seek me out until you have a person you love, never follow me. Do you understand and accept those orders?
- Yes, Mistress.
- Alessa. Just Alessa.
- Yes, Alessa. I was proud to be your guardian golem for the time we’ve shared.
- You’re the best of my servants, and I’m proud of you. I’ll go now. You may take anything from my
room you need; empty Annah’s and Deborah’s tanks and add them to your own for additional energy. The amulet and earrings of communication will be left to Cybil, and she may live here if she wants. Do not free Akasta. I’ll tell Cybil to do it in a few days. The slimes may leave if they want.

- Yes, Mistress Alessa.

The pair moved further towards the exit from the dungeon, leaving the golem standing there, almost like a lost child. After a few minutes Keita spoke.

- Alessa-san?

- Oh, Zipangu honorifics? I would be fine just being called my own name, but whatever makes you comfortable. - Alessa was flattered, surprised, but flattered.

Keita didn’t seem to take notice of her words.
- You’ve given them your own hair, didn’t you?

She smiled at him indulgently.
- You figured it out?

- The first two had green hair. Kirika is the only one with different hair, and she has black, which you also have.

Alessa grinned at her companion’s awareness. There appeared to be more to him than ability and skill.
- Yes, you’re correct. I commend your perceptiveness. They were things I’ve made on my own, and I could give them personality traits. Of course, they needed something of mine, like my children. They had fighting abilities scripted onto them along with the personalities, which limited their character development somewhat. That is, until I made Kirika. Although, she’s still not fully developed.

- How should she be? – Keita asked, a hint of actual curiosity in his voice.

- More feisty and playful. I’m sure she’ll grow into it, though.

The echidna and the human then walked (or slithered) into the cave where Conall and Deryn Amberwing were. The pair tensed up at seeing them both.

- So, are you guys coming with me? You wanted to know who I am, and I could actually use your help if we think alike. You did defeat a golem and those things were no jokes.

- But... you do see that snake lady next to you, right? - Deryn asked nervously.

- Of course. She’s the so-called Black Moth. Thankfully, she has a peaceful attitude and will be coming with me. I’ll explain everything when we have the chance, if you’re fine travelling with us back to town.

Conall hesitated. Deryn spoke out. - Sure. I want to hear the explanation how being in this dungeon gave her a peaceful attitude, especially.

- Very well then. That makes four of us, if Conall agrees.
- I'll accept her if Deryn does. He's smart enough to know what he's doing. - The older Amberwing answered.

Alessa summed everything up.
- Then, shall we take our leave, gentlemen?
Chapter Summary

The time for the Black Moth’s Dungeon existence may be coming to a close, as the four do what many adventurers have done in ages past: Sit down in a tavern and ponder if they have objectives that could overlap, and a quest they could accomplish together.

After a rather non-emotional farewell scene between a fickle Pixie that attacked Keita before entering called Cybil, a barely-sentient, currently one handed Zombie called Urokfu that aided in said attack and a set-to-leave Echidna, the group of four moved to leave the cemetery. Keita was curious as to why precisely Alessa got rid of her telepathy-transmitting jewellery - it appears someone who isn’t a monster or an incubus wouldn’t really be able to take advantage of it, so at the current state of the group it was pointless baggage.

As the three men walked and the one monstergirl slithered away from the cemetery’s gate, it was visible that the trio of males worried about the odd one. For different reasons, Deryn decided to speak up.

-You know, snake-lady...

-Alessa. I’ve revealed my name and you have my permission to use it freely, so please do so.

-Very well, Alessa. You know... Your form. I’m not comfortable travelling around with someone who is half-person half-snake. Not to mention, you’d make people at towns and cities panic, and any Order members that come our way will try to stop us and accuse us of heresy and relations with monsters. Can’t you, you know... appear as a human or something?

Alessa stopped moving for a moment and turned to Deryn.

-I can understand how a non-human companion would make you uncomfortable after your experience, but trying to hide the issue does not solve it.

-I don’t even know or care what you’re referring to. Just answer the question.

-Very well. You see, Deryn, I *can* take on human form. However, it is rather energy-draining. While it is obvious that I should be in human form while in towns or such, while on the road it would just be a waste of energy... And regaining, increasing, or accumulating that energy is kind of hard on my own.

Keita decided it’s a good moment to cut in. -Deryn-kun, please leave her be for now. Neither of us had a chance to explain anything yet, so wait with the judgemental attitude. Alessa-san, that means you basically refuse to take on human form as long as it’s not necessary, meaning outside of human towns and such?

-Yes. At least for now. As I’ve said, years of isolation have not done wonders, at least not in the positive sense, to my energy reserves. I’d rather keep them for something more productive.

-I see. Well, it’s mostly you who’s in danger, so I’m not going to force you to keep human form outside of what you think is necessary. But, we’ll be entering a human settlement soon, so you may
as well be prepared to do it.

Alessa gave him a nod in response. She wasn’t going to argue pointlessly, but neither there was about to go around wasting her demonic energy just because Deryn couldn’t fight and win against a bunch of slimes. Surely enough, she thought he had the right to distrust her and be uncomfortable around her, but if the situation was under the rule of one of the previous Demon Lords then the two boys would be dead already. Thankfully, it wasn’t, and she could have Deryn, Conall and Keita warm up to her little by little.

Well, at least she hoped it’ll be possible.

When the quartet was about to enter town, they stopped, and the three men simply looked at Alessa. She didn’t waste time. After putting a small chest she was carrying with her, apparently a set of items that she thought would be useful, a small, greyish aura surrounding her as her body started to change. The long tail started to shrink as it split into two; said smaller tails squirming around as they took a more human-like shape, finally solidifying into legs. Her skin started to lose the unnatural, violet hue and took on a pale, nearly white parlour reminiscent of a human girl that was brought up without any access to sun whatsoever. Well, not a ‘girl’ to be honest; Alessa’s human form appeared completely mature and, in fact, possibly a little bit older than her monster form.

Lastly, her hair simply lost the green colouring at first, leaving her with white and black hair. Then, the blackness seemed to slowly spread over the rest of her hair even as it lightened, leaving her with a grey coloration not at all dissimilar to Keita’s own.

She put a cloak on straight away, covering the marks representing moths that covered her hips, breasts and the one on her back - four black moths in total - and now, she could easily pass for a human woman, probably about thirty due to the grey hair and the apparent slight age difference between her human and monster forms, the latter one having her appear as if she was in mid to late twenties.

-So, am I presentable to the poor townsfolk now? Or is this still the kind of look you’d rather not have on a girl you bring to your parents?- 

Conall and Deryn both almost choked on that. -Parents?

Alessa ignored the question and just faced Keita.

-It’ll do. Good move with hiding these... Tattoos?Whatever they are. Fine, then. Let us rent a room or two, and I’ll explain everything to you at the tavern, Deryn-kun, Conall-san.

The pair looked at each other trying to figure out what the hell these things added at the end of their names meant. Suddenly, it was the Echidna leading the march for the town - the same one in which she was considered a dungeon-lurking menace just a few days ago, and even more so in the past. The three men weren’t far behind, though, and the group soon entered the town.

The shapechanged Lamia-kindred looked around curiously. -Things... changed around here, compared to the last time I’ve been outside. So, where’s the tavern?

-Under the Ebon Rose. Right there across the street.

-Is every named location in these parts related to the colour black? Well, never mind that. You probably all need a rest and we should discuss the entire issue of what happened.
They actually had to wait for Arnold, the owner to come down and open the tavern upon knocking - after all, it’s been late at night and most people were already sleeping.

The owner seemed pretty surprised to get the entire set of adventurers he just sent out plus a lady as bonus so soon, but being more than interested in what happened and ready to show gratitude if the cemetery nearby were to become safe again, if only for the benefit of secret couples and groups of kids, he let them in. Obviously, however, the presence of the female element piqued too much of his immediate curiosity to let it be. Alessa decided to handle the issue.

-Greetings, sir. Are you the owner of this cosy place? How should I refer to you?

-The name’s Arnold, miss. Pardon my probably overbearing attitude, but while I recognize your traveling companions, I have never seen you in this town for my entire life.

-Ah... My name is Alessa. These brave gentlemen rescued me... a classical damsel in distress situation, I’m ashamed to say. I had my own interest in that dungeon a while ago, but I failed and would’ve been in real trouble if not for them. However, right now, we’re all pretty tired, so if you’d excuse us and allow us to rest here...

-Of course, miss. Pardon my rudeness.

Keita approached and cut in. -Arnold-san, would you please tell me when could I expect the smithy here to be open?

-Ah, well, the young master there is quite the morning person, so I suppose it’d be up and running in just a few hours... probably at dawn.

-Very well. Then, I’d like to get us four ro...

-Wait, Keita-kun. You seem to be forgetting that we have a certain matter to discuss... All of us.-Alessa said quickly.

-Keita-kun...? Nevermind, how many rooms should we rent, then?

Alessa turned to face Arnold again. -Mister Arnold, is there a room big enough for four people where everyone can sleep in separate beds?

Arnold frowned. -Well... there is the family room, meant for a group of five... Just four beds though, one is meant for the couple. It’s rather expensive since the beds were made to fit people up to their late teens, and it’s also rather spacious, so the cost...

-We’ll take it.

Deryn felt the need to intervene. -Easy for you to say when it’s us paying for it, right?

-My oh my. How rude, speaking to someone older like that. And to a woman, no less.

-Wait, now *I’m* the one with no manners?

-Didn’t Keita-kun tell you to please wait until we explain everything properly before starting fights? You’re disrespecting both me and him. I’d call that a lack of manners.

Despite Deryn’s attitude, the room’s price was well within the reach of their combined funds, so they decided to take the family room. Deryn and Conall gave their share of payment to Keita and went
upwards. Keita asked for direction to the smithy’s and Alessa was waiting for him on the stairs. He also asked to not disturb them - they’ll be closing their room for the night and they’ll ask themselves if they need anything. He then approached Alessa with a raised eyebrow seeing her apparent reluctance to go up the stairs.

-Well... using the stairs while, you know... walking... with legs... I haven’t done that in years.-she whispered. -I hope it’s one of these things you never forget how to do.

-Umm... Alessa-san, please don’t joke unnecessarily. Also, don’t use Zipangu honorifics without care or attention to what they mean or imply.

-Ummm? But, you’re male, I’m female, and I’m older than you, so technically ‘Keita-kun’ should be appropriate, right?

He decided to simply shut up as the Echidna entwined their arms, clearly using his ‘help’ for climbing up the stairs despite apparently not needing it all that much.

-Yes, technically, it’s appropriate.

-So, to make you feel more at home, I’ll be using that honorific for now. Is that all right?

-Do what you want. Anyway, this should be the room.

Deryn and Conall were sitting on the floor. -Well, there are four beds and what we wondered about was...

Alessa simply cut them off with a small shout.

-I claim the big one!

Rather uncharacteristically for someone estimated to be the oldest of the group, the Echidna literally flew onto the large bed meant for two people. Immediately turning to the rest of the group, her behaviour alone suggested that’s it for assigning beds to people as far as she was concerned.

-I guess the issue is solved...

-Why does she keep doing whatever she wants to do...-Deryn added to his brother’s words.

-Well, it’s not like anyone else needs a large one, anyway.-Keita decided to make the situation what it was - insignificant.

It was Alessa’s turn to raise an eyebrow.

-You know guys, this *is* a bed for two people. I mean, technically it could be two guys or me and any of you three, if you insist, that is...

The reaction she expected was immediate. At least one person stuttering, two people blushing... and Keita taking a step back.

-But, to be completely serious, this bed has the most warming equipment to it. We Lamia-kindred do not stabilize body temperature easily, so at night and at morning we do need to be warmed. Since my relationship with neither of you is at a level where I’d suggest using you as a heat source, I guess
It was Deryn’s turn to raise an eyebrow. -This is a weakness. You’re comfortable telling us things like that?

-Of course! There is a chance we’ll be travelling together after all, and at the very least, I will require your discretion in case we go our separate roads. If you attacked me before I was warmed up, it’d be dangerous and a pain, of course, but I wouldn’t be completely defenceless, either.

The trio nodded and agreed to let her have the largest bed, while separating their own equipment and taking a bed each.

-So... Shall we begin by introducing ourselves or something? Name, age, reason for being here? I think we should also hear miss Alessa’s reason for following mister Haneo out of the dungeon.-Conall suggested.

-Well, I could provide you with a reason for that, if you give me reasons for why you were here in my dungeon as well as why you followed him up until now.

-Very well…-answered Conall.-I will start then. My name is Conall Amberwing, twenty years old, and I went dungeoneering with my brother here because I’d like to make this world a better and safer place. Since I’m skilled with fighting and stuff more than other things, I figured this would be the way to go. I had no specific reason for choosing the Black Moth dungeon over others. We’d heard of it, it was nearby and so we decided to help. I followed mister Haneo because he rescued us from a pinch in the dungeon...

-…He stopped the slimes mid-rape, to be precise…-Deryn cut in. His brother’s look informed him that he should await his turn.

-…Well, he descended into that dungeon for a reason and suggested our help might be useful, so I decided to hear him out. I’ll confess that being a somewhat faithful person and stuff, I am not comfortable with him just striking a deal with a monster resident of said dungeon, but, well… he did help us.- He turned to regard his brother, who took the opening for what it was.

-The name is Deryn, seventeen years. I go around dungeons mostly for the thrill and also to enjoy time with my brother. We were always pretty close and although we got our adventurer careers started in different ways they allowed us to reconnect after some time without contact, so I’m quite content with getting to do such things together.- He paused for a moment. -I’m not as religious as him, but let’s just say that getting raped by a slime wasn’t my imagined first time and having the mastermind behind the entire dungeon walking, or should I say, slithering here with us is probably making me even more uncomfortable than him.

-If I may…-Started Alessa.-While I understand your position, regret that you didn’t get to do this with someone you liked rather than unwillingly with a slimegirl, and while you have every right to be suspicious of me, I’d like to point out three things. First, I’d like to point out that I’m not the one that raped you and I find such a tactic to get a mate... distasteful, personally. The slimes that did it weren’t even under my command; they were used as a backup force in case of intrusion.

Nobody seemed to take issue with her reasoning yet, so Alessa continued.

-Second of all, the situation ended up this way because of your own lack of caution: you engaged slimes apparently without much knowledge on how to fight one as well as weakened after a battle with a golem that should have warned you that this place is dangerous. Nobody and nothing forced you to press on.
Well, she did cut off their way of escape, but she did not need to really capture them if they withdrew earlier.

-Third, well... I hate to call upon this, but... Under any of the previous monster lords, these monsters wouldn’t attempt to have sex with you, but rather they’d kill you or eat you... or both. Which one is better and which one is worse *does* depend on one’s views on the world, morality and such, but unless one of you has a twisted honour and too much pride I doubt you’d really pick death over a bout of sex with a slimegirl no strings attached. You may feel jaded and regret this if it was your first time, but it only changes these facts a little. I’d prefer it if we all started with a clean slate here and built our opinion of each other slowly.

Both Conall and Deryn went silent at that. Being lectured by a monster was not their favourite thing to do; the fact that she made sense made it seem even worse.

-Well, whatever. It’s your turn now, snake-lady.

-Alessa. My name is Alessa, alias ‘The Black Moth’. I’m a lady, so my age will remain a secret for now.-She said with a small smile.-It’s probably not what you think it is, anyway. I’ve been living inside my own dungeon for quite a long time; in fact, I’ve begun doing it not so long after the current Demon Lady took over... Well, not so long by monster standards, I guess. I followed Keita-kun here because for one, I needed something interesting to do, and for two, his quest seems very noble and righteous. Also, I think the monster clan owes him for the harm we’ve caused him in the past for which he did not exact as violent of a revenge as he could; the fact that his attention is directed towards the common enemy of both monsterkind and humankind only makes it more worthwhile. I do have two other agendas in doing so; a selfish one and a selfless one. For the selfish one, I’d like to hope I’ll manage to meet a few people from before I’ve moved into my dungeon and gained my alias. The selfless one will remain a secret for now, because I don’t want to seem overbearing or as if I’m sticking my nose into somebody else’s business or life.

Conall nodded slowly. -Very well. It’d seem it’s mister Haneo’s turn to explain his story and why is he so far from home.

Keita sighed, and then did explain.

He explained how he came from Zipangu thanks to being saved by the Order.

He explained how he ‘run afoul of’ a certain type of Monster and decided some of them are no good; he explained how ‘he has a strong, personal vendetta with the added perception of them as the greatest evil currently’ of the tentacle horrors; he explained how his goal is to make the species themselves suffer as much as possible, as well as noting he had no delusions of grandeur and didn’t hope to actually slay them all on his own or destroy the Umbro Star itself.

What Alessa noted was how vague the descriptions were. He spoke nothing of getting raped; nothing of days and months of being healed, nothing of slaughtering monstergirls as a method of ‘repaying’ the Order, and nothing of how he planned to deal damage to the tentacle horrors or at least obtain the knowledge of how to maximize that damage.

However, the two youngsters, one his age and one younger, were already fired up even with such vague, impersonal descriptions. Her only regret was that they wouldn’t understand why she wanted to help Keita in the first place.

-It would appear snak... Alessa wasn’t kidding. This sounds serious. While the tentacle horrors are
mostly the issue in Zipangu, it’s not like we can simply ignore them and if so, it’s only for the time being. If you need help with hunting down those who are already here or researching a way to thin out their numbers or weaken their leaders, we’ll gladly help you, especially if it collides with our goals and we manage to make the misfortunes of people on the western continent lesser as well.

Keita considered the pair, his gaze firm. -Well, it’s not like I’d want to endanger you if you cannot handle it. Fighting monsters out here is one thing; fighting things that have absolutely no preference whatsoever whether you’re half dead or ripped to shreds when they’re done with you is another. So, I’d say your help is welcome for a test period but if I find you’re not up to the task or the task is suicidal, we should say our goodbyes.

Deryn looked back just as firmly. -I guarantee we’ll be up to the task.

Alessa decided to cut into the conversation. -Well, I should remind you that you got careless enough to run into a group of slimes while weakened and lose to them. Even if your skill is up to the task, you’ll require more focus and cautiousness to actually pull it off.

-Don’t talk like you’re already above us in the hierarchy.-Conall snapped back. -Actually, I say we should vote on whether we are comfortable with miss Alessa here coming with us at all.

Both Alessa and Keita seemed surprised by Conall’s suggestion. Keita decided to simply dismiss any discussion on the matter before it happened. -That would be pointless.

-Why?

-Because I’ve already accepted Alessa-san’s presence, hence, she should be allowed to vote as well. Even if you two would be opposed, it’s two versus two votes.

Deryn raised an eyebrow. -So, her vote has the same weight as a human’s?

-Of course. She’s a person after all. I’d reconsider if she behaved differently but so far, nothing suggests otherwise.

-So, even if we both were opposed to it, it’s a tie and we’d have to separate.-Said Conall before he sighed. -Very well, Pardon me if I offended anyone. For the record... I didn’t say I would vote against her presence.

Deryn spoke out to make the discussion as short as possible, if only so they could go to sleep already. -And I’d vote yes. It’s better to keep an eye on those things and she seems tame as long as Keita here is around, so there’d be no point releasing her in the wild. If half of her act is real, and this keeps up I may come to accept her anyway. So, it’s three and half vote versus a half, problem solved. No, wait… actually, there is an issue. Black Moth, what exactly... do you... eat?

Alessa raised her eyebrows before laughing in a surprisingly cheerful, honest manner. -Am I supposed to say tender virgin flesh here? Or maybe it’s blood? No, I should eat souls themselves, it’s creepier and more appropriate that way.

Deryn clearly didn’t find the situation humorous. -I was being serious.

-It’s because you people never think we can eat something normal. We’re always supposed to feed in some incredible, creepy and dangerous ways.-Alessa countered.
-Well, that reputation comes from somewhere...

-It’s mostly superstition, human’s unwillingness to accept how many races are very close to them in habits, diet and intellectual as well as emotional and moral levels. Alessa said matter-of-factly. -Well, I’ll say this: Lamia-kindred are all carnivores with diet based on or consisting solely of animal meat. Some of us develop a taste for additional things as well, but for most of the time and nearly all cases animal meat, prepared or raw, is both suitable and enough to sustain us. I... do have tastes that differ from the ‘base’, though.

-Specifically?- Deryn pried, curious.

-I find myself having a small preference for properly processed meat over raw meat, a rare trait in most lamia-kindred. Of course, I’d eat either depending on circumstances. Also, I... Love cheese. And I like tomatoes.

-That’s... surprising.- Conall commented.

-Well, of course.- Alessa said rather reluctantly, blushing, in fact. -Well, like many monsters, we Echidnas can consume spiritual energy. It’s more of a delicacy and treated like a snack with the additional benefits of restoring and strengthening magical powers, but still.

-Spiritual... energy?

Alessa rested her head on an arm and rolled her eyes. -Well, you’ll get it eventually. Or I’ll explain, eventually. For now, we should probably go to sleep. If you’ll excuse me...

The Echidna’s original skin tone started to slowly show again, and her hair again separated into black and white sections. Then, her form slowly lost its legs in place of a long, serpentine tail, her skin color changed fully and the white portion of her hair regained its greenness.

Only then Keita realized that she was in her human form for the entire talk, and indeed it seemed like she got somewhat younger in her monster form. [She could’ve changed at any time... no, in fact, it would have been preferable for her. She did mention keeping the transformation up drains her powers. It’s surprising that she’d hold onto it for so long just for their comfort when talking... Looks like she pays more attention to getting along with them than I expected or she’d like to admit]

-Then, all issues are solved. I guess we can go to rest.

-One more thing, mister Keita. In the morning I’d like to discuss if we could do a particular thing before we start with your mission and all.

-Fine by me.

A few hours later, Alessa awoke from her unusually shallow sleep. Of course, it was the first time in years she slept anywhere other than her own chambers, so she could be nervous, and the sound of Keita shutting and locking the room’s door were enough to wake her up.

She was cold.

Stretching her serpentine body, she re-donned the large, somewhat baggy strap of red embroidered cloth that substituted for a bra in her case. She had a few more clothes along with her for special
occasions, including the cloak and a light battle armour suited for Echidna’s and other Lamia-Kindred specifically, but that was about it. Maybe she should persuade the guys to buy her human clothes if they had the means for it.

Especially given Keita’s current condition. She practically paraded around with half of her flesh revealed - she was worried it might make him uncomfortable. Then, again, he claimed to be an asexual and not a gynophobe, so she guessed he was simply indifferent to the sight altogether, at least as long as she covered herself with *something*.

[It’s cold. I should’ve learned much more fire magic. No real luck with guys so far, so nothing to use to warm myself up either. Move, body, move...]

She sat up and started her body-changing process again. She couldn’t walk out - well, slither out - of here in her snake form. Too much risk. She didn’t like her human form - the partial exchange of age effects with a normally human scale and the grey hair made her seem like much more of an older lady that she really was or felt like, not to mention the effect of draining her energy, the reserves of which have been always tested by her long lack of a steady sex partner...

Yes. Human form sucked.

Stretching again, this time with human legs, she reached for her cape. Her stance wasn’t very certain and she still felt cold.

[Humans have these toys for children to hug and sleep with. Maybe I should buy myself an extra-large one.]

Grabbing the spare key, she awkwardly worked at the lock with it. Coming down, she realized that Arnold was apparently woken just moments ago.

-Miss Alessa, you too are awake? I swear, young people these days don’t appreciate sleep, but I thought you at least had the sense to rest when you had the chance.

[Shut it. I’m still pretty young. By my race’s standards at least]

Alessa however did not allow her thoughts to show on her face. -I was awakened by one of my comrades leaving... Mister Haneo, I think. Did he come down here?

-Yes, he awoke me. Told me he had something to do at the smithy’s.

-Very well. If it’s not much of a problem, I’ll go after him.

-As you wish, it’s not like I’ll find it easy to go back to sleep now, anyway.

Alessa stumbled out of the place. Oh, how she disliked that particular weakness of her body! She’d use magic to try and compensate, but there seemed to be no need other than trying to catch Keita. She might be overdoing things on the front of conserving energy but she wasn’t just going to change her attitude about it completely now for no reason at all.

Seeing the Smithy’s building, she finally allowed herself to rest her back against a nearby house. Keita, indeed, left the smithy’s building moments after and quickly noticed her.

-And... what are you doing here, Alessa-san?
Following you, of course.

The reason being?

I was worried that you may have decided to ditch these two and go on your own way after all. The source of worry being you’d be ditching me in the process.

No, no. I don’t have that kind of attitude. I’ll let you all prove yourself. At the very least, you can be used as cannon fodder and meatshields. If you survive despite being outpaced a lot, then you’ll be able to guess yourself when you should leave. No pushing.

Interesting. Alessa appraised him carefully. You really are serious about this, referring to people as ‘meatshields’ and ‘cannon fodder’. Hypothetically, what would you do if one of us turned out to be much more competent in doing your supposed ‘job’ than you are? Or simply more effective at destroying those tentacle horrors you hate?

Well… then I’d be glad I travel with such people while working my ass off to catch up.

That’s a good attitude to have.

Anyway, your worry was for nothing. Since your precious servant Kirika broke my wakizashi in the fight, I had to buy myself a new short reach weapon. The smith had a pretty good dagger so I settled for that, at least for now.

That’s right! I… forgot that… Kirika gave you trouble...

Suddenly, she found herself supported by the young man’s arm.

You’re not feeling well?

Alessa sighed. My body still hasn’t woken up properly, so to speak. I’m cold, and my blood flows slowly. As I mentioned, raising my temperature back to manageable levels during the day without the use of magic is a pain.

And you don’t want to use magic because you need to conserve energy.

Precisely.

You didn’t seem to have a problem with maintaining human form longer just so these two wouldn’t be uncomfortable talking with you.

For someone who doesn’t sleep much, you’re awfully observant. It’s natural for girls to want to be popular.

Sounds to me like you’re making excuses.

And now you’re being too suspicious. Must be the lack of sleep.

Sleeping is overrated.

I suppose I know why you’d say that, but I don’t want to push in the wrong direction here. Thank you for the physical support, I should be fine now. Let’s go and wake up our companions, I believe they had something to talk to us about.
While Conall found it easy to wake up, Deryn, surprisingly, was utterly not a morning person and got very whiny from the attempts to get him awake. However, once called out on that, he quickly got himself together and tried to maintain a serious image.

Conall explained the situation. -You see, other than the Black Moth’s dungeon, there seemed to be another problem at the area around here. Apparently, a ‘bandit force of small but dangerous monsters’ has taken quite a hold in mountains over two nearby villages. In addition, young men from these villages were disappearing and there are rumours of one Order Knight who is also missing since he attempted to investigate the matter.

Deryn joined his brother. -Now, goblins or harpies are a natural assumption in this case, however if it was only that, there probably wouldn’t be so many disappearances and a member of the Order could probably deal with a single tribe of goblins somehow, especially if he rallied the citizens. Personally, I suspect an alliance of two monster tribes relatively harmless on their own, but it may be something different as well.

Keita turned to Alessa. -You wouldn’t happen to know what the issue here may be?

-I’ve been shut in my dungeon for too long. If it comes to knowledge about a specific kind of monster, I could help, but geographical knowledge is currently out of my league.

-I see. Will you be fine if we intervene in this matter?

Alessa was surprised. She didn’t expect such good treatment from a man who suspected her of having ulterior motives in trying to get along with her new traveling companions, but she wasn’t going to be suspicious of him now. He probably meant well.

-Well, I’d say we have to first investigate the matter and find out what’s happening. I’m not adverse to you stopping monstergirls that overdo things or truly threaten humans, however… do understand that if the situation isn’t critical or incredibly odd, I will not aid you physically in this.

-Yes, I understood so much when we talked about this in the first place. But it is all right to investigate and probably try to stop them?

-Of course. It’s your mission anyway. All I’m going to ask is minimizing the number of casualties on both sides.

-Very well. Deryn-kun, Conall-san, lead the way.

Some time later, an odd hunter lost the track of their prey near a town.

[From here, there’s no more sign of movements of anything serpentine, just the footmarks, but now four pairs of them, instead of three. They probably stayed in that town... and now I must search the place for where the snake marks begin again.]

The tracker sighed and started to move around the village, looking for a fresher trail.
Arc II: The Monster Bandits

Chapter Summary

Keita, Alessa, Conall, and Deryn set out to take care of the apparent danger caused by goblins or similar small monsters. What lays ahead of them? How far can monsters take their treatment of humans under the new Demon Lady?

Chapter Notes

Arc II of the story contains a lot of vivid descriptions of sexual intercourse and violence with participation of, amongst other things, Goblin and Hobgoblin monsters the way they're described in Monster Girl Encyclopedia. While not part of the "loli supremacist" faction of Sabbath, goblins are close enough to looking like/being children that depictions of violence or sex with them may be distasteful to some. They were put in this story with the intent of providing the first 'challenge', introducing some characters, and following (partially as a joke) the trope that amongst the first opponents a group of adventurers meets soon after becoming a team are goblins or similar creatures. Part of the intended humor in "Wicked Deity" is characters being genre-savvy to the point of leaning on the fourth wall, or giving obvious nods to certain situations in fantasy fiction (gaming and books both). The humor's not central to the story, but I try to make sure it is there.

Despite that "joke", Arc II is very much serious, with depictions of violence, death, implied kidnapping of minors, and some emotional problems amongst the characters, both old and new. I was far enough into the story before posting this arc that I almost forgot certain earlier and later arcs being potentially displeasing to the 'average' reader when giving it a rating. While I have no intent to ever include the "Sabbath" faction as characters that participate sexually in any events during this fic, I've decided the goblins themselves are enough of a breach of the line to increase the fic's rating from "Mature" to "Explicit".

I will always inform readers in author notes at the start if I believe the sex scenes or violence scenes in a new chapter is something that may disagree with them, and remember the repeated "******" marks are a sign that a sex scene is incoming in case you're worried these things are indeed too distasteful for you.

For the record, I don't consider the story, or even this arc, to be particularly violent, dark, or hardcore, I just realize people have vastly different sets of sensibilities when it comes to that kind of stuff, and there may be points where it turns out the story indeed is one of those things. I hope that, with or without reading all the smut scenes, you can find the following arc enjoyable.
The odd quartet of Deryn, Conall, Keita and Alessa soon reached the region containing supposedly endangered town. Looking from far away, it did seem kind of empty, but they were still too far to really judge. The trio of men turned to their serpentine female companion and seemed to await something.

-Do I really seem that interesting? Or are you thinking of selling me out? Or maybe using me? No way in the Demon realm I'm giving any of you a piggyback ride all the way there, you know.
-Alessa-san, we were simply suggesting that perhaps you should take on your human form now.
-Figures. And here I was hoping it was something more fun this time.

The look Keita gave her made it clear he did not share her good mood after both the small talk they had this very morning and his earlier concerned behaviour on whether she was fine with them fighting other monsters. Well, the fact that the apparent vote on ‘should Alessa come with us’ ended visibly in her favour also made her mood better.

-Sorry, Keita-kun.- She apologised.
-I'm just really not used to it and it's bothersome. Of course, if you think I should treat the issue more seriously, I will, but since so far all we know is that the enemy is probably either goblins or harpies... well, after seeing how well you've done in my dungeon I find it unnecessary to be all that serious.

-Maybe it's because you're not the one who's going to be fighting them.- Deryn commented dryly.
-Well, I already apologized, but... sorry again. Give me just a moment.

Indeed, it did not take much time for Alessa to assume her human form once more and cover herself with the cape that now seemed the trademark of said form.

Conall and Keita moved forward. Deryn and Alessa formed the pair that was slightly behind.

-He's kinda in a bad mood, it would seem.- Deryn said softly.
-Well, he did not sleep much, and maybe it wasn’t necessary given that the dagger he went to acquire is simply a dagger, nothing special... It may also be the sudden presence of others or something else.

[Or maybe it's the mountains.] The thought struck Alessa then, almost making her pause as she glanced at the towering peaks. [If the area looks similar to the place where he fought the Ushi-on... he'd be annoyed without even realizing]

-But then again, you're not the type who'd worry so much or start a topic over it, or at least you not seem to be. Are you inspecting me for some reason?- She turned her eyes onto Deryn who had been watching her very closely. He winced slightly at being called out, but to his credit didn’t try to lie.

-Well... It's not because it's you, please understand this, but I've been kinda wondering on whether you're really about to let us fight other monsters. Aren't you guys like, pieces of a giant whole meant to eradicate the human race or something?

-Nobody's doing any eradicating. That's human superstition.- She replied tersely.
-Well, then bend my words to suit the truth and answer.

Alessa rolled her eyes at the young man’s stubbornness, but decided that if they were to work together in future, he deserved an answer. -Well... first of all, I’m already committed to your cause, so while I’d be uncomfortable fighting them myself, standing on the sidelines is all right as long as this doesn’t turn into a bloodbath. It suits all of our purposes, really - I can watch you all in action and travel away from my old place, Keita can possibly free people, ek-hem... oppressed by these monsters against their will, and if you all handle it well Conall may be making world a better place. You’ll get to fight at your brother’s side again and get the thrill of it, too. It’s a win for everyone.

-That’s an awfully unselfish point of view, but it only partially answers my question.

Alessa sighed, thought for a moment, and attempted to answer the rest of his question.

-We monsters are allies, usually. Not family or stuff, but essentially here, in the West, humanity doesn’t accept us so we have to help one another unless it’s about getting a man - which does, occasionally, turn into a competition I admit... However, our Demon Lady’s envisioned paradise has us living in peace paired with our own precious human males. But the road to this paradise is long and it won’t happen unless we actually treat humans as precious and value their opinion and point of view. Therefore, Keita’s stance is one of the best stances a human can have from our point of view - even if he actually eliminates the ‘oppressive’ monsters. I do want to believe that the three of you will handle this in the best way possible with the least amount of bloodshed but in order for this to happen, I have to actually give you a chance at handling this. There’s certainly a possibility that you’ll do a better job at bringing our Lady’s utopia closer to reality than this bunch of monsters kidnapping men randomly because said monsters don’t like to keep their pants on for too long.

-However, if it does turn into a bloodbath or if we are forced to fight against a monster especially precious to you, the situation would be different, wouldn’t it?-Deryn asked pointedly.

-I’d... probably try to stop you. I’m not sure what’d happen afterwards. You see, the reason most monsters don’t see much wrong in trapping a human and repeatedly having sex with them is because usually it turns out said human starts to like it. I’m not sure if your experience makes you think it’s possible or understand why, but that’s how it is. I’d hate to get my own hands ‘dirty’ in that way, but honestly, there’s little I can do and only a little more I see wrong in some of my fellow monsters acting that way.

-We’ll have to finish that talk another time, or maybe not at all. My brother is giving me dirty looks. Now one thing, you’re not off leash yet, but I can understand you switching sides if we go overboard.

-Thanks. Really.- How she kept the dry sarcasm out her tone Alessa would never know.

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Javier was quite a promising young Knight in service of the Order, for all of his modest age of twenty-four years. He spent days, months, maybe years of his recent life in the service of the Chief God (though, honestly, currently the title ‘Last God’ occasionally seemed more appropriate), defeating, capturing and killing monsters as directed by his faith and his commanders.
He was told that monsters were dreadful creatures that attempted to do the worst things possible to humankind and he always worked based on that information, fighting them and carrying out his duties mercilessly and without a second thought.

Now, he was reduced to little more but a toy for a pair of them.

And honestly, he was learning to enjoy that treatment.

With human girls there was an odd, frustrating amount of playing around, courting with them pretending they didn’t like you or pretending they had ‘other options’. Then when push came to shove breaking the relationship because someone they’ve been immediately attracted to came along, or because you’ve done something wrong while they’ve been doing all kinds of wrong all the time. Getting a girl to bed you was frustrating; when it happened, you were supposed to do all the work and then they got to complain that you screwed up something. It made sense – to Javier – to lose oneself in work.

Here, everything was simple. The one that officially called him her ‘slave’—atall, pink-skinned warrior woman with big soft breasts by the name of Surgva—and the one that regarded him as ‘communal victory spoils’—a less human-like, partially insect woman by the name of Triel—both simply approached him, often a few times a day, told him to lay down or take another position and engaged him in sex until they had enough. There were almost never any complaints - if he did wrong, he was taught how to do it right. If he came too early, he was molested and enticed until he was up for another round. And there was never a situation when he was left not sated or not pleasured. On a level, the two seemed to genuinely like him even if they treated him as something below them, like a toy.

Currently, the situation was one of these ones that were most arousing of all to him - they *both* engaged him at once. His official ‘mistress’ was on top of him, mounting his face as he was forced against her wet folds, breathing in her thick, meaty scent as he tasted her juices, which also resembled thick beef in taste. Meanwhile, Triel was engaged in an action one could never get from the girls in his village or in the town he moved into as a knight and here it was only occasional and thus equally exciting as regular sex; she was tasting and playing with his very hard erection inside her mouth, sucking him off and just awaiting until he would fill her mouth with his essence.

Surgva’s plump but strong thighs were nearly suffocating him, wrapped around his face but it appeared they had little to no intention of getting him hurt that day. He continued to eat out the large woman on top of him while getting sucked off vigorously by the insect-girl.

_That’s a good little servant, putting his tongue to good use. Make sure you don’t get him too tired, chief-sis, I want to have my fun with that meatstick too._

_As long as you have me and these fat boobs of yours by hand I doubt he’d be too tired to please. Now, let’s see how many ‘ropes’ he’ll shoot off on the first try._

To be perfectly honest, Javier only heard about two thirds of that, the sound being dulled out by his Mistress’ thighs and he himself engrossed in both the caress he was receiving from Triel and the one he was dishing out to Surgva.

But, once she got completely serious with him, it didn’t take long for ‘chief-sis’—as his official Mistress called her—to make him blow his wad. His body shivered, cock twitched, hips travelled upwards and then he felt her suck more intently, drawing the semen out of him and into her mouth.
There was no crappy domination or humiliation play with spitting it out, saying it tastes horrible, giving it to him to swallow instead or telling him he finished too quickly. Triel just swallowed it all without a word, then gave him a few appreciative licks as her hands rubbed on his ‘freshly drained’ testicles.

Oddly, he easily stayed hard lately after such a treatment, seemingly only so the insect monstergirl could straddle him and get him inside while he was still fresh after orgasm and very sensitive. He trashed under the bigger warrior-woman who had the mercy of lifting herself off him. She turned around to look at the scene on her own, her ‘chief-sis’ bouncing up and down on her slave’s erection, causing him to gasp, moan and whimper in response. -You better do a good job, servant.- She said commandingly. -Chief-sis gets into a mean mood when she’s not satisfied, so you have to do each other good. Remember, it’s my turn after that so don’t you dare get tired.

Of course, it was one thing to say it and another to actually pull it off. Javier doubted they’d get be completely satisfied anytime soon. Come to think of it, his stamina was increasing from all the sexual contact with the two of them - though it mostly concerned the sexual endurance. He was also becoming more and more horny when left without such contact over a longer period of time.

Triel’s bumpy and at places oddly hard vagina was a source of pleasure different from her mouth or from a human’s - while perfectly compatible with him, the differences compared to a human girl were present and visible. The biggest being what she just brought into the play; namely, Triel’s inner muscles allowed her vagina to twist, turn and shift inside nearly as she wanted. She could give him the kind of penetration normally reserved for the doggy-style position while riding him cowgirl, for example. This was mostly used to increase both of their pleasures, with Javier tasting different angles of penetration while doing almost nothing and not changing position at all while Triel could experiment on which of her spots were more responsive to the invading penis from her ally’s boytoy.

Soon, he was unable to look at Triel since his own mistress demanded attention, blocking his vision by swinging her sizeable chest above him, forcing him to start massaging her breasts and sucking on her nipples. The half-liquid squishiness and satin softness of the things as well as certain other parts of her body belied her physical strength, but he was content enjoying it as a man would with any woman. To him, both his Mistresses were creatures of beauty no matter how the world perceived the situation. Triel’s increasing tempo of riding him, causing his manhood to twitch, his mouth to gasp and his body shiver in delight of the approaching orgasm.

-Get over here, Surgva, the brat seems to be enjoying himself a tad too much. Lemme touch those offensively huge things, too.

-But, he’s supposed to be enjoying himself! Hurry, hurry!

The strong but plump woman once again swung her leg above him and squatted over his face, this time so his nose was almost shoved between her buttcheeks and her womanhood straight on his lips.

-You know I can’t hold on long without my precious servant, chief-sis!

The insectoid woman was apparently touching his Mistress’ breasts, groping them rather roughly as the pair shared a kiss.

-Come on, you won’t have to hold to such a small number of them for much longer... once we make our own small world here, you’ll have at least half a dozen Javiers plus bonuses! They’ll have to stand in line to get a shot at one of your dirty holes, Surgva!
Javier himself whimpered in protest underneath the two monstergirls; however, this quickly changed into an animal-like groan when he felt his testicles draw close to his body and then, on another inner twist of Triel’s vagina he immediately erupted inside her, painting her love canal white with spurt after spurt of thick semen.

-He’s cumming! Poor guy got jealous and couldn’t hold it in anymore! No worries, there’ll always be enough horny girls for you to enjoy here!

Another loud, sloppy kiss over him. He felt his Mistress’ plump backside shake and squirm on top of his face. -Triel, I need it inside me now! You made him cum twice, so it should be enough!

-Enough? But we both know it’s a third of a three-course meal! A half at most! You’re just being greedy!

-But I’m always sharing him with you! How can you call me greedy!

-Your greedy snatch starts twitching and drooling the moment you see that guys cock! Not only his for that matter! And once it does you cannot stand the itch for even a few minutes!

-You’re being mean! It’s not like you’ve ever shown any self-control yourself! You’re an avaricious fly-slut and you criticize me for wanting to violate my own slave! How mean!

-Don’t use words you when you only think you know what they mean!

-Get off my servant’s cock! I want it! Want it now!

-Okay, how about we share? We’ll switch whom he penetrates every few strokes.

-All right, but after a round of that he’s all mine! And you’re helping if he can’t stay hard enough for at least two rounds!

He finally felt Surgva’s jiggling bottom move from his face as she turned around and straddled him face-to-face. Triel was also facing him, giving him a pretty naughty grin from between his Mistress’ spread thighs right before she sat down on him. The chitinous abdomen sticking from her cute, petite backside was also clearly visible, probably the reason why she didn’t pick a different position.

Moments later, he found his semi-erect penis stuck between his Mistress’ big soft buttocks and Triel’s drooling vagina and slickened thighs. Only the few seconds of contact got him hard again...

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In the meantime, the trio of men travelling with a monstergirl already managed to ask more about the resident monsters. It’d appear the main problem were indeed the goblins, but they were aided by at least a few creatures separate from the main race. It’d appear there was a hobgoblin amongst them, already rare in and of itself, and they were also either aided or ruled by something that Alessa said was ‘probably an orc’ based from the townspeople’s description.

Back at the tavern, where they decided to rest a few hours from the long journey before attempting to attack the goblins in the mountains, Alessa had more to say about that matter. -It is very rare, for Goblins that already have a Hobgoblin in their ranks to ally with monsters of other types.
-Really?- Deryn asked, surprise in his tone.

-Goblins usually form parties of all-goblins that may or may not fall under the control of a monster who lives in similar habitat. However, if a hobgoblin spawns amongst the goblins, they get a clear leader amongst their own numbers so if bullied they’re more likely to either rally and win against smaller numbers of other monsters or simply relocate. Here, it’d seem there’s both a hobgoblin and at least one orc. I’ve never heard of such a situation before, to be honest.

-So, hobgoblins automatically become leaders amongst goblins? They’re better or something? -Deryn asked again.

Alessa sighed and wondered how to precisely respond to that. -They’re... different. Not better, different.

-How, precisely?- Deryn pressed, his curiosity rising.

-Goblins are fast-growing but childlike creatures that rely on a mix of agility and strength in battle, both of these traits above a human adult’s. -Alessa started. -Hobgoblins are basically slightly mutated goblins; their horns are bigger, sometimes asymmetrical and they gain breasts. Really big ones. They don’t suit their otherwise petite physique so most hobgoblins end up losing most of the grace and agility of normal goblins, but... well, said breasts help them get adolescent or adult males’ attention. They’re often slower both physically and mentally than a normal goblin, but in addition to the breasts, their strength grows as well. Taking a direct hit from a hobgoblin is usually equal to a loss for most human warriors, except the tougher and more experienced ones. In addition, hobgoblins are tougher and have a slightly greater affinity to the mating ways of a succubus, which are now quite widespread amongst monsters. Most are unaware of that so the skill goes unnoticed, but some learn how to do it or gain the skill through pure instinct. As such, a mate of a hobgoblin turns out quite differently from a mate of a regular goblin, having a higher chance of becoming an Incubus eventually, most of the time.

-So, they’re another type of monster that captures human men to mate with them? Like the slimes earlier, or the famous succubi? How many monster types like that exactly are there under the current demon lord?- Conall asked a question of his own.

Alessa and Keita looked at each other. Alessa rolled her tongue across her teeth, gave a small grin and decided to answer in a completely straightforward manner.

-I believe you meant ‘under the current Demon Lady’ mister Amberwing… and if you ask how many or which, I’m gonna have to answer ‘all of them’. Conall had a stunned expression on his face. -A... all?

-Yup, every single one.- Alessa chortled before restraining herself. -I can’t speak for the Zipangu region, where the strength of local monsters’ ties to our Demon Lady is about three to four times weaker than on the main continent and their attitudes may differ. But here, where we are and where the three of us other than Keita-kun spend most if not all of our lives... here, virtually every monster adheres to our Demon Lady’s vision, and that has us paired up with human males. From what I hear, most Zipangu monsters managed a relatively peaceful existence with their local humans even before that change. Before you ask, there’s practically no people amongst monsterkind who truly feel different - an utopia with people that we love, care about and share pleasure with is a far better thing in our eyes than constant warfare and attempts to conquer or eradicate humans the previous Demon Lords often had. Thus, in terms of political and personal power our current Demon Lady is in the top two Demon Lords in the last dozen or two dozen of generations, only really rivalled by the greatness of another female Demon Lady three generations back. What I’m getting at is this: There are truly no monsters that serve the Demon Lady that desire to harm humans, and any ‘conquering’
is done either in bed or to further the idea of our Demon Lady’s utopia. There probably are some bad elements that misinterpret the idea, others that are too serious or too oppressive about it and five or so creatures amongst the numerous monsterkind who’d oppose our gracious Lady but to be honest, currently when met with a monster the thing you’re most in danger of is engaging in sex, unfortunately depending on the kind and the specific monster’s attitude, sometimes against your will.

Conall and Deryn looked at each other, then at Alessa.

-But, Miss... does that mean... you’re also like that?

-More or less. After all, most of my servants had a mind to either beat you and then use your seminal fluid as fuel, or beat you and then mate with you and it was on my command. I don’t like harming or forcing humans unless there’s another way, though, so while the terrifyingly boosted sex drive can be a bother, I’ve learned to live with it and control it.

-So, we’re... safe?

Alessa gave all three of them a rather flirtatious smile. -Depends on what you mean as ‘safe’. I never named my relationship with any of you as something set in stone from the start. We may end up just as companions, as friends, or something else entirely, who knows...

-No way in Hell.-Deryn started the bashing ritual.

-I believe I’ve already explained the issue to you, Alessa-san...

-Not enough wine in this town for that.

She laughed, honestly, and then looked at the three again.-Ohh, young human men, always so stubborn. Remember, Deryn, what I’ve told you. Most men end up quite happy about their relationship to specific monstergirls... Who knows, maybe when you learn more about us and get more experience, you’d want to get a monster girlfriend yourselves. I do however doubt any of you would get romantically involved with me, specifically, since I’ve put both misters Amberwing in danger and my relationship with Keita-kun is more that of accomplices or professional partners.

-Anyway...-Keita decided to cut any wondering about the trio’s romantic future short. -For our opponents, Alessa-san basically summed up the goblins...

-Oh, there’s the curious point of Hobgoblins having very sensitive breasts...

-Well, now they’re definitely summed up. As for Orcs... they have a reputation as dumb brutes from the previous Demon Lords’ rule, but this was never completely true - orcs are quite intelligent, if aggressive and ferocious... One can imagine their aggressiveness now manifests itself differently. They’re quite sly and, in my personal belief system have a problematic, nasty attitude - they believe in enslaving by force. Basically, they’ll attempt to grab any type of advantage they can, win at all costs without honour, and then they’ll treat you as a slave. If you win, the relationship is reversed; they become willing servants who’ll do nearly anything to arouse you and gain your favour. Thus, fighting an Orc is exactly as problematic as the consequences of defeating one or losing to one.

Alessa barely stopped herself from releasing an unladylike sound of surprise and frustration. [Too well informed, too opinionated. This Orc is a goner. He probably fought against them before when he was repaying his ‘debt’ to the order and that’s how he dealt with their ‘problematic, nasty attitude’. I just hope he controls himself when it comes to slaughtering the goblins...]
All right. We’re renting two rooms for an hour each.

Why two?

You two can cohabit. I have a small thing to discuss with Alessa-san. It’d be cheaper than four.

Make sure you get separate beds or something. She is a monster.

We’re not going to sleep, and you don’t have to tell me what I should do when traveling with one. Let’s go.

Rhalia was well aware of what was probably going on by now in Surgva’s ‘quarters’. Thus, thinking about it too much got her aroused, too.

To be completely honest, Rhalia thought her ‘endowments’, outrageous compared to the size of the rest of her body, were a huge burden and a bother during most day-to-day actions. They made her move slower, they forced her to train balancing her body day after day in order to not stay clumsy like she once was, they were a weak point, weighted her down and forced her to adopt certain fighting styles and poses rather than allowing her the full array of options a normal goblin would have.

Truth be told, because of that Rhalia occasionally felt inferior to said regular, average goblins, born and bred with little variety, quite similar appearances, skills, and to an extent even personalities...

It was only situations such as this one where her breasts happened to come to her aid, where they were an advantage rather than a curse. When her insides were itching and throbbing, she could just pick a man she wanted to do it with from the bunch of people her and her allies gathered and press the things against him. Soon after, his member would get hard and he’d be ready to play with.

Recently, this guy was her favourite. She was sure he was much, much younger than Surgva’s primary slave; short and light, there was little danger of him getting the interest of either Surgva or Triel, and nearly no goblins dared to put a hand on someone she’d choose to have repeated intercourse with. Paul was hers, more or less - and thankfully, her allies wouldn’t know what they were missing. While short and sleek, he was quite fit and had pretty good stamina. His member was adequate, she supposed - she wouldn’t like it much larger or smaller. Thanks to his light weight she could also put him into virtually any position she wanted, but Paul also had the courage, guts or sheer recklessness maybe to show some initiative of his own while in the throes of passion, which she honestly appreciated.

Right now, she was already past the phase of provoking him into sex - which had gotten easier to do recently - and had his erect cock in the air right in front of her having already removed her bikini-like chainmail armour and only remaining with the leather strap she used to help support her breasts, she bent forward, sliding the erect thing straight into her soft, large bosom. She didn’t bother putting any pressure onto him yet - the leather strap was already doing some of that, and she liked the look on his face when he was getting excited from the teasing of their velvety feel alone, though she wouldn’t mention that.

He reached out, trying to grab her breasts, probably either to enjoy their feeling or to put some pleasurable pressure onto his prick, but she pushed his hands back against the wall, her chest
wobbling around as she gently moved back and forth, teasing him further. -Impatient much? Silly human, as long as you’re teased you just want to drown in it. You have no idea what it means to endure when your desires are ignited, do you?

-Sorry. I wanted to...

-If you ask me properly, maybe I’ll make you feel good with these breasts. You’d like that, wouldn’t you? Ejaculating just from my breasts?

Paul blushed and Rhalia required little more enticement. Taking off the leather strap, she run it along the base of the shaft and his balls, then dropped it, pressed her breasts together and started gently pumping his erection, buried completely and invisible, covered by her large chest.

-Your breasts... feel amazing Rhalia...

-You didn’t even ask me! You should be ashamed of yourself! I sure am, letting you take advantage of me like that. I’m just doing this so my body will calm down, okay? Don’t go getting weird ideas. It’s not about what you need.

His hips were shaking and instinctively thrusting forward, deeper into the embrace of her overgrown jugs. The contact started to feel slick and slimy and she realized her playmate was leaking precum in quite large amounts. -You’re going to... cum? It’s okay, that way we can get on with the main event. You shouldn’t be holding it in, it’s b... wait, it’s not like I care...

Paul’s hands suddenly reached out, one resting on her shoulder, the other on her breast. She shivered at the contact - despite her various attempts to desensitize them, her breasts were still one giant erogenous zones of intensity greater than the chests of most if not all human women. -You’re trying to bully me again! It’s not my fault my breasts are like that, okay? I didn’t ask for this, so stop bullying me! Cum already!

Rhalia was starting to enjoy both the very gentle touch and the penetration of her cleavage a bit too much, so she decided to quickly finish it before she got overwhelmed by the pleasure. Pressing her breasts together with much greater force than before, she started to pump faster. Paul almost lost his footing and soon, he was pumping his white semen deep into her cleavage, his average penis comparatively small and lost in the sea of her breasts. He couldn’t hold back a moan of pleasure especially when seeing Rhalia’s visage, one full of strange wonder and sheer excitement at the situation. As his semen was leaking into her breasts, she delivered a few more pumps to milk him further before pulling him out of there, gently stroking his cock and delivering a small kiss to the head of it that provided equally gentle suction, the remaining fluid in her urethra slowly flowing into her mouth; at the same time, the additional pleasure provided by her own excitement, her breasts and the uncharacteristically gentle suction kept his erection hard, something he could never do on his own when he started masturbating.

Paul was soon to turn seventeen, a hunter’s son from a village nearby. He had been about to ‘join the family business, so to speak’, looking for game in the forest just below the mountains, one of his first alone hunts just after the disappearances started.

Rhalia spoke out, interrupting his thoughts.

-Take off your shirt and sit down, okay?

He started to do as she requested while he reminisced. He heard the voice of one of his friends from
the village as he was hunting, and rushed to help - turned out it was the goblins attempting to grab him. He started shooting at them only to discover one of them lagged behind and fell over right next to him, taking him down. In frustration, apparently, she tried to punch the ground but punched all of the air out of his lungs and then, nearly punched out his meal from his stomach right then and there. The goblins were happy to grab two guys instead of one and he was himself violated by a few and brought to this cave. He managed to undo his bindings almost managed to free two other captives, but the goblins and the giant pig-lady intervened. He was worried what’d become of him and then, Rhalia appeared.

She looked different from the other goblin and acted differently, too. She said she was gonna punish him on her own, but so far she did none of the scary things that could be considered punishing. He was simply always kept around her part of the cave and she occasionally came to him to relieve herself. Paul knew what a sex drive was and he somehow understood hers was much greater but also she was trying to keep it under control somewhat.

Rhalia was different from anyone in the cave. She seemed somewhat ashamed of what she was doing, dissatisfied with everything yet apparently always tried hard at everything. She was trying her best at moving with grace and agility despite her huge breasts weighing her down. She wasn’t keen to abuse him, but was just a bit too keen to explain that he shouldn’t be taking advantage of her - all the while taking advantage of him with an adorable blush on her face, pressing her breasts against him and rubbing gently until he got oh-so-excited and was viable to be taken advantage of. He knew she was strong but she never hurt him seriously - well, he once was nearly suffocated when she pressed his head into her breasts too hard. She avoided him for two days after that, came back and actually apologized.

Until then, he was pretty sure he felt increasing affection for the creature. She wasn’t human and didn’t behave as one, but somehow the uneasiness, anxiety and overt determination were adorable in ways that the cutesy behaviour of girls in his village wasn’t.

He was sitting, his six inch cock completely erect, waiting for the embrace of Rhalia’s tight, warm womanhood. He was a virgin before running into the goblins, so he had nothing to compared it with, but sex with Rhalia felt good, natural and adequate, except for the seldom too strong grip of her outer or inner muscles and the odd difference in size compared to a girl his age.

-Should I lie down?

-Why would you lie down? Do you want me to do all the work again? Don’t you think I’m too embarrassed already with you having blown that white stuff in my chest?

-I was just asking. It’s okay.

Rhalia spread her legs and thighs, making her by now rather moistened, hairless lower lips visible. She apparently wasn’t trying to give him a show, so she simply squatted down in his lap, hissing slightly as the tip of his cock hit her small clitoris. Squirming as he gently held her sides, she managed to draw him inside herself. Her muscles reacted immediately, giving him a way too strong squeeze that had him hiss now, but they slowly relaxed and she pulled him deeper inside, bit by bit. She reached up and rested her arms on his shoulders, pressing her still somewhat semen-covered breasts into his own chest. He didn’t mind much - she seemed cute embracing him like that, with her breasts in the way. She was panting slightly from the sensations of insertion and probably also from the chest-to-chest contact - her breasts appeared to be rather sensitive.

Rhalia lowered her head and tried to cope with the rush of feelings over her as quickly as possible.
Her playmate was apparently already a bit too anxious, since he started to gently lift her and his own hips, bouncing her in their sitting embrace. She stifled a moan and bit on his nipple, causing him to yelp. *-I haven’t told you that you could move yet, okay? Are you trying to embarrass me?*

Paul rubbed his pain-inflared nipple and apologized. Rhalia decided she acted rashly.

- *I’m... sorry too. You could’ve lost your erection from pain and all, too. I acted too quickly, just please, wait a moment.*

She slowly adjusted to his length inside her and her felt her muscles working on the inside again, giving him another almost painful squeeze, then relaxing, and then repeating the process.

- *If we were lazy, I wonder if I could simply finish it like that...*

- *Rhalia...*

- *You can move now, silly human.*

He drew her closer, resting one hand on her small, slender bottom and another on her side under the ribs and impressive breasts, and slowly started to move. Rhalia reacted by pressing her breasts more strongly against his chest, then resting her own head just under his neck. The horns were annoying but it didn’t seem like they were going to harm him. She stifled another moan and started to shake, then pumped her hips on her own, the wet, slick interior of her crotch greedily pumping up and down on his erection with squelching noises. Paul gasped from the intensified pleasure of both of them moving. Soon, they caught a common rhythm, and it got even better. He couldn’t control himself anymore, and he shifted her by pressing a hand on her breast, groping her, causing her to yelp in surprise, while pulling on her horn to yank her head back. He quickly placed a kiss on her lips, and she moaned into it, her hips ramming into his strongly as his cock was gripped by her inner muscles like a vice, all the semen that remained in his urethra after the tit-fuck suddenly flowing into her as he also started to leak precum freely into her depths.

Incapable to withstand such pleasure he decided to cut her movement short before he came early, pushing her down onto the ground and changing position to missionary, breaking their kiss in the process. *-What... are you doing... I did not allow...*  

Another kiss combined with a few pumps of his hips silenced her as he thrust himself into the hobgoblin, this time with him moaning into the kiss.

- *Ahhh, I see... you couldn’t hold on anymore... Okay then, do it at your own pace.*

He didn’t need to be told twice, and he started to move his hips again. She lay there with a rather serene expression, holding onto his backside, so to give her more pleasure he decided to increase the pace. Rhalia started panting slightly, her hair dishevelled, her expression now filled with something like expectation and curiosity. Her jugs were jiggling with every thrust, and her body was responding by pushing itself up against him more and more. Soon, he was unable to resist, bending over her and grabbing her breast with one hand, supporting himself with the forearm of the other as he pounded away, closer and closer to his orgasm. Rhalia could no longer manage to silence her moans and he felt her muscles tugging on him desperately, eager either for his member, his seed, or both. He was diving in balls-deep, the naughty noises of their lovemaking filling the cave as he felt his testicles drawn closer to his body, semen raising inside him as his body was prepared to spill his hot liquid affection into her. Seemingly, Rhalia came at the same time as he did, her pussy suddenly squeezing him with great strength as he tried to keep pumping into her as he filled her with warm jizz, causing
their combined juices to froth and spill out of her, both of them panting and moaning as they climaxed. The little hobgoblin grabbed his body and hugged him close, causing him to fall down on top of her as his orgasm slowed down to a dribble of liquid out of his member, the girl’s pussy working it further to milk everything out. The strength she used bordered on dangerous, but being smashed against her soft breasts and small, adorable body did not feel bad at all, thought Paul as he closed his eyes.

Javier was in a far less equal or tender but just as pleasurable position, having just been slipped out of Triel’s bumpy, rigged, ‘rotating’ vagina and straight into his Mistress’ warm, plump love passage. He couldn’t even number how many times he was already pulled out of one and into the other, but he knew he couldn’t last all that long with his Mistress matronly body on top of him and the two women either competing or cooperating in giving him an orgasm. Triel even went as far as forcing him to grab Surgva’s breasts while mauling the other one with her chitin-covered hand. The jiggling and slapping of Mistress’ plump buttocks couldn’t be stopped even by Triel sitting behind her, and it was shaking his entire lower body. Moments later, he was pulled out of Surgva and back into Triel’s rough pussy, causing his cock to twitch.

He bent in his lying position, pressing his head against Surgva’s stomach while caressing her breast, his other hand unconsciously having moved to her buttocks long ago to control the tempo of her slams.

-Chief-sis, it seems my little servant can’t keep up with us much longer!

-It’s expected! The boy’s so hooked on us he could probably blow his load moments after we started! So cute, trying to hold it in like that...

Surgva slammed him back into the ground as she drew him back inside herself. Triel continued to tease him.-Now, which one of us would you like to cum inside? Remember, your choice may have numerous... consequences...

He felt a sharp if small surge of electricity moving into his testicles, and he yelled in pain and surprise.

-Triel, you shouldn’t be so sadistic with my little servant!

-He’s community goods, community goods! I want to hear him say he wants to cum in my perfect pussy even though he has no right to, and I wouldn’t want him to think you’re the one who’ll be mean to him if he picks me!

-You’re just being greedy again, chief-sis!

Surgva picked up her pace, wanting to have her servants’ cock all to herself right on the finish, but Triel just grinned.

-Look at him, the little fucker can’t even pick properly!

-Javier, you’re my slave, so the choice is obvious!

-Apparently my perfect womanhood makes the choice not so obvious, Surgva!

-More like your lightning magic fired into his testicles!
-Say what, if he can endure one more round in each of us, we’ll give him a double reward instead, and he won’t have to pick! What do you say?

-Fine!

Surgva let him slide out of her and Triel took charge again. Eager to be rewarded, Javier summoned all of the warrior left in him to try and endure. After small number of pumps in and out of her pussy, Triel switched with Surgva again, his Mistress bouncing up and down in his lap. He felt his semen raising, eager to flow inside her warm, welcoming insides but he was doing his best to resist and get the promised reward. She rose and fell on him two more times than Triel did, but he managed to endure. Moments later, she pulled out of him and stood up, leaving his throbbing, pre-leaking cock cold and alone in the air. The pair of monstergirls lay down on both sides of his legs, and Surgva moved her breasts atop his groin, squeezing him in-between them. Both Triel’s tongue and her own joined the assault on his member and in two pumps flat he was done, erupting on both of his monstrous mistresses, giving in to the overwhelming pleasure as they slurped on his erection, Surgva’s breasts jiggling as she squeezed and released them around his shaft, big enough as they were to cover most of it, and using them to squeeze more of his sperm out.

He lay there, panting and gasping as they teased his sensitive tip, drawing out the remaining fluid and actually getting him more excited in order to maintain his erection.

Moments later, he again felt cold and abandoned when they stopped. His Mistress walked over to a larger rock, pressed her hands on it and presented her backside, wiggling it.

-What are you taking a nap for, slave? You should do some work too, not just lie there getting fucked! It’s purely my turn now, so you don’t have to bother with Chief-sis either!

Lead entirely by the wrong head, Javier rose and walked behind his Mistress, her hips on just the right height to allow him to thrust in. Grabbing her wide hips and plump butt, he slid his cock right into her waiting pussy. Slowly pushing it in, he bottomed out in her, shaking from her muscles squeezing his still sensitive dick - after all, he already had three orgasms and while trying to hold it in at that.

-What? You tired? Or are you just so happy you can finally fuck me back that you froze? Move, move! I need a man, not a statue!

Obeying instinctively and immediately, he started to thrust his hips, fucking her with more and more intensity. After Triel’s bumpy and rough but incredibly teasing and pleasurable inside, his Mistress was like a soft, wet oasis that brought him relief.

Or would, if she didn’t want rough sex. But nevertheless, her insides were much softer and more malleable. His tender member was still mercilessly assaulted by the occasional too strong squeeze or his own thrust, but he was in no place to complain, certainly, being able to pound into his Mistress’ lovely pussy while being able to watch her soft ass and breasts jiggle, right at the reach of his hand.

Suddenly, he felt a smaller figure move in behind him, a rougher, chitin-covered pair of arms grabbing his sides.

-Oh Javier, Javier... even when you try so hard, it does not matter. You lost and became a slave to such a naughty slut, so you can’t even spank that plump sexy behind...

Saying that, Triel lifted her own hand and delivered a spank to Surgva’s jiggling ass. He could’ve
Surgva pushed her hips back against him, causing him to groan as his own back rammed into Triel, forcing her drooling pussy against his thigh. He could feel his and her combined juices running down his thigh.

-Chief-sis, you’re going to infect my cute obedient slave with your nasty attitude!

-It ain’t nasty! I’m perfectly acting out my role as the dirty-talking duchess of this place!

-You’re not getting his dick right now, so you shouldn’t be molesting him away while I’m doing my thing!

-Well, maybe if you showed him a little kindness he’d be more into you than into me, like it should be? Or maybe it’s the reverse and you should abuse him even more? Though, I can see in his eyes that he’s watching you jiggle in all the right places...

Surgva started ramming her hips back into her slave as he pounded away inside her, vocalizing her permission.

-Go ahead, Javier. You can squeeze whatever you want. No spanking, though. That’s not allowed.

The young man proceeded to do just that, gently kneading her buttocks with his hands before getting a bit rougher, and then running his hands on her sides all the way to her big breasts. Surgva’s pussy grabbed him like a vice when he did, and she moaned loudly, apparently starting to get really excited...

His own cock was also submitting to the pleasure provided by his Mistress’ velvety insides and the incredible sensation of touching her body like an equal lover would. She seemed content, but also sensed his own closeness to peaking.

-Come on, Javier, surely you wouldn’t ruin the good impression you just gave us by simply cumming inside me? Hold on and let your Mistress get an orgasm from this first! Be a good servant and you’ll definitely get to cum inside!

Excited by the prospect, Javier attempted to withstand the pleasure as his hips picked the pace up on his own, practically ramming into her backside, his cock pistoning in and out of her hungry slit while his balls flied around, occasionally bumping as far as her clit. The roughness of the act seemed to bring Surgva close to a climax of her own.

Suddenly, she pushed back with too much force and he lost his footing, Triel simply disappearing from behind him as he fell on the ground, just the tip of his dick stuck inside his Mistress, panting and with an expression akin to a beggar’s on his face as she moved herself on top of him reverse-cowgirl position and started slamming her bottom up and down. Suddenly, she oinked again and he felt her womanhood squeeze down on him as it practically pulsed inside while she drenched the lower part of his body with her juices. She picked up the pace instead of slowing down, one of her hands moving to tease her clit as she lifted her plump bottom up and down on her slave’s cock, said slave being unable to resist the lure of it, grabbing her soft ass and even rubbing her taint and even her asshole, though not daring to put anything inside there. The intensity of it was already overpowering him and his Mistress and he suddenly both screamed in unison, reaching their climax, his cock pumping out jizz fiercely as her pussy again squeezed down on him and made him wetter and wetter, all the while milking his cock for more and more of his semen as she never ceased to
continue ramming her hips and ass into his own.

-Good boy... you came just at the right time... good boy. You can rest now, you'll need the strength soon enough.

Keita was alone with Alessa in their room, the Echidna having already closed the door and ‘sitting’ in her snake-woman form. Keita, on the other hand, was standing and with a serious expression at that.

-You wanted to talk, Keita-kun?
-Yes. I have two things to ask you.
-I hope it’s about something nice. You seemed too stressed out lately anyway.

-Sorry, but it’s completely serious matters. First of all... you know how monsters operate, and you mentioned the situation of both a hobgoblin and an orc being amongst a tribe of goblins as rare and unlikely. I’d like to hear if you have thought of any possible reasons why such a situation is taking place.

-Indeed, you’re in serious mode... All right. There are three possible reasons of such a combination possible to me at the moment, and only one is really something to worry about.

-Go ahead. Tell me.

-There is a possible family thing, meaning the orc was found by the goblins as a child and they simply took pity and raised it, before or after the hobgoblin was born. The other possibility is that we’re in fact going against two or more allied tribes of goblins, one of which was led by an Orc and the other by the Hobgoblin. They might’ve befriended one another, or they may be related somewhere along the line through an Echidna such as myself. The last possibility is the worrying one.

-And what is it?

Alessa looked at him. She seemed hesitant to talk about it.-It is... theoretically possible that these goblins submitted themselves to a larger monster organisation. In that case, the hobgoblin is the original leader while the Orc is probably the ‘eyes’ of said organisation in the group, making sure the organisation’s leaders’ wish are being worked for. If that were true... I’d suggest completely dropping the issue of helping this village. If you get too entangled with a monster organisation like that, you’ll lose and I won’t be able to help you. More so, I might be inclined or even forced to join the opposite side, depending on circumstances... Though, in the case I’d be forced to leave you and fight against you, the organisation would have to be so deep rooted and powerful that humanity in this area would’ve probably lost already and you yourself with your sensible attitude would probably give up after discovering it.

-I see. I’ll consider your advice. There is... another thing I wanted to ask.

[He... seems uncomfortable. What could it be?]
-Today was another time you mentioned the term ‘incubus’. This time, it was more direct and you actually tied it to monsters such as goblins and hobgoblins... What exactly is an incubus? I was under the impression that incubi are either mates or children of the succubi, so this is kind of confusing.

Alessa sighed, and looked straight at Keita.-You’d be right under other Demon Lords, but not the current one. Incubus is a state a usual, heterosexual male ascends to if enough demonic energy is poured into him. It is sometimes accomplished through sex, sometimes through rituals and sometimes through methods unique to a certain monster type. An Incubus is different from a normal human, being more physically and magically capable, that’s why I keep using the word ‘ascend’.

Keita went silent for a moment before adding another question.

-Am I... an incubus?

Alessa smiled.-Does the idea make you... uncomfortable?

-Slightly, yes.

-You’ve been marked by demonic energy, that is true. Apparently, either the sex or the blood - remember how I’ve said some monsters have unique ways of doing it - with the Ushi-oni changed you slightly and infested your spirit with demonic energy, but no, you’re still human. It doesn’t change who you are. Additionally, the moment you become an Incubus is pretty much the moment you start behaving like a monster’s ideal mate would - namely craving said monster’s affection and intimacy, and your sex drive skyrocketed. That doesn’t exactly describe you.

-I’ve asked because you’ve mentioned I’ve been ‘marked’ with demonic energy before, and it would appear I’m physically superior in some ways to the average male.

-That is correct, but I think it’s more the result of your treatment and surviving both the Ushi-Oni’s and the tentacle horror’s attacks, as well as the time you spend training and adventuring than the demonic energy you have in yourself.

-We’ll talk about this matter later. Thank you for sharing your knowledge.

-You’re very welcome.

Soon after, the trio of humans and the Echidna travelled into the mountain scape that seemed to be producing the goblins that in turn caused so much trouble. Alessa was pondering on remaining in her human form, but she decided changing into the Echidna form and staying back while they fought: trying to keep a low profile worked better and allowed her to conserve energy.

It didn’t take long for the goblins to take interest in not one, but *three* young men in the vicinity of their camp. They appeared in a group, rushing to strike at the three fighters and incapacitate them. They stood back to back, Alessa simply staying far from the situation, slowly sliding up the mountain far behind the trio. It didn’t take long for the battle to break out - and despite Alessa’s earlier description of them, all three fighters were doing quite well. While Deryn and Conall were initially surprised by the little creature’s speed, agility and most of all strength, Keita took them very seriously from the start and didn’t pull any punches, although he took care not to finish the little things off, either.

[He’s keeping his word. That’s a good trait to have, certainly.]
It didn’t take long for the first group of goblins to dissipate. Then another fell as they climbed up the mountainrange.

The third one, however, had two leaders to actually engage once they were dealt with. One of them a hobgoblin, the other one being - surprisingly for all of the quartet - human.
Arc II - The Monster Bandits : Conclusion

Chapter Summary

It is time to solve the issue of the goblin bandits once and for all. What will happen as our heroes-to-be strive to do so?

Chapter Notes

The only warnings for this chapter are of the violence already mentioned, and a character appearing expressing strong views that may be seen as a type of bigotry. It is also the last chapter of this arc - most "arcs" will have between 2 and 6 chapters of similar length.

-What the hell’s a human doing here? Paired with a big-boobed goblin, no less?- Deryn wondered aloud.

-My name is Javier, and I was once a Knight of the Order... but no more. I realize how miserable my own life has been, made so by my own hands... When a scout found out you defeated a group of goblins in the mountains, I’ve was sent with miss Adrema here to stop you... It’d appear now you are the one with advantage of numbers, but I don’t intend to go down. I won’t let you try to harm my Mistresses.

-Mistress-es? As in, plural?- Conall responded in surprise.

-This guy is quite a pervert... for an ex-knight, that is.- Alessa chuckled as she heard from her own position a bit in the back.

-What should we even do with a guy like that?- Deryn decided to bring the conversation back to its right track.

-He’s probably the type of person I’m trying to stop from being ‘created’... A guy who was taken in by monsters and had his will broken. Well, he’s definitely old enough to make his own decision about that now, but who knows how long he’s been enslaved...- Keita voiced his opinion.

-I’d... rather not fight a human. Especially an Order Knight at that...- Conall answered.

Alessa slowly approached from behind, slithering on the sand of road at the bottom of the mountains they were climbing upon.

-If it’s a problem for you guys, I could take him on. I’m worried about using too little or too much force, but if it’s too hard for you three...- Deryn cut her off. -Even if he’s human, he’s on the side of the monsters we’re trying to stop from forcing humans into slavery... You’d still be fighting against monsters and doing our work. I’ll take him on. I don’t have any problems taking an ex-knight a couple notches down.- There was a mildly unexpected eager note in his tone.
-Are you sure, Deryn-kun? He’s older than any of us, probably received some pretty intense training... I could take care of him instead, probably.

-No, Keita. I can do this. I’ll probably damage him less than any of you two would, in any case, since I’m also using a blunt weapon.

-Well, if you’re too hard on him he may kiss his bones goodbye.- Alessa reminded him, eyeing the mace that Deryn had in his hand.

-You three cannot win against my conviction, even if you have a monster by your side! Humans, especially human women... they look down on others, attempt to play games with you, mess with your beliefs and your self-esteem, always claim what you do is not enough! They always want you to do everything and never do a finger to satisfy any of your own wishes! Human women are worthless! When I was defeated by Mistress Surgva, I expected it to be hell, but I found an asylum instead! Women who do not ask me to do impossible things that are a bother, only barely-possible things that fill me with pleasure and ecstasy!

The trio looked at him, then at Alessa questioningly.

-Multiple ejaculations in a row, probably.- She replied off-handily.

The three of them answered, all already familiar with the idea, although mostly not knowing how much the other two were.

-Ah, that’s right.

They looked at each other surprised and decided to drop the issue.

-Well, in any case, he still talks like a friggin’ fanatical knight. It’d be a pleasure to kick his ass. I’ll be your opponent, ‘Sir Javier’-.

-I’ll protect my mistresses and their superiority! Guys like you who don’t understand their greatness don’t deserve to be their slaves! You’ll die here!

The hobgoblin next to him tugged at his leg.
- Noooo, Javi, don’t kill them! They look like fun! I wanna beat them up and do things like piggyback riding and pony riding!

Alessa chuckled, then coughed.
-Probably she means the cowgirl position in the latter case...

Deryn and Conall shout back at her.
-We guessed!

Javier scowled and then looked at the hobgoblin, then at them. -Very well! I’ll kill only the one that challenged me, since he’s so high and mighty and eager to look down on me! Do what you want with the other two! But I’d plead that you make sure they don’t bother my Mistresses, Miss Adrema! Just please keep them for yourself and your friends, okay?!

-Yup, yup! Gonna get new toys soon!- The absent-minded hobgoblin started walking towards Conall and Keita, carrying a great spiked club that seemed too big for her build.
Deryn drew his weapons and instead smiled at the Knight.

-Oh, so your ‘mistresses’ would take us as slaves too, given the chance? Quite the promiscuous cheating sluts, eh? Doesn’t sound all that superior to a human woman to me.

-Shut up! You have no idea! Normal women are nothing compared to them!

-Sounds to me like you simply had a shitty luck with women so far and are too quick to judge and over exaggerate, but whatever. A few slams to the head and you won’t even remember being a Knight.

Conall looked to Keita as the hobgoblin approached them slowly.

-What should we do? Should we quickly play a game to see who’s gonna fight her?

-It seems you read too many books about knights or something, Conall-san. Rather than hammer everything one on one like in these books and then attempt to take the final opponents, if there are any, weakened and tired we should take advantage of numbers and just take her down as quickly as possible.

-But, ganging up on a young lady like that...

-We’re simply trying to make them stop from doing wrong, not uttering a challenge of honour to demonstrate the superiority of our beliefs or crap like that! Also, in case you haven’t noticed...

The hobgoblin was already upon them and prepared a smashing strike from above. The duo jumped back quickly to dodge, and she hit the ground. The strength of the blow made sand fly and formed cracks in the hard ground of the mountain below it.

-This is not a ‘little lady’ at all!

Rather than his blade and dagger, Keita reached for the kusarigama instead, as Conall did the same with his partizan. The immediate attack with the chained weapon temporarily stopped the goblin’s swinging arm from being able to strike again. Conall followed up with a swift barrage of thrusts, leaving the Hobgoblin hurt in addition to defenceless. When the monstergirl finally overcame the strength of the chain and swung her weapon down, Conall was already jumping back, while Keita threw his new dagger at their opponent, causing her to lose balance and twitch. Conall followed up on the strike, taking the goblin down. Alessa wasn’t looking by that time. Watching a little monster get hammered and probably killed wasn’t her favourite pastime.

Conall grabbed Keita’s weapons, deciding not to check whether the hobgoblin was alive or not. He immediately handed them to their original owner.-Well, that was much easier than I thought it’d be.

-We moved quickly enough together. If you run into another of these ‘hobgoblins’, you’d do best not to underestimate them. Remember that they’re naturally above humans in physical terms, we simply nullified the advantage with all the battle and training... Now, Conall-san, should we leave this to your otouto, or provide him with help here as well?

Conall looked on his brother, already engaged in a fight with the ex-knight, sadly.

-He seemed fired up about this. Well, compared to me Deryn has much more experience fighting humans... and he doesn’t seem to despise it the way I do. He should be fine, but if he starts losing...

-Of course.

Alessa moved up to the duo, of which Conall was already slowly moving forward, approaching his
brother and the knight to observe their exchange of blows. The Echidna practically whispered to Keita.—*One death doesn’t change much, but please remember... bloodbath, a massacre of these little monsters in a thing I probably couldn’t bring myself to tolerate.*

—We... attacked efficiently. Other than what appears to be their ‘leaders’, there’s no reason to use such lethal force against most of them, so this should be a rare picture.

—Let’s move on then. I hope Deryn won’t have too much of a hard time.

It was indeed not much of a hard time.

Deyrn once fought against a person who used a very similar warhammer battling style to the one Javier here used. He figured it was some sort of a uniform training style for the Knights and Javier wasn’t old enough, talented enough or experienced enough to seriously develop it or change it for a different one yet.

That or maybe it was meant to be effective against monsters and *not* humans.

He was the opposite. Originally, at least.

But, being an ex-knight, Javier was as stubborn as any actual knight.

—I... *I will not lose here!* Trash like you shouldn’t be allowed to meet my Mistresses!

—You still talk like a knight. Old habits die hard, huh?

A sudden strike from above. Deryn already counted half a dozen of those delivered in the same manner, angle, pace... Dodging was hard only on the first try.

—Compared to a knight, I am enlightened! We shouldn’t fight this! This is something to give in to!

—Oh, you’re the type who likes to hear ‘good boy’ from a chick that could break your back?

—You’re a fool, hiding behind jokes and witty remarks!

—Who’s joking here, idiot? You’re helping a bunch of monsters that kidnap humans for their own pleasure! Apparently with little care for things such as age, connections to others, dreams or desires!

—If you’ve tasted the pleasure and affection a good Mistress can provide, you’d abandon such useless things!

*[That sounded wrong.]* Deryn thought before launching a rebuttal. —*Many of these people have sisters, daughters or wives and mothers they love. What is their place in your Mistresses’ plans? What will happen to them?*

—The females of monsterkind are superior to these worthless sluts!

A sudden, but not overly hard kick to the balls and a smash of mace to the chest later send the older man on the ground. Deryn hated using the first move as much as any guy who ever got hit in the sensitive spot, but it was the quickest way to incapacitate this “Javier” and see if he could be reasoned with.

—Stop thinking with this, you useless piece of crap! One of those ‘worthless sluts’ bore you into this
world, because your ‘fool’ and ‘trash’ of a father fell in love with her! Another bore me and my
brother into this world! And you’re suggesting all of this is worthless? I am two steps away from
deciding you should *die* rather than be ‘reeducated’!

The knight went back onto his feet, grabbing his warhammer.

-Don’t say bad things about my mother!

[What an idiot.]

Deryn couldn’t be bothered trying to convince a fanatic anymore, so he waited for the expected
opening during the strike. But it never came. The knight suddenly stopped, jumped to the side and
forward while trying to smack him with the hammer, and when he dodged, he was shoulder-charged
and sent onto the ground. Javier then prepared a strike from above.

-Creativity. Unexpected from you.

-Die!

It was a matter of a simple roll to the side and a sudden smack with the mace to the legs of the knight
to cause him to lose balance and totally miss.

Deryn was on his legs immediately, and with Javier still pained and slowed down, overtook his
opponent with a sudden flurry of blows. The knight swung his hammer yet again, only to find Deryn
practically behind him and feeling cold steel pass through his abdomen, right through his armor’s
weak spot. Then, a mace blow to the head – not at full force, to allow him a good chance of
surviving and Javier’s front slowly started moving towards the ground, before hitting it with a thud.

-Quick, clean if cruel, efficient. I like it.

-I made a point of trying *not* to kill him, Keita.

-And you made such a short work of him? I should be impressed. Maybe ‘Deryn-kun’ doesn’t fit
you at all.

-He wasn’t half bad. He just fought precisely the same way as someone I already fought with in the
past. Funny, they might’ve trained under the same master, even. Only the last guy was totally loyal
and subservient to a human girl. The irony.

Alessa couldn’t help but hold back a chuckle.

-It’d appear your brother has an interesting backstory of his own, Conall.

-We don’t like talking about it. Let’s move on.

-Not checking if mister I-love-monstergirls-that-don’t-ask-for-consent here is alive?

-If Deryn says he tried not to kill him, he’s probably as good as alive.

-Now that’s an expression you don’t hear often.

---------------------------------------------------------------------

Some time later and higher up the mountain...

---------------------------------------------------------------------
-There appears to be a cavern or a cave complex right there. My assumption would be...-

Deryn was cut off by sounds of many pretty cheerful and loud young women... no, more like girls, singing, and running as well, apparently, from the pitter-patter of the massive amount of little feet.

-Looks like the nest is getting nearer and nearer.

-Alessa-san, if you don’t want to be caught in the crossfire, I’d suggest withdrawing from the time being... Although, given the sheer amount, I’d actually appreciate your assistance.

-No can do. Sorry, Keita-kun, but I won’t kill or even fight a monster unless it’s extreme circumstances.

The trio unsheathed their weapons.-I’d suggest you don’t look, then.-Keita replied evenly. -We’ll do our best not to kill too many, but, well, this is self-defence, and three against who knows how many.-

-I’ll go watch butterflies. Make sure there’s not too much red here when I come back.

The large bunch of goblins, having appeared from behind some stones, were clearly visible and charging at them.-I can’t promise anything.

Paul noticed the increased movement of the goblins in the cave. He was hearing voices like -Sisters are fighting some guys right below!

-They say there’s a three feet tall hunk!

-Are you sure it’s not ‘three hunks’?

-...

The goblins were moving chaotically and many were actually leaving their posts, leaving the prisoner’s unguarded.

This was a chance.

Paul has long before had his bonds weakened and now, as soon as the goblin guardians took their eyes off of him, he had undone it completely and started to move slowly, sneaking around the cave.

Saving the youngest captured was the primary concern. The others were less shocked and could probably endure a bit more, maybe even release themselves on their own.

Sliding close to the walls and pretending like he was bound whenever a larger group of goblins came along, Paul moved from one captive to another, telling them to wait before escaping.

Slowly, he gathered them into smaller groups and lead them out to the closer escape routes or collected them at points without anymore goblin surveillance for a larger escape attempts. The older ones were instructed to try to free and organize others.

It was probably the first prison break goblins experienced in their history under the current Demon Lady. Almost definitely the first successful one.
Deryn was the one panting the most out of the three. It appeared his youth left him behind in the endurance department... Or he was being too much into kicking goblin ass and tired himself out. The reinforcements for the goblins were not a nice surprise, too. A voice could be heard behind them, signalizing someone friendly was done watching butterflies.

-Out of pure curiosity...

-What is it, Alessa-san?

-Did you guys keep count?

The trio simply turned to her, eyebrows raised and faces suggesting the very idea was dumb.

-I mean, come on... ‘Heroes’ always keep count of defeated opponents in face of overwhelming odds, or at least the amount of heads taken, right?

-Where’d you get that idea from, snake-lady?

Alessa puffed out her cheeks at being called snake-lady again by Deryn.

-My... Let’s say, my childhood friend told me so.

-I see...

-Some pretty weird childhood friends you have there...

-You’re awfully interested in the number of the comrades of yours we’ve beaten, Alessa-san... I’ve gotta say, this is suspicious... Are you planning some punishment or something?

-Maybe I’ll tie you to a pole and tickle you.- She teased playfully.

-But do you really believe ‘heroes’ keep count in such situations?- Keita decided to ignore her joke.

Alessa nodded slowly, unsure of herself. Deryn decided to humour her.

-Seven knocked out and two apparently killed.

This caused the echidna to raise an eyebrow, although a small smirk also came up to her face.

-Same here.- Conall added.

Keita looked at his two travelling companions, and sighed.

-Had to count. Eight knocked out, I chopped off one’s arm, one was kicked down the mountain so I have no idea at all whether it...she’s alive, and one is definitely dead.

-So... Keita won?- Conall asked.

-We’re not competing in headcount. Actually, given the fact that I might’ve potentially killed three of them, it’s possible I’ve ‘lost’ since we’re trying to keep as many non-bosses alive as possible, Conall-san, due to Alessa-san’s request.
-Don't despair over it. The goblins are in the wrong here. I'm really thankful that the difference between incapacitated and killed ones is so great.

-Goblins are in the wrong here?-Deryn inquired.-You've suggested what we're doing might not be bad before but now you seem pretty much on our side.

Alessa smiled.-Well, of course, from my point of view, goblins are the good guys. They just want to get their hands on some males and live their life in peace fucking like rabbits in perfect harmony with their mates and without much strain, struggle or stress. But positives and negatives aren't so obvious and clear cut. Evil can arise from the best intentions. Benevolent results can come from people only wanting to cause harm and chaos. If your conviction is strong and is combined with a certain foresight, you're probably not wrong unless you specifically mean to be... These goblins lack both conviction in wanting to truly bond with a man and the foresight. Their actions ultimately harm the relations between humans and monsters, but many of us have no wish to ‘battle it out’ with you humans until each of us gets a cute slave to eventually change into a pseudo-loving partner. Therefore, stopping them before they screw up too much while keeping them alive and trying to set them on the right track is the best thing to do.

-Did you spend a lot of time thinking about this in your dungeon?

-I was almost alone for years. Of course I was thinking of many things, including how to help and polish our Lady's vision of Utopia. It's boring when you're mostly alone.

-Did you train giving these speeches as well?

-No. I'd suggest you train your awareness of your surroundings, Deryn-boy. You're about to get pounced by goblins.

Indeed, each one of the group was jumped upon by two goblins. Deryn simply used both his weapons separately. Keita’s reaction was fatal for them while they were still in the air, sending one goblin flying with a kick below, and the other was impaled onto his sword. Alessa was dumbfounded by the speed of the reaction - it seemed like consciousness thought barely had any participation at all, he moved by instinct.

Conall was the slowest one to move, but also the least fatal. Jamming the back of his javelin into the head of one goblin knocked her unconscious, and a quick series of punches and kicks also incapacitated the other goblin.

-You may have looked amazing doing it, Keita-kun, but now you’re *definitely* losing from negative points on your headcount.

-Let’s move. We have to strike at their leaders before the goblins we fought before recover and before they manage to gather all their remaining forces.

-Is that a ‘charge’ order?

-If it’s a ‘charge’ order, then do it properly, Keita-kun. – Alessa couldn’t resist cutting in with a little chuckle.

-Ekhem... Charge.
This lacked any enthusiasm or passion whatsoever.

-No, seriously, move your damn asses before we’re ambushed again.

-Now that’s better.

-I’ll stay here. If you have to retreat, I will do something to buy you a moment of time, but for the moment, I’m not interested in seeing you kill these girls... and since one of them is probably the ‘root of evil’ here, at least one of them will die.

The trio of humans charged into the darkness after that.

It took just another four goblins after rushing into the cavern to meet what definitely seemed more like a ‘parting committee’ than a ‘welcoming’ one.

Only one of the faces here was expected. A very tall, thick-bodied woman with pink skin, flappy ears, short tail and equipped with a handaxe and an odd, spiked mace which’s metal part was apparently meant to be similar to a pig’s nose, except for the spikes.

The other two were unexpected and odd.

After Alessa claimed there was almost always one hobgoblin in a tribe, the presence of what was apparently a second, but vastly different, hobgoblin made them both surprised and worried.

This one was different both in appearance and in clothing and the manner with which she carried herself. In contrast to the red-headed hobgoblin they’ve met before, this one had exotic, purple hair and dark gray or black eyes. Her body type was very similar, but her clothes and weapon different; rather than a spiked mace or a similar weapon, this one carried a machete of quite significant size. Rather than the baggy clothes of other goblins, this one had more of a warrior’s attire, consisting of an apparently silken, but odd grey cloth covering much of her body, completed with black leather straps and something that looked like quite modesty-preserving chainmail underwear on top of everything. Rather than brown, her horns were a dark grey like her eyes, with small, green lines running over them; they were slightly sleeker and longer than on the other hobgoblin, and in her case, the left horn was the longer, bigger one rather than the right.

The last creature was the least expected of all. She was just a bit taller than the hobgoblin, with three-fingered, chitinous arms, legs with chitin armour extended over them, somewhat small, dark insect wings with a weird pattern that looked like a whitish skull. The look was completed with something that looked like an insect abdomen sticking out of her petite backside and something that was a mix of antennae and horns on her head.

-Well, well, what have we here?-The insect-like monstergirl spoke, her voice far deeper than they’d give her credit for.

-Slaves-to-be! Today is a good day... But that mean my precious little slave failed his Mistress despite being given so much freedom... I am disappointed.

-Surgva, he may as well run away. There are three guys here! They seem younger and livelier, too.
The hobgoblin remained silent.

-So, you’re the ones responsible for the kidnappings and stealing of the men from the villages.- Keita stated.

-Ohhhh? So the boys are playing heroes? Or perhaps you were jealous and wanted to join the ‘kidnapped’? I recommend that, you get properly milked every day and have a chance to become a communal good of many very energetic girls!

Keita simply continued with a deadpan look on his face.

-What’s your purpose in doing this? Are you following someone’s orders?

-Us? No. Why would our Triad serve anyone? We’re merely doing m... our little paradise on earth here, with access to as many males as we want and can, hmmm, operate on.

Keita actually grinned at that.
-Excellent. That means I can simply slaughter you all without reconsidering.

This made the hobgoblin livelier.

-Very well. You may try if you wi...-

Then, suddenly, the insect monster released a powerful blast of what appeared to be magic-infused wind, throwing Keita and Deryn against the walls of the cave, with Conall managing to only be pushed back thanks to immediately taking a defensive posture.

-You guys are complete fools. You dare to oppose me, Triel of the Beelzebub kind? You stand no chance. If you have it within yourself, you may still challenge me... And lose horribly, becoming my little toys.

Spreading her wings, she flew out of a hole in the cave, apparently leaving for open air. Made sense since she could fly.

The hobgoblin and the orc attempted to follow, but Keita and Conall moved quickly enough to block the passage.

-It’s three on three. The question is who takes care of whom.

-You would be wrong in this case, Deryn-kun.

-What do you mean?

-The creature outside has a certain amount of magic power at its disposal and is capable of flight. Obviously, it’s going to use flyby attacks and magic to fight us. Battling it one on one is foolishness; if there’s two of us out there, we can intercept or counter the fly-by attacks and one of the part will definitely survive even if it has a large supply of magic.

-But then, one of us will have to fight these two at once.
-That’s why I’ll stay here.

-And why you?

-At the moment, I have the highest head count and managed to pass the dungeon you two did not manage to. I think it’s safe to assume I stand the highest chance against two opponents at once.

The duo was apparently getting tired of waiting.

-Move, Conall-san, Deryn-kun. There is no time. Trust me, this is the best way.

Conall moved first. Deryn was further away from the exit. The hobgoblin already swung the machete at Keita, who made a little backstep and a block.

The power of the strike was so tremendous it almost swept him off his feet. Deryn saved him from the follow-up by attacking the creature with his mace, but it dodged with agility unbecoming of the same species as the one he and Conall easily beat down.

- Are you sure you can handle yourself, Keita?

-Yes. All I need is a little mobility, and you’re wasting time here.

-If you lose, we will try to save or avenge you.

-Likewise. Let’s hope we both succeed.

Deryn moved upwards. Keita was met with a charge by the orc, but he easily dodged and run past the hobgoblin as well, while trying to cut it down during the charge. The goblin half-kneedled and blocked gracefully before turning and attempting a chop from above with the machete. Keita dodged to the side, kicking the little goblin into the head, but she blocked using her arm, managing to amortize the strike. The orc was already upon him, swinging her axe and the mace, with Keita pushed into defensive.

After a series of evasive manoeuvres, he managed to slip in a simple thrust, cutting the orc. Then, he had to dodge the hobgoblin’s own thrust, only to finally be slammed by the mace of the orc, causing his body to shake with pain and be thrown back.

Moments later, the hobgoblin made an impressive leap and was prepared to sever his body into two parts with a chop from above...

At the same time, Alessa was watching the fight the two Amberwing brothers had with the Beelzebub outside of the cave.

And she was pretty nervous about it.

-What is Keita thinking? Beelzebubs have a huge magic power supply! And their flyby attacks are dreadful due to their special abilities! Why did he put the two of them against...

Suddenly, she went silent. And shivered.
Keita’s life in the meantime probably might’ve as well been decided by tossing a coin. Chances of dodging would be fifty-fifty here... And he doubted he could survive such a strike... When, suddenly, the orc grabbed the hobgoblin and stopped her mid-air.

-What are you doing, Rhalia? You lost your marbles or something? This is a perfectly good piece of man-meat, why are you trying to cleave him in half?

-It’d be easier. Now, you’ve messed up my attack and he can continue fighting.

-I want another slave, Rhalia. Don’t just go killing people.

-Or what? You heard him. He wants to kill us. I say we do him first just to be safe.

-’Do him’? Now that’s a thought...

-Stupid naughty orc...

But this time, *they* made the mistake of talking too long. Keita held absolutely nothing from the velocity of himself and his strikes as he pierced and slashed the duo with his sword and quickly-drawn dagger. The duo of monstergirls yelped and screamed in pain as he quickly moved out of their reach, sheathing his dagger.

-Happy now? We should’ve killed him when he had no chance to defend himself.

Surgva didn’t even answer. She was already charging. Keita just momentarily tried to consider what was going on. Yesterday, Alessa told him monsters wouldn’t want to see a human man dead. What was different about this Hobgoblin, then, assuming neither of them was lying? Was it just excessive self-defence after hearing his desire to kill them?

Conall and Deryn where pretty much in a pinch as well, although they finally managed to get a strike in. After Conall instinctively managed to stab the creature's leg as it flew between them, Deryn delivered a vicious blow to Triel’s back, sending it flying, but towards the ground.

Problem was, they were already attacked with a variety of physical and magical attacks up to this point, and this was their first clean strike.

When the Beelzebub was falling, even then it managed to spin in flight and shoot electric discharges, curiously purple in colour, at the duo from both of her hands. Continuing with the assault, she was soon able to again increase the distance between her and the ground, including the two fighters.

-Alright. I’m not really in a mood for long foreplay, so how about we raise the stakes just a little bit?

-Shut up and fight, fiend!- Conall spoke like the ex-knight met previously rubbed off on him.

-Ohh, ho, such energy... How about this. I’m going to strike one of you two with one of my most powerful attacks, and IF you manage to endure it and keep fighting, I guarantee the person that
accomplishes the feat becomes my own personal slave! How about it?

-Such stupid stakes...

-Seriously, is she dumb or something...

Triel just grinned as she gathered energy for her next strike.

-Ssoo... Here I come! Please try to endure, I need a new fun slave right away!

-She’s fucked up in the head.

The two looked at each other.

[“I’m betting on a close-range powerful attack infused with elemental power. Makes sense to use both her magic and all that velocity... If Deryn is thinking the same thing, too, we’ll be able to play this to our advantage.”]

-Intense Thunder and Wind spell: Storm Rush!

A ball of electricity formed between the hands of the insect monster, soon joined by a powerful gust of wind. The wind spiralled around the ball of power, slowly infusing with it, and growing, in size, power and disarray. The energy was swirling and coiling around Triel’s body, just as she moved and charged at them.

Deryn was the target. Normally, they wouldn’t be able to perceive it, but Conall’s reaction was all his brother needed to determine he didn’t sense danger towards himself, but towards the younger of the duo. Conall bent over as Deryn quickly did the same, leaning on his brother as the creature just barely missed him, only to be propelled forwards, kicking it straight into its corpus, the kick connecting just before the Beelzebub flew past them.

The girl squealed as she was kicked away, the younger of Amberwings immediately following up on the strike, trying to cut her all the way across her torso.

Like a fly’s, Triel’s reflex and ability to change directions during movement were incredible and she dodged the strike despite the disadvantage.

However, the way she dodged...

-I've got you!

Conall’s partisan was already prepared for a thrust as he swept towards her. This time, the precision and swiftness were enough to connect, reaping through the creature’s chitinous carapace and soft, girly flesh, almost running through her. She screamed in pain as she withdrew, but Conall followed right up, sweeping the end of his polearm in a wide arc, trying to cleave her. Triel jumped back, only to be met with a powerful mace strike from Deryn, sending her flying again.

-Damn you, stupid boys! You should just lie down and let me tie you up and treat you as toys!

Intense Wind Spell : Razor Gust!
Suddenly, several rotating, sharp gusts of energy struck at the duo, cutting up their bodies and almost throwing them away as she flew up.

- *Normal Thunder Spell : Shock!*

Throwing another spell at Conall, she caused him to fall onto one knee before she smashed into him, sending him onto his back and attacking with another Shock. Deryn’s attempt at counterattack was dodged easily as she flew up.

Despite the couple of successful attacks, it appeared she still held a remarkable advantage.

Come to think of it, Keita appeared to be doing quite a bit better until Surgva shoulder-tackled him and cut his armour and body up with an axe strike, sending him onto the ground.

- *You’ve been a naughty little slave-to-be, giving us such problems like that! But what’s done is done! Give...*

Keita was already up on his feet. Surgva reacted swinging her axe again, but was much, much too slow.

Suddenly, the half-zipangu swordsman was behind her, sending a powerful kick to her back. Rhalia attempted to strike from the side only to be jumped over and slashed across a clavicle, her chain armour and clothes thankfully for her shrugging of most of the damage.

But Keita was not done.

His dagger already in his left hand, all it took was a quick decision which of the monsters attack next.

Throwing the dagger at Surgva’s back, Keita literally run over Rhalia after dodging another blow, and just as Surgva turned around to smash with her mace, nearly cut her open with a forceful slash. A quick series of jumps distanced him from both the hobgoblin and the orc, as the former was already trying to strike at his back.

- *You... little piece of shit... I’ll chop off your arms and your legs... always wanted a pathetic cripple slave anyway!*

- *Surgva, no!*

The already wounded, weakened orc charged Keita and swung both her weapons.

It was a piece of acrobatics worth watching when the swordsman swept both of his feet off the ground after a dodge, crushed the head of the female warrior between his feet and calves, and then pressed on the hilt of his blade with one hand while half-thrusting with the other, running her through with his sword.

Surgva’s body was quickly losing muscular control, so he simply rolled and tossed her over himself.

But one thing was unexpected - the little hobgoblin charging at him just after he’d done that.

The matchete swung and hit the ground in the spot he just was in, as he struggled to regain his
footing from a side-roll. Not hesitating a single moment, Rhalia simply punched the warrior to the gut with frightening strength before delivering a swift, unprepared cut with the machete using just one of her hands, her enormous breasts jiggling pleasantly during the action.

Had Keita not been in the state the double-rape a couple years ago lead him to, that would be enough of a distraction for him to take a slash from a hobgoblin head-on; given that Rhalia apparently wasn’t just any hobgoblin, things would’ve been bad. However, with a sharp turn of his body, he came out with something that could be described as a moderately severe cut.

-You’ve made a mistake. If you wanted to take the stronger one down first... You should’ve went for me.

-I figured as much.

-Oh, really?

-Yes. From the moment your partner stopped you from probably cleaving me in half, you fought completely conservatively. You were testing me and trying to take advantage of the superior endurance the two of you likely would have, trying to tire me out before going all-out. However, your companion just wasn’t up to the task, and I’m WAY tougher than I look.

-I see. So you’re the type to take out small fry first.

-That depends... although, given my previous experience with a hobgoblin today, I fully expected *you*to be the weaker one.

-I am not an average hobgoblin.

Keita sighed loudly as he prepared his combat stance once again.


-Some sort of tradition, telling your name to worthier opponents or other useless bullcrap like that? Rhalia, born of the Echidna Tete’rassa.

Keita’s eyes opened wider.

A Hobgoblin born of a completely different kind of monster? The same kind of monster that Alessa was, in fact? No, Alessa did say something about that, about the possibility of an Orc and a Goblin being related through an Echidna. Apparently, they’ve had the ability to mix bloodlines down the line, or Echidnas could birth different monsters... as proved by Rhalia here.

Just a bit behind their own Echidna companion, another creature was watching the battle at the top of the mountain unfolding between Deryn, Conall, and Triel. And it was clear Triel was quickly gaining the advantage.

But the creature momentarily focused on Alessa.

[What is SHE doing here? I don’t want her here! Don’t tell me she’s here to get in my way again!]
However, the group fighting quite a ways above the observing echidna brought far more attention from the one who tracked them so far.

[Anyway, let’s just leave the lamia and move. Taking care of her comes later.]

Keita dodged another strike by Rhalia.

-Why would you bother with such a weird setup? Doesn’t your kind naturally have authority over goblins!?

-Foolish man! You know nothing! I was cast off by my mother and all but one of my siblings! Why would anyone accept a mutant goblin who wasn’t part of their clan? I was born of mediocre strength in the monster world, slow, clumsy, with no skills or special abilities!

Another few dodges after that...

But he didn’t predict this. The girl simply grabbed her apparently dead companion’s axe and threw it at him. It was flying too fast to completely dodge, grazing his body as he managed to get out of it with his life at the last moment.

He bled.

-I worked my ass off to get into a proper shape for a warrior! To combat this weird centre of gravity and overcome all disadvantages! To gain skill, agility and develop instinct rather than count just on strength like a dumb hobgoblin would... Even then, to be accepted, I needed to fight my way up the ranks while gaining the support of other monsters! Only then I had a shade of a chance to be truly recognized... So I’m sure as hell not letting a single human simply destroy our Triad just like that!

She was upon him. He took a nearly direct blow and was sent onto the floor, his blood flying in arcs through the air.

[She’s a dozen leagues above that other hobgoblin! What the hell is that supposed to mean!??

He managed to get back onto his feet as she attacked again.

Even bloodied like that, he managed to dodge.

-So, you had your hardships. So did I. Let’s see which one of us is able to overcome them once more.

He swung his sword. This time, it was the Hobgoblin getting cut.

Conall and Deryn were in a pinch, themselves.

After finishing another acrobatic, this time with Conall basically using his partisan and then his brother to kick at the Beelzebub in the air, they struck, and the attack was just placed enough so
Deryn could follow up with a mace strike... but they were losing, clearly.

Triel responded with another Razor Gust, which cut the tendon in Deryn’s leg painfully enough to cause him to keel over and kneel. Conall was blown away and she turned to his younger brother again.

The dark, purple lightning struck once again and showed no signs of stopping. Deryn was on the ground, taking the full power of the continuous surge of electricity.

Another flurry of blows, part dodged, part blocked, part weakened by armor and only partially successful.

Moments after, it was a stand-down exchange of cleaves and slashes.


Kicking the little creature away only to have it grab your leg and throw you like a ragdoll.

Keita coughed up some blood and rose to his feet again.

-You have no chance of winning. You should give up.

A strike from above. Blocked. A rapid kick to the chest, followed by a thrust. Blood flowing. The two swords clashing in the air, his getting pushed away. A pirouette, his blade once again cutting through the little things muscles.

-Looks like I’m starting to get the advantage back.

-I’ll concede that you’re an amazing warrior. About equal to me, maybe even better... But I worked too hard for this, and you lost any chance of victory the moment you made it a two versus one fight.

A low strike. Keita jumped, rotated in the air, slashing and kicking at the goblin, landed, kicked her away, and responded with a powerful slash from above of his own. She blocked, but was in no position to overcome his strength.

-I cannot lose! I worked too hard to lose!

-You’re putting your strength to wrong use here. I cannot simply give up, either. It’d be a waste if all your hard work would have to be cut short right here, but I’ll fight you even if it’s to the death!

The swords clashed and bounced off each other again, before going for the flesh of the other warrior.

Conall quickly tried to charge against Triel, to stop her torture of his brother, but he felt so slow in comparison to Deryn’s grunts and whimpers of pain.
Suddenly, Triel turned around and was smashed with great force by some odd, orange-red viscous substance sending her uncontrollably airborne rather than flying. Deryn got back on his feet enough to headbutt the Beelzebub as it was pushed through the air and straight at him. Conall charged and swept his partisan again, slashing the insect creature as it tried to regain control over its body, only to be blasted away by a strangely familiar tendril of somewhat familiar stretching attack.

Conall turned around and saw...

A red slime.

A somehow familiar one.

No, in truth, he was nearly sure... It was the same slime as the one in Alessa’s dungeon.

Figuring it probably wasn’t a good idea to question the blessing of having it strike the fly-monster at such a crucial moment, Conall prepared himself to defend. A wave of wind was coming... But suddenly, he was submersed from both sides in the slime that easily stopped and amortized the strike. He felt the slime vibrate as it moved off him.

-We need to drain her energy or target her wings.- The red slime burbled.

-Figured out that much. Any idea how to do it?-

They were struck by lightning, Deryn almost losing his footing again. Numerous long tendrils struck out against Triel, forcing her to cease her attack and dodge.

-She makes turns and twists and controls her flight ultra well. That is even worse than her crazy speed. Unless we somehow lead her into a trap, my slime will never be able to incapacitate her wings.

Deryn spoke.-One of us could act as bait…-

-My thoughts exactly.

-Then, I...

Conall stopped his brother. -Don’t be ridiculous. You took too many of her attacks as you are now. You need to put your trust in me this time.

Triel once again started accumulating one of her most dangerous spells - Storm Rush. However, Conall was completely sure the target was Deryn...

She in fact intended to kill or cripple his brother.

Deryn, Conall, and the slimegirl nodded.

-Intense Thunder and Air Spell : Storm Rush!

Deryn moved forward and to the left, forcing Triel to make a detour as she curved her flight towards her target.

Conall moved into the way, taking in the full strike of Storm Rush.

The slimegirl moved rapidly from the side, engulfing Triel in as much ooze as she could.
Deryn charged, mace ready to smash her head, sword ready to pierce.

Keita was barely standing anymore, while Rhalia was in a very bad condition, but hanged on better than him.

He was in strict defensive now, focusing on dodging, blocking and the occasional counter.

Rhalia’s strikes were slow and easy now, but precise and still with some strength behind them.

They heard a scream just then.

-Tri...Triel? They... They got Triel? But... she’s the strongest...

Keita wasted no time calling upon the very rest of his strength and striking. A fast exchange of blows had her with one new stab-wound and one new cut while he had another minor cut on his body.

Their blades clashed again and he jumped back, dodging a shoulder-charge and then a sweep.

Conall and Deryn turned to the slimegirl now, weapons still prepared. She smiled gently, but somewhat sadly at that reaction.

-I... My name is Glaw. We have met before. You... she pointed at Conall.-You have helped me feed and I followed you here.

-The reason being?-

Her slime gently shaked all over. She seemed scared of the question, and in deep thought.

-I... enjoyed your presence, attitude, strength, looks and feeding on you. I wish to follow you.

-Excuse me?

-I wish to feed upon you again with your c...con...cons... If you agree to it and help you with your struggles such as moments before.- It was clear she was struggling to use formal and difficult words in that little speech.

-I’m still not sure I get you.

-My feelings for you are very positive, so I want to help you and establish a relationship that will help me bond with you and allow me to feed with your help more often. I... truly do not know how else I may put this. I just wish to be by your side from now on.

-This is crazy! You’re a monster that...

-I hate to interrupt your reunion and I’d love to hear my brother’s rant on how that’s completely crazy, but I think we’re forgetting about Keita.

-Shit!

Deryn and Conall ran down back into the cavern. Glaw slowly moved after them.
Keita dodged another attack and had his own strike blocked.

The battle was now essentially a clash of two cripples of nearly the same level if slightly different characteristics. One mistake could cost him victory or even his life.

Another clash.

-I... I just... I don’t want to lose everything now! We were so close... Sure, Triel wanted too much, but we goblins just wanted to...

-You went completely the wrong way about it, Rhalia-san! Stealing people too young to properly decide when they were asked and forcing humans into slavery isn’t the way! If you fail to see this, I will have to kill you!

-There’s no other way! I’ll win, and then my sisters will....

Suddenly, another voice filled the cave.

-You’ve already lost, hobgoblin.

She turned around. Two warriors behind her, one in front...

-I... We... have lost? To humans?

-We can be pretty resourceful when the situation calls for it.- Deryn panted with a touch of pride.

-Wh... What will you do with me? Will I be killed? Enslaved?

Conall spoke.

-Keita? What do you think?

-What happened to the fly-like one?

-We killed her. She was powerful and a total maniac. Looks like the orc was killed, too. That leaves only her, right?

Deryn repeated his brother’s question. Everyone could feel that the clash she had with Keita left him quite heavily wounded, completely drained... but with something like respect for the little excessively-endowed woman.

-What do we do about her?

Keita sighed, and answered.

-She’s... reasonable and special, to an extent. If she wasn’t pushed into a corner half of her life, she’d be pretty decent, I think.

Rhalia raised her eyes with a stunned expression to look at Keita.
-We didn’t come here to slaughter your people or anything along these lines, Rhalia-San. We came because you stole precious youth of humans, at an age when they’re immature, weak and susceptible. This is something I cannot allow, so we decided to stop you. The orc had an ‘enslave or be enslaved’ mentality, so leaving her alive would be a problem. The fly was apparently quite the fiend, but you... You know how hard it can be just to stay alive while not being completely isolated and in constant pain. Do you understand why we cannot allow you to continue capturing humans?

-But we need them! Without human males, focus is impossible, reproduction is impossible and it’s hard to grow stronger!

-That may be true, but you cannot trample on other people’s wills to get what you wish for. If you changed your relationship with humans... they may be willing to be friends with you, even mate with you of their own accord. It’s quite common in my grandparents’ home country.

-And... what do I need to do in order for you to leave us be?

-Very simple. Release all males that don’t wish to be here and all males younger than 18 years old. The ones older than that may stay, if they want to. Attempt to find alternative means, as peaceful and non-violent as possible, of getting men. Ambush them one on one in the woods and try to talk to them, attempt a partnership relation, whatever, just don’t force, oppress, and kidnap them. In return, I won’t kill any more of your tribe nor I will ever try to fight you again.

-... I see. But... we’ll lose many that way...

Suddenly, another Goblin approached. She was ready to fight when she saw humans, but Rhalia ordered her to step down and report.

-Big sis Rhalia, the humans... most of them escaped! They ran... ran away!

Rhalia sighed.

-Guess I may as well accept the entirety of your conditions in that case, Keita Haneo, if you’re still willing to hold yourself to that promise.

Saying that, the hobgoblin dropped her machete and slowly approached Keita with an extended arm. He sheathed his sword and also approached her.

Unexpectedly, Rhalia tripped. Equally unexpectedly, Keita caught her. Suddenly, he felt her little hands grab at his on limbs and clothes, strongly, but with no violent intent. She pulled her body close to his, as if in a hug.

-My... my mother thought of me as a bother, and all but one of my sisters shunned me. I... I tried very hard to become a member of a tribe and I’ve managed to do this. I thought that if a strong enough human will come along, this will all crumble and be ruined, so I continued my alliance with Surgva and Triel... But you came along and barely killed any of us goblins...Even if you killed the other two, you let me live. Even though we’ve lost all our mates now, we can rebuild. I am very grateful, Keita Haneo, to you as well, Keita’s companions.

-You’re welcome. Just don’t slip onto the path of oppression again.

-L...look, Keita. All of our mates escaped or will be freed. I probably... won’t be able to find any of those I liked, and I can’t think of any person more worthy than you. Could you stay here and be my
partner? I’d be honoured to have someone like you. We’d all be. I can’t think of anyone more worthy...

-I have to re...

Suddenly, Glaw cut in.

-Your thinking is wrong, goblin-girl. Rather than looking for someone ‘worthy’ to be your mate, you should find someone you like and someone who might enjoy it. That’s what it’s all about, you can’t force them or nominate them and expect them to do all on their own.

-I... I see. I assume the answer is a no, Keita?

-I have to refuse. There are too many reasons not to.

-Then I... Will heed your words, Red Slime. I’ll... release those Keita instructed to release and only keep those that want to stay. You have my word that a campaign like that of our Triad won’t happen again. And... thank you.

She squeezed Keita in a hug once again, and he returned it, albeit barely. He stood up, nodded to Rhalia who immediately started releasing the remaining prisoners.

Then he left to meet up with Alessa.

-I see you managed to do this all without things becoming a bloodba..a... Glaw, what are YOU doing here?

-Piss off, Echidna. The brown-haired one is mine.

-Conall. My name is Conall.

-Conall is mine.

-That is incorrect, and Alessa is not interested.

-Come to think of it, Conall-san, what’s the deal with the slimegirl?

-She tagged along after she helped us kill this Triel bitch. I’m not sure what to do with her... She seems to want to help but says many different weird things...

-Well, we could discuss this once we make camp somewhere. I need to get bandaged and rest...- Keita winced, an action that only Alessa noticed.

-Glaw, as long as you stick to Conall here, we’re fine. I wasn’t particularly interested in him, until now, so first come, first serve.

-Why are you talking about me as if I were a meal... Wait, what are you!?

Glaw engulfed Conall’s right leg and arm in her slime.
-Mine.

-We’re going to need a long and deep discussion about your issues, Miss Glaw.

-Yes. Mine.

-No, I’m telling you!

-I will attempt to convince you to let me feed with your agreement to it, then, mine.

-STOP REPEATING THAT!

-Sorry. I will stop saying that if it bothers you, even though you are mine.

Deryn couldn’t help holding back a laugh.
-She seems pretty into you, brother.

Alessa cut in.
-Red slimes often have proper emotional responses, bordering on the same range of feelings as humans at times, so she can experience infatuation. She can also understand your feelings, but initially you’ll have a bit of a species barrier and communication problems. I wish you best of luck, though... It’d be great if you had a monstergirl girlfriend, even if it’s someone as wild as Glaw here.

Conall just sighed. They started breaking camp.

Javier soon found out that both of his Mistresses were defeated and killed.

He spend another hour or so simply sitting over their dead bodies.

-I’m sorry... I failed you both...

A Knight crying over a monster was a sight not often seen.

-I have... no reason to live. What should... What should I do?

He spent even more time wondering, before the conclusion came to him.

-I know. I’ll give myself into the hands of the Church and the Order, telling them I willingly had relations with a monster. They’ll... surely punish this by death. I’ll rejoin Mistresses, and people... people will hear my voice before I pass away. Yes. I should... do this...

But his tears wouldn’t stop flowing... So this was not a plan he could complete immediately.
Not so far away from him, Paul led the last group of escapees onto the route to town. *That’s all of them... I’ve done it.*

Turning first to the mountains, then to the village, he stood there and wondered a moment.

*-Now, whether I should really be escaping with them, or not...*

At camp, Alessa approached Keita. *I saw what you did there, Ke-i-ta-kun.*

*-What are you on about?*

*-Mostly, I approve of how you solved the situation. These two were the villains in this case, and you still left Goblins with a strong leader while freeing all the males you wanted to free.*

*-That’s good. Wouldn’t want you turning on m...*

*-But you were oh-so-cruel and efficient, Keita-kun!*-

*-I really have no idea what you’re trying to say here.*

*-You must have really wanted to stop this situation... To use Conall and Deryn as bait... as cannon fodder...*

Keita’s eyes suddenly went wide.

*-You sent them after the strongest one so they could buy you time and wear her down, deciding that most likely you’ll have to take care of all three, but by the time this Beelzebub would be done with Deryn and Conall, she’d be out of magic. But, it turned out to be the other way around. You were locked in a draw, while they won.*

*-I... overestimated myself. And underestimated everyone else. You... really watched closely. Or you are too perceptive.*

*-Maybe both. But, well... I’ve seen the depths of your determination. Using other humans cruelly like that. I don’t dislike that too strongly, but I hope you’ll come to trust us a bit and we’ll fix the bad side of that determination. By the way... are you okay if Glaw follows us? It’d be nice to have a monstergirl with us as well, even if we didn’t get along well back in my dungeon.*
As long as we’re sure she’s not dangerous, and she doesn’t go into cities with us I don’t mind.

-Excellent. She’s a slime, so she’ll probably just want to squeeze semen out of Conall twice or thrice a week and it’ll be okay.

-Well, I hope I’m not there to see it.

-Well, that’d be all. Congratulations on your first success, Keita-kun. And thank you for resolving it so well. I just want to repeat myself that many monstergirls aren’t quite as obsessive and dangerous as what you’ve seen here. There’s a certain side to finding a permanent partner that makes them both more and less dangerous when faced with danger form a human, though.

-I had your advice. I just followed it and my gut. – Keita answered, before pausing. Both Surgva and Triel didn’t seem to care about the humans they kidnapped, but were set on kidnapping more, and, until Surgva’s life was in danger, very against hurting him too much or killing him. Rhalia had a lot more focus, and seemed willing to actually kill him, which was against what Alessa said earlier – except right now, there was that additional piece of information that just *might’ve* explained it, despite the stubborn little hobgoblin asking him to stay as her mate right after. Well, it was something he’d never discover fully now, he guessed.

Alessa noticed him pondering, so waited a bit with her answer.

-We have to use that combination more then... Goodnight.

-Goodnight.

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Rhalia was looking over the remaining mates and goblins of her clan. She was now the sole leader, her people surprisingly easily choosing her over the still alive, if badly wounded, Adrema, the hobgoblin native to the clan.

Most of the males were gone and their reputation was probably ruined here, so attempting to rekindle the relationship in a positive fashion might have to be done elsewhere.

-Maybe it’s time for us to travel somewhere else... At least look for a new home.

-Hey, hey, Big Sis, what’s that? Wha’zzat?

Rhalia turned around and saw a figure approaching. Human. Not too tall. Slender. Somehow... Familiar.

Her feet moved on her own. She walked at a brisk pace, meeting the human halfway, and looking at him deeply, curiously, as if inspecting him.

-Y... you came back.

-Of course I did. I haven’t been properly punished for my last escape attempt, and now I’ve done it once more.- Paul responded.
Rhalia shivered, and remembered what someone told her about an hour ago.

Casting her eyes down, she blushed lightly, and started to speak, each word quiet, awkward, but spoken clearly.

-I... I propose an...agreement. I... As the leader, I will not punish you, but... But in return, you must stay here. With us. With me. Is... is that a good deal? Do you think it’s unfair, still?

Paul smiled at her warmly, which caused her cheeks to go completely flushed.

-Yes. I accept those conditions.

Rhalia looked up at him, her face still bit red.

-P... Paul, I...

-Yes?

-N... Nevermind. C... Can you come with us now?

-Yes. I think so.

The little hobgoblin walked over to him, with her usual, if slightly impaired from tiredness and combat, more than half-graceful walk uncharacteristic of a hobgoblin, and reached out to take his hand. He gave it freely, and she squeezed with all her strength, as if letting go was a crime or something fatal to her entire clan...

Or maybe just her own life.

-O... Okay. Let’s go.

She said, as she slowly pulled him towards her sisters, all looking at her with bright smiles.

Such a change might have been possible because of Keita, Conall, Deryn and that slimegirl...

But the person she wanted to live through this change with was someone completely different than those four.

It was the person squeezing her hand back gently.
Chapter Summary

Keita, Alessa, and the Amberwing brothers continue travelling together, now with the addition of another companion. Will the attempt to get along take its toll eventually? How much can they learn about each other, and why do odd evils seem to be so easily encountered in this world?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The group decided to sleep in camp under the sky once more before going into the city.

That, of course, required picking guards and such.

Conall and Deryn both agreed that since Keita had to manage fighting with two opponents at once last time, not to mention saving them from their oppression at the Black Moth dungeon and *still* sleeping the least over the past few days that they should take watch instead of him, allowing him to get a proper rest.

Interestingly, they learned from Alessa and Glaw that the latter was basically the perfect watchman (or watchwoman, as the case may be) - daily, a slime only required an hour of passive rest to continue maintaining cohesion, and two hours to keep all their control and be fully battle-ready, retaining regenerative and offensive abilities and so on. Thus, Conall and Glaw would take first watch, then Deryn and Conall and finally Deryn and Glaw. Alessa was written out of the procedure based on her body temperature troubles, and Keita was asked to simply rest.

Thus, the Echidna was watching the de facto instigator of the common travel of the quartet, now quintet, of people from afar.

Keita himself was holding a somewhat small jar in his hands. *It’s almost empty...* - He whispered to himself. Feeling someone eyeing him up, he turned to face Alessa, who was looking at him from afar with a puzzled expression.

His reaction was rather unfriendly, furrowing his eyebrows and clearly attempting to behave as if the jar wasn’t there.

*[That’s a bit too enigmatic, Keita. You’re difficult. Not responding well to friendliness or humor… or playfulness, or politeness, or anything; you only randomly respond positively to anything that has to do with this “quest” of yours. Humans shouldn’t behave like that… What’s an act in your case? What’s real, and when are you pretending? One time a man never lies is when he makes a vow in his own heart… So you probably appreciate us trying to help you, unless you deem us weak and useless. But, without Conall and Deryn, he’d have lost against these goblin overlords… You may*
need more fixing than I thought, despite your open mind-set. Maybe more than I alone can provide or set up for you... Or is it just that I need to prove myself as well, to see even a glimpse of a smile or some gratitude?

She closed her eyes and sighed. [Not to mention, holding secrets of your own so soon. Why would you have a need to hide a nearly-empty jar?]

Suddenly, she shook her head. [Why am I so worried? We’re just supposed to do some good stuff and not be bored. On the other hand, it’s natural to worry about a travelling companion, even if they’re not your friends... I wonder how Kirika is doing.]

Squirming, she laid herself down and closed her eyes, listening to the others. Conall and Glaw were clearly discussing rules for Glaw even trying to follow them. Glaw understood, she was sure of that, but apparently had fun teasing her... crush, or whatever the elder Amberwing brother was to her.

[Crush... how long it has been since I’ve had one, myself? High level monsters have it harder than low level ones... Instinct only pushing us toward superior specimens... Or maybe it’s the reverse, being hurt over a crush on the wrong person?]

Wondering about how the relationship between a not-exactly human Glaw and Conall would play out, and whether they’d fight, be friends, or become a couple, she drifted off to sleep.

She was alone. It was dark. And cold.

Alessa was admittedly used to lots of moisture and somewhat cool temperatures, living quite a large part of her life in a dungeon, although she spend nearly all of her time in the most luxurious part of said dungeon.

But how can one like it when one is *both* cold and alone? Nobody liked it. Some people would cry. Especially young ones.

Alessa had shed her share of tears during her life and wasn’t going to cry over something as stupid as being cold and alone at night; heck, she wasn’t sure if she was dreaming or conscious.

She felt something like a small wave of warmth from a bit further away.

Truth be told, she wasn’t planning anything. Her body moved on its own towards the warmth.

There was this heat, and some light, and it grew and grew the closer she got to it...

Of course she was going to get as close as possible!
Stupid night temperatures. Camping outside would only be fun if she had a proper heat source with her, one she could rub against and coil around!

The heat source was closer and the light was getting stronger and stronger...

Then she felt something cool and slick moving across her body. Quickly, it wrapped around her neck, made breathing hard.

It tried to move up to her face, to block her mouth and her nose, probably.

Alessa screamed and suddenly woke up.

She was at camp.

Halfway across it, in fact, far from her sleeping spot.

It was hard to determine whether she was moving for the camp fire, Conall’s sleeping bag, now filled with its owner, or Deryn, sitting close to both.

One of these was her desired heat source.

The source of the slimy feeling was clearly coming from Glaw, who took it upon herself to stop her in a rather violent way.

Alessa swung her tail at the slimegirl, causing her to recede and withdraw.

- WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, STUPID MASS OF GOO? – She snapped.

- I would ask you the same thing, you stingy sneaky snakewoman! What were you doing? You were going for my Conall again, were you not? He is mine mine mine! I got to him first! It is your fault for sitting at spots where no one can meet you, stupid snake! Find your own men! - Glaw responded angrily.

- Why the hell would I be interested in a guy you touched? You were a pet at my house. Does a lady eat with her dog? Does she touch her dog’s leftovers? –

- Now you’ve done it! Insulting me and my spiky-haired mate! Mine! Mine!

Deryn decided at that moment to cut in. – Quiet or you’ll wake him up. Besides slimegirl, what did you miss in your conversation with Conall yesterday? You’re here on probation, a mere trial period. If you misbehave, you’ll be expelled from our group. We humans do not appreciate getting raped, so you calling him ‘yours’ after doing just that is sure to get him angry. Besides, Conall decidedly liked human women more so far. Not to mention, he was going to become a knight, so shut your trap slimegirl, unless you want to get out of here. If you’re so into him, be at least a little subtle and girly about it.

Alessa smiled with satisfaction. Apparently, in camp hierarchy by Deryn, she was way ahead of Glaw. She was a ‘snake-woman’ less and less, often called ‘Black Moth’ and very occasionally
‘Aless...snake-woman’, while the slimegirl was called just that.

Come to think of it, there was nothing to be satisfied about, being second to last in a seventeen years’ old camp hierarchy. But something Dreyn had just said caught her attention…

- Your brother did strike me as somewhat the knight-aspiring type. So, why would he abandon such a calling? Did he realize how barbaric the Order can be compared to the relatively meek monstergirls? - She asked curiously.

Deryn raised an eyebrow. - I was continuously raped by two monstergirls after being pretty much beaten up by another, and then had to battle an entire force of them followed by a freakin’ fly dominatrix or something. That’s not what I call ‘meek’ Black Moth.

- Ummm, I apologize. I merely suggested possible reasons...

Deryn sighed. - There’s only one reason and currently neither of us will feel comfortable talking about it. It had little to do with Order’s ideals and nothing at all to do with you monsterkind.

- I understand. I suppose I may deserve to learn that story at some point, but I’ll respect your privacy. - Alessa replied, bowing her head in understanding.

Glaw’s reaction was completely opposite. – I will ask him when he wakes up, then.

Deryn and Alessa shook their heads, before Echidna turned around to see Keita’s sleeping bag empty. - Where’s Keita-kun? - She asked a little concernedly.

- He woke up early and went out to gather something. - Dreyn shrugged.

- I see... I’ll go and rest a bit more, then. I’m all numb. You know, maintaining temperature and all... – Alessa turned to head back to her sleeping kit. But she’d barely gone a couple of feet when Deryn coughed behind her.

- Ales...Snake-woman?

She almost smiled, but he still stopped just short of calling her with her name. - Yes, Deryn? - She replied as she turned to regard him once more.

- Two questions. First, if we’ll have to travel during winter... Will you and Glaw here be all right?

Alessa wanted to smack herself in the face for not thinking of that beforehand. Of course, camping outside during winter without any proper heat source would nearly kill her unless she started using up her magic reserves...

- Ummm... That depends on many factors. I’ll probably start having to use magic to heat myself up further, which would mean I’ll be less productive in combat, but I should be okay, especially if some of the events and other elements turn out more... favourable than they seem to be now. As for Glaw, I’m not sure. I’m pretty sure blue slimes can die during winter unless they relocate to relatively warm waters and spend their time there. Red slimes can probably either hibernate anywhere, move
somewhere warmer or go about in a more solid, but weaker for them, form. You’d have to ask Glaw how she handled winters before. The other question?

Deryn fidgeted for moment. - What the hell does whatever you and Keita add at the end of our names mean? I know in Zipangu they have these... honorifics, but I have no idea what they mean.

- Fufufu... I know just a little. It’s very complicated, so you’d be better of asking Keita-kun. First of all, it’s good enough that he uses your first names, second of all... - Alessa paused for a moment, working out how to explain in a way the young man would understand.

- Him calling you Deryn-*kun* implies that he either somehow feels closer and less formal with you than with Conall here, he respects you less than him, or simply feels the need to accentuate your age difference.

Deryn leaned back, sighing. - He doesn’t sleep at all compared to what should be required, so he does seem pretty old... especially with that hair. But I’m more worried it’s the respect thing.[

- If that’s the case, I’m sure you’ll earn it in time. - Alessa reassured the young man. - After all, you did step up to fight that ex-knight and defeated him, not to mention you came to his aid on your own two feet it seems...

- I certainly hope so, but thanks for your kind words, Bla...

- Alessa, please. You may start out by trying to spit it rather than say it, but please, start trying to use my name rather than aliases or spiteful nicknames as soon as possible, okay?

- Fine. Why do you call him Keita-kun, though?

- It would seem appropriate considering I’m a woman older than him and all the other implications such behaviour carries. - Alessa smiled devilishly for a moment before sighing. - As I said, it’s often a bit complicated. Oh, and Deryn, starting to use someone’s first name amongst the citizens of Zipangu straight away, especially without any honorifics, is considered extremely rude or overly familiar, so whenever you can, try calling him Keita-san. Though, considering he’s a half-westernian of the second generation and he’s spent a lot of time here already, he may not mind at all.

Alessa slithered away and awaited for Keita’s return while lying in her spot, pretending to sleep.

Soon enough, she heard Keita sit nearby and unpack something. After a few moments of waiting, she arose and cast her glance over whatever he brought.

Two separate kinds of mushrooms, one type of seeds and one type of leaves.

She recognized or seemed to recognize at least some of those, so she slithered up closer, curious.

Keita turned nervously when he heard her, already quite close by.

- What, pray tell, would you be doing with these? All pretty rare ingredients, though not *so* rare. ‘Violet Bark’ mushrooms, Kray mushrooms, some seeds and these leaves...
- _Mera seeds._ – Keita supplied coldly.

- _This is no spice for breakfast or supper, I dare say._ – Alessa couldn’t help the note of concern in her voice.

Some heat began to enter his words. - _You would be right. I also dare say you shouldn’t be concerned with..._

- _Would you rather have this come up at a point where you’ll be unable to gather any yourself? You’re going to make more of the stuff you hold in that jar, right?_ – Alessa’s own temper was raised.

- _Alessa, you’re certainly putting your nose in my business a bit too far! Back o..._ – Keita started to respond angrily.

Suddenly, he found the end of her tail wrapped around his right arm. He couldn’t use it to reach for his sword... and before he noticed, the tail - along with most of her body, really - was poised to block any attempt of him reaching for his dagger. Her face was closer to his and she grabbed his cheeks with both hands, forcing him to look her straight in the eye.

- _I’m your *ally*, Ke-i-ta-kun. Your accomplice. I will not ‘back off’ because you feel uncomfortable talking about the reason why you gather normally non-edible plants and mushrooms. I am not your enemy, so you *should* tell me. You’ll find that people become way kinder and more *productive*, thus ultimately more *useful*, when you believe in them a little and trust them._ – She stated forcefully.

- _Alessa...san, as I’ve said already..._

- _Will you submit quicker to a strangling hug or tickling? Or maybe you give up and will tell me without torture?_ - She snapped back.

- _Alessa-san!_

- _Not used to physical contact? Or is it a phobia? I don’t want to force you, but if you don’t trust me, we’re bound to lose or fall apart at some point!_ – She reigned in her temper, and continued to speak softly. - _*Please* tell me all you can. We’ve already promised to travel together; I can only help you, so what’s the harm?_

Keita sighed. He couldn’t really look away much. Alessa slowly withdrew as he relaxed. - _Fine, I’ll tell you.

- _Great. Please do._

- … _You’re the only one who knows how my meeting with the Ushi-oni, the tentacle horror, and the subsequent healing period *really* played out._ – He begun.

- _I’ve noticed. You haven’t told them yet. I don’t blame you._ – Keita looked sharply at her for a moment before, with obvious reluctance, continuing to explain.

- _You see, during the treatment, I was dosaged extensively with certain medicines. These medicines happened to be enhanced by a type of drug._

- Yes; there are two ways to prepare that specific substance, and one of them is with the four ingredients I have here. Basically, I make a salve out of these four things. Said salve can either be rubbed into a cut and go directly into blood, which can be unpleasant or even dangerous... or be distilled in a larger amount into boiled water and made into an essence that can be either inhaled or drunk. It requires more of it in that case but on the whole is safer. -

Alessa nodded. She was feeling more and more anxious about this. - And the reason you have to prepare that salve... is what I think it is?

- If the medicines weren’t ‘enhanced’, so to say, it’d have taken a longer time for me to heal and I could even have become more permanently crippled by my encounter. However, the amount of the drug I took in... made me addicted. I was informed of the possibility during the treatment, though I was unsure whether to agree to it or not; being informed that it’ll allow me to regain full physical capability, I did not protest. Turned out, I did get addicted. Withdrawal symptoms are a bother; my left hand weakens, I get either feverish or hypothermic, nauseous, and occasionally some more... So I simply prepare the drug however I can and take it. - Keita shrugged in resignation.

- Is it possible for you to cure this addiction? - Alessa asked worriedly.

Keita shook his head. - On my own, not at this point. If withdrawal symptoms were cured and supported by magic, or if I found a way to significantly strengthen my body, then it’d be possible, but at the current point, it’s easiest to just continue making the drug.

[Strengthen the body? Incubus form?]

Alessa shook her head to clear the thought. - All right. I would suggest telling Deryn and Conall, but I won’t do it in your place. I’d ask that you show me how to make the drug when possible, so I can help you do it if you’re wounded or sick at any point, but no pushing. I’m glad you told me, though I’m sorry it has to be that way.

- It’s fine. I guess it’s better that someone knows, anyway. - Keita turned back to his concocting.

[No, Alessa. Stupid. Not all problems can be solved by ascending a human to Incubus form!]

Alessa scolded herself as she gathered her things. [It’s the demonic energy and the tentacle horrors that *caused* this addiction in the first place. You can’t force something like that on a human, and the easiest way to make him an incubus would be through the Ushi-Oni race that already has him marked. That’s a giant *no*. Or, maybe you’re being selfish? You want your own incubus that soon, huh? Stupid girl.]

Conall seemed to wake up as well, which meant they’d soon be on their way.

Of course, there seemed not to be much order in how they moved now. Apparently, Keita either really was trying to give his companions some kind of trial period or just wasn’t particularly set on doing anything at the moment and decided to just wander the countryside in search of bad beasties to
beat up or kill.

However, it appeared they haven’t reached easy, peaceful days of wandering aimlessly just yet.

To be precise, the town they reached with aims of figuring out what to do next after re-stocking on supplies and maybe resting a bit in more comfortable quarters was *closed*. Nobody was to be let in; apparently, a quarantine was put up in order to stop some sort of sickness from spreading into the city...

They were surprised to hear about any epidemic disease just now, but there wasn’t much their hosts-to-be, or precisely the guards of the city that was to be their asylum for a few days, were willing to share.

They were kindly informed however, that not all nearby towns knew of the sickness spreading so some may still be opened to visitors.

And so, they had to spend the rest of the day travelling to yet *another* town. Thankfully, they took care before to not run short on supplies in case of a crisis, but sleeping under the sky was starting to irritate some members of the group somewhat.

Thus, with a little bit of struggle, they did manage to reach the other city just after sunset, the gates being guarded but obviously open to visitors.

They paused to wait for Alessa to assume her human form and set up a waiting spot for Glaw, whom they obviously couldn’t just take into a city without raising suspicion.

With Alessa shape-changed, the group approached the gate, only to notice a commotion and a sharp sound of pain... And then the sound of something else.

Tearing of flesh.

Keita, Deryn and Conall wasted no time in putting their hands on the handles of their weapons as they picked their pace up; the walls next to the open gate were obviously moist from a red liquid, and a large, inhuman shape rushed straight into the city, moving past a chaotic pile of what seemed like body parts and a scratched and unnaturally bent corpse, apparently the two guards who were there *just a moment ago*.

Well, things like that are rarely left by the good guys, and good guys wouldn’t attack in the middle of the night like that. When another shout was heard from the town, the trio wasted no time in reading their weapons and charging in.

Alessa was more composed, or maybe reluctant to jump in after something that just did this to two
probably qualified guards. Looking at the corpses, or more like a corpse and pieces of another one, confirmed her suspicions - there was a high chance of more than a single offender here, and their method of combat was pretty animalistic.

Just next to the entrance was a small gathering of stores and shops, some in the open air, some inside buildings, although it was apparent most of the salesmen had already abandoned their workplaces and retired to their homes or the local tavern...

Those that were working currently occupied themselves with either running as far from the entrance to the city as possible, or decorating their stalls with red liquid seeping generously from cuts or ripped parts of their bodies.

Out of one of the houses, they could hear another scream while slightly deeper in the city, sounds of battle were apparent.

Hearing the sounds of battle and someone shouting for help. Conall wasted no time in rushing to the aid of the person in the building.

It could’ve been his final mistake.

As he entered the house, the creature immediately sensed his presence, strong claws ripping through his armour and leaving cuts on his skin. He dodged another strike by moving backwards, but that only prompted the beast - because that’s what it was, a beast - to pounce upon him and throw both of them out of the house and into the shopping district.

Keita and Deryn were already close. Close enough to see the build of the creature.

Its shape might be described as a mix of feral and humanoid; something that definitely could move on its hind legs only, but with an arm length decidedly uncommon for humans and similar races that preferred such method of walking. Practically the entirety of its body was covered in an uneven-length, grey fur that enhanced the animal-like visage, and rather than a face, the creature had a dog’s jaws on the front of its head, coupled with eye and ear placement that would’ve suited a canine as much as it would a human - not-perfect but passable for either species.

Keita stopped in his tracks for a moment when he noticed what the beast was, but Deryn had no such luxury - his brother was trapped under its seemingly quite muscle-packed and heavy bulk. Practically charging onto it, the younger Amberwing quickly treated the canine-anthropod to a smack over the head with his mace. When it didn’t withdraw, a quick look down confirmed the werewolf had a gender, and as much as Deryn hated the idea of doing it once again, he prepared to kick that place - and thankfully, just the threat of it had the werewolf withdraw with a surprised squal of sorts, falling off his brother and rolling onto its side.

A powerful smash with the flanged mace reminded the beast that this was the middle of a fight and its opponent seemed pretty ruthless and not the kind to give it a rest or show much mercy.

The creature went onto all fours and turned its attention to Deryn, attempting to trip him only to find Keita’s and Deryn’s swords sinking into its flesh as it made the forward motion.

Withdrawing, it encircled the pair before noticing Conall’s movement and leaping wildly at him. He
blocked the swing of its respectable claws with his partisan, and Deryn followed with a strong smash to the side with his mace.

Keita’s swing aimed at the very neck of the creature with frightening speed and precision was what caused its survival instincts to kick in. Sure, it got only a minor cut thanks to its incredible reflex and perception, but it might not be so lucky next time. Pushing Deryn, the smallest of the trio, away, it made a clear path for itself back to the gate.

Almost clear. There was just a single gray-haired woman blocking it. She shouldn’t be much trouble.

Alessa was prepared to skin the werewolf alive before changing its bones to toothpicks as she quickly remedied the ‘alive’ part, but realized there were several things stopping her.

1. Energy conservation.
2. Human form. Human form sucked, nearly all her physical attributes being lowered and her senses and reflexes not working as well together as in her natural form.
3. The creature was very, very fast compared to the human form. So, she stood ground and when it swung its claws to shred her, she grabbed its hands and struggled against its physical power.

It was a bad idea to continue doing this for long, especially in her altered form, so she heightened her demonic energy and prepared to feed the feral thing one of her spells...

And that’s when the last problem came up.

There were groups of humans looking at them. Heck, some of them were apparently cheering on the provisional anti-werewolf squad.

A young to mid-aged woman holding a werewolf for a moment could be explained by luck, experience and exercise.

Said woman also shoving any form of magic into said werewolf was a lot *harder* to explain. Human mages were supposed to be studious wimps, at least most of them.

And so, an alternative method of dealing with the creature had to be taken.

Thankfully, assuming the approaching duo of warriors were able to show at least a little bit of teamwork with her as well, the option presented itself.

When you’re in a grapple against a girl a bit over half your size, you normally don’t assume she can overpower you under any circumstances or put much force into her muscles, regardless of whether you’re a sentient human or a beast.

Thus, a momentary surge of strength was all it took for Alessa to surprise the creature enough to grab
its arm and bend it painfully while rushing behind the werewolf, essentially holding it in place for a moment with its arm presented clearly.

A stab under the ribs from one side, and a mighty chop to the arm from the other, the werewolf was at once wounded in a painful way AND lost most of the tissue connecting the arm and the forearm around the elbow. Alessa pulled with all the strength she could muster and the remaining tissue snapped, leaving the werewolf a one-armed cripple.

Keita wasn’t done, and Conall was just getting started. As the canine-man attempted to run forward despite, or maybe because, of its injury, Keita crouched and cut the tendons of its legs while Conall shouted at them to move out of the way.

The werewolf lost its pace from the pain and the new injury, but Alessa was more interested in the sight of a partisan being thrown at the moment. It stabbed the beast right in the back, causing it to collapse entirely. Deryn, following up on the two of them with a dash after finally getting back up, didn’t need another invitation, slamming its head into a sticky mess with his mace.

One werewolf down.

The sounds of the battle further into the city also quieted, and suddenly, groups of people ran out from their homes or improvised hiding spots, greeting the group that slayed one of the beasts that attacked from nowhere.

Well, they actually attacked from *somewhere* and the people were worried about it for a while.

Long story short: After a short commendation from the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the city guard (the previous commander-in-chief being permanently crippled in the fight against the *other* werewolf a bit deeper in the city), and a job offer extended to but denied by the three male members of the group, the situation was explained to them.

Essentially, this was a peaceful countryside as far as monster activity went. Problems with non-humans were rare and quickly taken care of, until now that is. Some started weaving conspiracy theories about monsters preparing a soldier caste while luring the good citizens of the area into a false sense of security only to strike at the last moment, but truth be told, no one knew exactly *how* or *why* the area suddenly got infested with the lycanthropes.

Two things were certain. They appeared the most often on the roads around the town they found isolated and not letting people in, which probably forced the quarantine.

Also, the increase of werewolf activity also caused a decrease of criminal activity. Whether this meant bandits and rogues got infected with lycanthropy somehow or whether it meant that the werewolves slaughtered them, no one knew.
Point being, were-beast hunting suddenly became a noble and profitable profession amongst the citizens.

Bonus prize for anyone who figures out the source of said problem.

The group rented a room for themselves immediately, as discussion was in order.

- I suppose we should discuss whether or not we’ll be doing anything about these werewolves and how we will go about it. - Conall begun once they settled down in their room.

His brother continued. - Well, guessing what exactly they’re doing here is pointless.

Were-beasts are pretty much amongst the rarest of monsters, and unique in that males seem to be more co...

- Werebeasts aren’t monsters - Alessa cut in.

- Please elaborate. They seem pretty monstrous to me. - Dreyn sounded very sceptical.

- Only two kinds of werebeasts currently have ties with our Demon Lady, one specifically created by monstercind based on actual werebeasts as a method of converting human females relatively painlessly, and one adapting to sexual hyperactivity and tuning in to the bond with our Demon Lady through help and careful planning, but still at large being a ‘wild’ race. - Alessa explained. - Werebeasts aren’t monsters in the truest sense of the word. Nearly all of them were humans that transformed into their current forms through a violent reaction between magical energy and an infection commonly carried by many Werebeasts. A healthy enough person with no connections to magic whatsoever won’t become a werewolf without outside intervention, for example. The only two other methods of spawning werebeasts is infusing a perfectly healthy wild animal with so much magical energy that it transcends its original nature and turns to other possibilities, such as metazoathropy, commonly miscalled lycanthropy due to the relative knowledge about and popularity of werewolves, or when an artificially bred hybrid of human and animal survives and develops in a stabilized way towards human-like cognitive processes, cunning and efficiency while still being dominated by instincts and its inner nature.

Keita spoke. - So, it is as I expected. Werewolves and wererats were noted as far as two Demon Lords ago, but never appeared to be active member of the monster forces. They’re monster-like creatures of different origin, but without ties to the Demon Lord, right?

Alessa thought for a moment. - I guess that depends on what’d you call ‘ties’. The similarity between werebeasts and old age Beast type monsters is completely undeniable, thus, some kind of connection may exist.

- *But* the vast majority of them probably are opposed to or at least not aligned with the current Demon Lady, right? They’re aligned with... something else?

Keita almost blushed as Alessa beamed him a smile, pleased at his insight. - I’m impressed, Keita-kun! To put so much thought into this with such accuracy! Most people assume they’re some sort of
warrior-caste bred by our Demon Lady in case the brave and pure paladins don’t fall to temptation of succubi or aren’t distracted enough in battle to fall against other feminine monsters.

- Don’t go into unnecessary details. - Deryn cut her off.

- True, that’s for passionate people. - Alessa smirked lightly.

Conall was frowning lightly. - Are the rumours about these creatures true? Like them being vulnerable to silver and stuff?

Alessa seemingly considered something before nodding. - There is some truth in this mythology, yes. However, to be precise, it’s not really silver itself that makes them vulnerable.

- How does that weakness work, then? - Keita asked, curious.

- Werebeasts do have a slight vulnerability to the material silver; it makes their wounds heal more slowly and weapons made of silver cut them more easily, but this isn’t a huge advantage compared to normal weapons. The exact difference is that magic channelled through certain materials, silver being one of them, is much, much more effective on werebeasts. The werebeasts being vulnerable to silver rumour probably started when someone used an enchanted silver blade against them and got far better result than his or her companions with more regular weapons. Sapphires seem to share that trait, but I’m unsure if there are any more materials like that.

- So, basically, if we want to fight them, getting some silver is not a bad idea? – Conall summed up.

- Nor is adorning your weapons with some sapphires. - Alessa added. – But… the main advantage is the weapon-based magic channeled through these materials, and I’ve never seen any of you perform any. - She shrugged after a moment. - Still, it’ll give you an extra edge, so I’d suggest that one of us goes to find some jewellers and blacksmiths in this city.

- I’ll go. - Deryn offered. - I intended to check the town out anyway.

- Probably wanted to find a tavern - Conall laughed.

- Tavern? - Alessa asked, her lips twitching.

- Legal drinking age is vastly different in different parts of the world, so Deryn checks out where he can drink and where he can’t, and makes notes of it. Of course, that ‘quest’ is at an end since in a few years he’ll be able to drink anywhere. Never heard of a place that doesn’t allow twenty year old people to drink and he’s already seventeen. No worries though, him checking if he can drink here doesn’t mean he will, even if he can. It’s just a weird hobby of sorts. He also claims that ‘many interesting bits of information can only be learned in taverns and brothels’. - Conall explained, grinning at his squirming younger brother.

- Brothels? - Keita frowned. - Please leave such things for when you are of age, Deryn-kun.

Alessa decided to voice her opinion on that matter. - Many monsters would say that cultivating a healthy sexuality is important even at a young age... But isn’t that way of doing it wrong? Paying for it? Someone like you could definitely get a girlfriend or find a monster interested in you, Deryn!
- I AM NOT VISITING BROTHELS, SO SHUT UP, ALL OF YOU! I’m currently uninterested in...that kind of... stuff. And when I am, I will certainly not lower myself enough to pay for it. However, it is true, you can learn rare and hard to obtain information by visiting these kinds of places, so I mentioned them when talking about it.

Everyone raised an eyebrow, but Alessa decided to simply stop the conversation from going in weird directions anymore. - Very well, go and check for jewelers, blacksmiths and any taverns if you’d like. Conall, if I may ask you, maybe you should go talk to Glaw about us staying here for an additional day or two... Two days might be enough, I think, but it could take longer. We’ll probably have to check on her periodically doing that time, but that’ll be group effort.

- All right. I’ll go do that.

- I’m leaving, then - Deryn said, and his brother quickly followed.

[And... Alone with Keita. With anyone else, that would be quite the exciting situation for a woman, perhaps, but not him, oh no. There’s a zero percent chance of anything exciting or naughty happening.] Alessa thought to herself, a small sigh escaping her lips the only hint about her thoughts.

- Alessa-san? - Said man spoke up quietly, his tone unsure.

- Yes, Keita-kun?

- Before, you’ve mentioned something about my predictions on werebeasts being correct. Little as I’ve known about them and having only met one or two in my life, I wasn’t completely sure but they always seemed a bit different and separate from the ‘main’ monster-kind. When I was with the Order, their teaching about them didn’t make much sense; you don’t breed a warrior-exclusive caste and then keep them off the battlefield, so they couldn’t be a warrior-caste for the Demon Lord and monsters. Are they completely feral, then, or something? Or are they aligned with something else?

Alessa nodded. - As I’ve mentioned, your reasoning was flawless. There are seven known werebeast types: werebat, wereboar, werecat, wererabbit, wererat, washeep, and werewolf. There are also rumours of werefoxes, though I suspect western people just misjudge Kitsune-type monsters as that, as well as weresharks in the sea. Out of the known types, five date to about two Demon Lords before the current one, as you mentioned. Wererabbits were a crazy attempt by a certain Angel to change other werebeasts, certain monsters and Incubi into easily manageable and relatively harmless creatures; ironically, the latest Demon Lady’s philosophy ensured that many wererabbits are at the side of monsterkind... Weresheep are an experiment of us monsterkind based on actual werebeasts, meant as an easy way to convert human women to monsterhood instead of killing them... Well, they’re also supposed to provide wool easily. But the other five types have no connection to the Divinities nor the Monsterkind. It turns out they’re tied to a certain druidic cult at large, though many do regress enough into feral instincts that they may be misjudged as beasts. Said druidic cult does worship an entity that does not seem like any of the currently known deities; said entity seems pretty opposed to both human religion and monsterkind. To us, it became known as the ‘King of Fangs’. The thing that’s worrying to our Demon Lady is that the King of Fangs managed to lure some monsters to its own side, and is apparently capable of reverting the forced female transformation in first generation monstergirls that are still alive; thus, monsters that lived
before our current Demon Lady took over that were male can be transformed by the King of Fangs into their previous violent forms, including their own genders. This suggests the King of Fangs may be an incredibly powerful monster, perhaps even one of the Demon Lords presumed dead or their descendants, but such capabilities and its worship also imply that he possesses divine blood or at least divine powers. If it comes to an open war, the King of Fangs would no doubt be a horrible opponent to either humankind or monsterkind.

- So, him and the Demon Lady are not allies?
- Not in the least. - Alessa stated firmly.
- That means, since it appears everyone is in agreement that we’ll try to stop this werebeast threat in this land… that you’ll be fighting on our side? - There appeared to be genuine curiosity in his tone… maybe a touch of hope?

Alessa nodded with enthusiasm. - Indeed. I would’ve attempted to defeat that werewolf today on my own, but to do that, I would have had to use my powers which would raise many questions from the townsfolk observing us, including me possibly being accused of witchcraft or monsterhood, so I had to stop myself from doing so. But, I’ll gladly help you with them since they’re a danger to humans and possibly to monsters as well.

- I see. - Keita paused, before he frowned. - What about your energy conservation?
- Well, unless the situation will become dire, I won’t have to use so much power that it’d become a problem, so you shouldn’t worry about it. The problem is tracking them down while not leaving the town unsafe, and how many of them are there… so, Keita-kun, it’s my belief that you should get yourself a proper silver sword for this before venturing out to battle them.

- That’s what the two days waiting period is for, then?
- Among other things. I wonder if they will attack one more time in that period, though. Should we go rest now?
- Probably, yes.
- Fine, then. Goodnight.
- Alessa-san, this is my room.
- So what?
- We’ve rented separate rooms for everyone this time, remember? It’d be a waste of space and money not to use your own room.

She hoped he’d at least behave normally and allow himself to be teased a bit, but it appeared his condition was serious. Sighing she rose, bowed her head gently and left his room.
In the morning, it turned out that Deryn found two blacksmiths and two jewelers in the city, so they spend a lot of time asking around the town to learn more about them.

Turned out one of them had a better reputation than the other but only really did the good stuff for people who were willing to pay a lot, so they weren’t sure what to do and what ‘a lot’ meant. Apparently, he did normal stuff too and asked for the price range, so you never could be one hundred percent certain at whether you’re in the ‘poor’, ‘average’ or ‘elite’ ranking and thus which weapon you’re going to get.

They also asked about the werebeasts themselves - apparently, werewolves were the most common, and Alessa later claimed this was often the case. Apparently, wererats and werewolves were the most common out of the five ‘main’ types; wereboars and werecats being less common and werebats the least common among the werebeast kind.

They decided on going to the blacksmiths the day after, in order for Deryn to collect some more information on them at the tavern and for Alessa and Keita to check the jewellers’ places for some sapphire-and-silver based jewellery and such.

Before the evening, they took their time training, with Keita and Deryn going to check on Glaw in the meantime.

When the evening came, Conall himself went to check on Glaw, Keita and Alessa went to a jeweller’s, and Deryn decided to finally visit the tavern.

Alessa couldn’t believe their luck at this time.

One of the jewellers was *moving away* and as such, decided he had to sell most of his merchandise before he does, so the prices were *lower than usual*, with a few exceptions based on what was popular in his new location.

Apparently, neither silver jewellery nor sapphires were popular out there; sapphires were in fact amongst the things the price of which dropped the *most*.

As a bonus, they had access to some of Deryn’s and Conall’s funds as well...

Alessa was a woman at heart, and although the frequent shopping urge was buried deep, deep down by her species, her lifestyle, her personality and finally her years without actually doing any shopping, said urge was almost brought out by this incredibly rare opportunity.

- K... Ke-i-ta-kun, l... let’s BUY THEM ALL!

- Alessa-san, that would be a needless waste of money... - Keita was actually quite alarmed at his companion’s reaction.

- I was only talking about the silver and the sapphire ones, of course! We can be a bit moderate about other types!

He rolled his eyes. - Alessa-san, you can’t really be insisting that we waste our precious resources on jewelry that won’t even aid us in...

- Okay, okay, let’s stick to the sapphire and silver stuff and buy half of them!
- Alessa-san!

- We can stick the sapphires in your weapons! I’ll wear four rings, a necklace, bracelets and...

- Alessa-san, please calm down!

- If you want, you could wear one of the rings instead! If so, then we should totally get matching ones and... wait...- Alessa paused, and seemed to come back to reality. - I’m way too enthusiastic about this, ain’t I?

- Yes, you are. It was a bit... surprising, to be honest.

Alessa nodded a few times and licked her lips nervously. - I never understood Sybilla’s and Lisa’s shopping urges, but now, faced with an opportunity to buy something we may use *and* is pretty, at relatively low prices, I... I think I understand...

- Sybilla? Lisa?

- Ah, uh, umm... Nevermind. Let’s check what could be useful.

They began looking around the place to find something suitable. Alessa decided the best way to do so would be simply asking the jeweller himself. They just needed a quick suitable story or they had to count on him being willing to help them immediately in favour of other clients…

- Excuse me? Mister? - She called for the jeweller.


- Greetings, mister artisan. You see, I work in service of a certain noble lady and it so happens we have certain issues with recent events at her home...

The jeweller looked at her askew.

- Hmmm, of course, Miss may not be too happy with me trying to save our money rather than spending them excessively on luxuries, but what’s wrong with being something of an entrepreneur when no one looks? No one’s fortune is endless. - She smiled disarmingly at the man, which seemed to ease his concern.

- I like your attitude, lady, but I worry you may receive a lashing.

- Worry not, this person is trustworthy.

He nodded, relaxing. - What exactly are you looking for, miss?

- Well... first of all, Mistress wants to get her personal guards’ weapons adorned. Since she likes sapphires, we’re looking for something that can be put into a weapon by a blacksmith. We’d also like to buy a ring, preferably a silver one with a sapphire, and... - She felt Keita’s hand on her shoulder, a bit of an unexpected gesture, and she recognized that she was starting to go too far...

- I think I’d have to consult my Mistress on what else we need, sorry.
- Very well. There are a four rings like the one you seek right there, and I’ll try to find some things that may be put in weapons, shields or armour right away. Please wait for a minute. The jeweller moved towards the rear of the store.

Alessa walked over to the stall with the rings requested displayed. Indeed, there were four silver rings, with an implanted sapphire each. They came in identical pairs, so Alessa suspected they were supposed to be bought as such.

- Hey, Keita-kun, since they’re identical, maybe we should...

- Just pick one. – Keita’s tone was flat.

- But they’re clearly meant to be bought by people who want matching ones, so...

- Alessa-san, we’ll be practically out of funds once we get the weapon improvements needed on this. We have no time to be fawning over jewelry and spending our money on it. - A firm note of finality had entered his tone, along with a trace of anger.

- I... I see. Then, please buy me one out of the bottom row, and go talk with the jeweller.

- Very well.

Taking the ring and going up to the artisan, Keita left Alessa alone for a moment. Obviously, she couldn’t help but reach out and take the other ring in her hand.

[It would appear he is almost completely hopeless... Well, it’s not like I was trying to get two rings *specifically* for him, but it was a pretty blunt suggestion, so...] She sighed.

[Hopeless. Seriously, I have no idea where to start working on him. It’s like he’s buried beneath both tons of rock and molten magma in a steel coffin shut down by best constructors and sealed by magicians. How to turn such a person healthy?]

Another sigh. [More importantly, I don’t ever want to be put into this kind of situation... Where I have someone I like, and nothing to signal the relationship with, nothing to share, nothing to present them with as something we could use together or have in common...]

No sigh this time. Instead, Alessa carefully looked around.

[This man wants these gone anyway. They won’t be profitable in his new workplace either. It’s just one more ring, and could be thought of as a bonus for a customer for buying stuff he doesn’t need anymore, so...]

No one was looking at her. Alessa licked her lips nervously.

[We just have to make it so that what I’m carrying is not a silver ring adorned with a sapphire, but something else entirely...]

Another quick look over the place, coupled with some additional lip licking.
[Hmmm... Let’s make it... disappear...]

A quiet whisper, and she felt pieces of sand move through the separations of the wooden floor and through her cloak, towards the palm of her hand.

- Intense Earth Spell: Miniature Crushing Barrow...

An oval shape formed from the rapidly gathering pieces of earth as she rolled the ring in her hands.

[... Calm down, control the pressure, we don’t want it crushed...]

Soon, the ring was completely covered in the stuff, a hard piece of earth in her hand instead of a ring.

[And now, to make my little souvenir complete... Normal Earth Spell: Miniature Stone Roots!]

A small but growing web of rock started to cover the surface of the piece of earth in her hands. In a short while, an intricate pattern covered almost the entirety, forming something like an earth-filled rock, with a precious gem at the centre - said gem being now invisible to anyone.

- Miss? Miss, I’m sorry, but if you’re done, please make room for other customers! Oh, what is this? I don’t have something like that here. - The Jeweller had returned.

- Ah, uh, this? I’m sorry, I was lost in thought. This pretty stone here is something my brother gave to me when we were little. He’s away now and I really miss him, so I keep this with me at all times. If everything is paid for, I guess we’ll be leaving, Mr. Swordsman?

Keita rose an eyebrow at both his nickname and the strange stone she was carrying, but nodded anyway and they left.

Alessa quickly decided to add her self-made rock souvenir to her little ‘treasure’ chest back at her room. For the moment, she had nobody to present the rock or what it contained to.

At that time, Deryn was already at the tavern. Handing out drinks and asking about the blacksmith. There was a lot of gossip but very little useful information.

He was almost willing and ready to leave, when he noticed a pretty rare scene.

A quite pretty redheaded girl was pushing some thug-like looking guy’s head against the bar table while ordering another drink. A large guy working in the bar apparently took the thug off her hands and led him out.

- And that’s wha’gonna happen to any guy I dislike that hits on me now, ya hear me folks! I ain’t a noble little girl no longer, so I only need to put up with guys I like, you hear me? There’ll be no arranged marriages and freakin’ fake courtesy anymore from me!
The barman approached. Carefully, Deryn noticed. - Miss, you’re being too loud.

- So what! These guys were all staring at me anyways! What, now one of you gonna ask if he’s my type, right?

She cast a challenging glance to the people in the bar, and then, predictably enough, she noticed Deryn.

She gave him a long look. There was a strange expression on her face... First, something like curiosity, then intense focus combined with disbelief, and at finish something else entirely. Satisfaction? Recognition? Playfulness? It was hard to say.

- You, you there! Black haired guy, my height! You look shady enough! Come here, drink with me. It’s boring drinking alone.

With a sigh, Deryn decided that refusing was more trouble than it’s worth, so he simply sat next to her and she ordered a drink for him.

- Now ain’t that a surprise. You look like you’d be popular, yet never seen you and yar hanging around such shady places. ‘Suppose you could tell me what you’re doing in a place like this, mister-boy... whatsyarnname?

- My name’s Deryn. To be completely honest, I came here in search for some clues about one of blacksmiths here.

The woman looked at him with narrowed eyes, her lips twitching. - Old Dave or Mister Peris?

- It ain’t ‘Old Dave’ so I’m guessing... the second one?

- He’s a sucker for pretty girls and women acting sentimental, concerned and caring about others and being nice to everyone. Want a discount, bring a girl and have her go ‘Oh how dreadful it’d be if the blade failed’ or ‘oh, how superior the sword must be for my beloved father to accept it’, crap like that. Good chance he’ll do better or do it for less.

- You’re pretty knowledgeable about the blacksmiths out here.

- Had to be. Weapon makers are important stuff in my previous line of business.

- That being?

- Curious now, are we?

Deryn smiled. - Maybe.

- I was a squire. Got it all figured out, gonna do a great job at being a squire, then gonna either become famous as one or will be knighted myself.

- Since you’re sitting here drinking, I’m assuming something either went very wrong or very right. Celebration or drowning sorrows? - Dreyn asked as she took another swing from her tankard.

- My, my, aren’t you worldly. What are you, seventeen?
- You nailed it.

- Well, you can call me big sister, since I just turned nineteen here. Big sister Sela. You nailed it, too. I’ve been thrown out. - Sela finished off her drink, the tankard making quite the ‘thunk’ as she slammed it down onto the bar. - Apparently, I’m too informal, my presence lowers morale since I kick ass more than a few young noble guys who expect they’ll be killing dragons by the time they turn twenty and the Knight I’ve been in service to has found himself a lady and she’s not much into the fact his squire is a girl. So, I’m unemployed, drinking my worries away and hanging out with shady-looking guys like you.

- Do I really look that shady?

- I’ve got an instinct about that, Deryn-boy. Trust me, you’re about the shadiest guy here.

- I’m supposed to be happy about that?

- Well, that got you an ex-squire girl buying you drinks and talking to you, so maybe it’s not a bad thing either, huh?

- So, you’re somehow into shady people now?

- Of course. Gotta do everything to ensure me being thrown out has been the right decision, right? It’s dumb trying to prove things the other way around, me being a girl and all. So I talk to shady people now.

- You’d love my companions, I’d say. - Deryn commented wryly.

They drunk a few more rounds together. Sela seemed friendly in a too innocent way to really be trying to interact with shady guys and proving her ex-superiors right.

- So, Deryn-boy, why’d you want to learn about our dear blacksmith? Gonna be a customer or what?

- Yup. We have to improve our weaponry before we go out and fight the werebeasts.

- You gonna figh’em creepy beasties? Why?

- Two of my companions, one being my dear brother, have a certain obsession about making the world a better place. Apparently their definition of it includes getting rid of some of the non-humans.

- Eh? You wouldn’t be traveling with any of dem knights, would ya?

- No... Both have past ties to the Order, but this is the past. One apparently did this as a way to repay a debt... the other genuinely wanted to be a knight, but, well, shall we say... the Order condemned something important to him and he wouldn’t just ignore this.

- Ah, sounds like a good guy then. Crap like Order rules should never be put before personal morality. Puff-uh.

- Sela?

- You see, Deryn, I’ve been getting myself pretty much drunk here. I might need some help returning to my room, and, well, I don’t know any decent people other than you in this bar.
- Twenty minutes ago you’ve said I’m the shadiest guy in here.

- Shady and indecent aren’t the same things, Deryn-boy.

- All right all right. Let me take you there.

They were given the tab and the key to her room. Deryn figured she’d also ask him to go and pay for the tab, giving him the money of course.

Unless she was taking him into her room for more... private, intimate reasons. He was neither innocent enough nor clueless enough to *not* suspect such a development.

They entered her room and he helped her sit on her bed. - Please close the door.

- What’d you need me here for? - Deryn asked a little nervously.

- Just... hear me out, ‘kay?

Shrugging, Dreyn pushed the door too, before facing her across the room. - Fine. What is it?

Suddenly seeming a bit more sober, she reached for her bag on her own. She pulled out a set of parchments of paper, some seeming very, very old, and started to look them over. - Ah’hah, found it.

- What are those?

- What do you think they are? Bounty posters and arrest warrants.

- And you’re keeping them because?

- Old job. In much of these lands, once a bounty is put on someone, you can still receive it even if their crimes are technically no longer so important as long as you present a proper document. They check the date of the bounty being placed on someone. Aaaand... here.

She handed him a ‘wanted’ poster. There was an adolescent male in it, with slightly messy, somewhat short black hair..

- That’s you isn’t it? A couple years ago, but this is you nevertheless.

Deryn suddenly felt a lot less comfortable being in a room with this woman. His hand was instinctively reaching for his weapon.

- Oh, come on, relax, Deryn-boy. I’m a bad girl now, remember? I wouldn’t be getting myself drunk if I really was after such an old bounty. But, I’m glad my senses are as sharp as ever.

- Then why are you...

- Being a proper bad girl, of course. Listen, Deryn-kid. I don’t know why they were so stuck on finding a fourteen-or-so years old guy that they gave you a bounty, and not the smallest one, either.
Some of your crimes are listed, but none of these are severe enough to warrant something like this, to my knowledge. You even seem like a nice person, if quiet and... well, shady.

- Things... changed in my life. I dislike to talk about it... But why are you telling this to me?

- Well, you, me, and apparently one of your companions are fellow Order castouts, or at least you and them don’t like each other. Really, I’d call myself a woman with pretty good intuitions and I’m rarely wrong in my character assessments. You seem like a good person or at least a decent one, so I figured I should stop you from running into other maniacs like me who collected these warrants.

- Aren’t these pretty old? I’m seventeen now, so these would be a few years back.

- Precisely why I’m talking to you right now. Your previous bounty will still be honored at three nearby cities I know of. Avoid Akureyri and Drogheda, and the Old City of Danann. You know, the one’s not actually in Danann anymore. Unfortunately telling you this seems all I can do for you, other than advising you to leave for other areas as soon as possible. Certainly your reputation from a few years back only covers so much ground, so there are bound to be places where people never heard of any ‘Deryn’, and he was never considered a criminal.

- Thanks for your advice, but I’ll go wherever my companions may. Although, we’ll definitely try to avoid these three cities. Old Danaan, Akureyri, and Drogheda, you say?

- Exactly.

- Now, how may I give my thanks to the woman who apparently went out of her way to warn me?

- Well, you’ve done a good job as a drinking partner, so if you’d be so kind as to pay for your drinks and a third or half of what mine were deemed worth of, it’d be great.

- Figures. All right then, I’ll do that.

The next day, Deryn explained what he learned yesterday, while Alessa shared the information she provided Keita with, in a shorter version, with both Conall and Deryn. The two brothers shared some small talk, then the younger one went to check on their slimegirl companion. Alessa, Conall and Keita went to talk with the blacksmith, instead. On the way there, Keita asked something that he meant to ask about earlier.

- Alessa-san?

- What is it, Keita-kun?

- It’s purely a matter of curiosity, but when we fought these goblins, the hobgoblin Rhalia said something pretty interesting. Apparently, her mother was an Echidna like you... I remember you mentioning something related to that, so I’ve been meaning to ask...

- I’ve never had a hobgoblin daughter that I know of... Nor any encounters with females that may have caused any of them to think I’m somehow responsible...

To her surprise, both Conall and Keita snickered at her half-joke.

- It’s not what I meant. I mean, I always thought that monsters are only capable of spawning more
of their kind... And yet, she claims her mother is of a different species entirely. - Keita explained once the mirth had faded.

Alessa smiled. - Well, it is correct. Normally, a monster will only give birth to another monster of the same kind. In some very rare situations, the nature of a father may have influence on this, though in human-usual monster pairings, the father changes nothing; it’d require something more on a supernatural level to sire a baby. However, there are certain exceptions from the rule and Echidnas are one of them.

- And they’re an exception... how?

- Since the first times Echidnas were spawned in ancient times, our numbers remained relatively the same. In fact, they decreased slightly, or at least that was the case before the current Demon Lady took over. The Echidnas are unique among monsterkind - only the first child of every Echidna, or in the extremely rare cases, the first twins, are of the same race. After that, Echidnas are capable of birthing children of many monster traits, nearly at random; all of said children are capable of breeding true. Thus, Echidnas may be responsible for quite a number of currently known monster types ever appearing, but there hasn’t been a new type of monster born from an Echidna for some time. It’s perfectly possible that a hobgoblin was born of an Echidna, though it may be a tad different compared to the usual.

- Well, she was certainly different than that other hobgoblin we fought. But... this is a weird way to reproduce. Aren’t your species in danger of dying out, then?

- This is precisely why we mostly hide ourselves from the world, other than the fact that our methods allow us to find quite extraordinary partners and in turn, produce superior offspring. But, well, yes. Echidna’s are amongst the rarest types of monsters, even if we’re not in the very top regarding natural power. To add to it, only the greatest of monsters have a chance to turn only the appropriate human women into neo-echidnas, as some like to call ex-human women turned monster, which doesn’t happen as often as you may think.

Conall cut in. - So, that’s why you wanted to find someone strong by the dungeon method? To make... an Echidna daughter and maybe a...

- Hey, hey, I wasn’t *so* inefficient at finding guys as I may seem. I might not be the prettiest star in the world nor in the most frequently visited vacation spot, but... - Alessa trailed off before shrugging - Nevermind.

- So, does that mean...

- I said never mind! - Alessa snapped. - We’re where we are supposed to be, anyway.

Indeed, they were at ‘Peris’ Anvil’ smithy, and entered it. It was a pretty spacious place suitable for someone skilled enough to have a reputation. Alessa just hoped that they’ll be able to get the best out of him.
The werebeasts are ones of the biggest differences between the worlds of "Wicked Deity" and original "Monster Girl Encyclopedia". Essentially, with exception of "Large Mouse", Wererabbits and Weresheep, monstergirls listed as "Were-anything" or based off on variations of lycanthropy do not exist as monstergirls. Instead, they're altered to creatures strongly resembling traditional werewolves, making them a physical and lethal threat to humans and monsters alike. Weresheep and wererabbit are still monstergirls and slowly-becoming a type of monstergirl respectively. Monstergirls listed as a "type of" werecat/were-anything, such as Anubis, Sphinx, or Nekomata, are still monstergirls who should be considered to also gain some additional traits from the "original" Were-type monstergirl, but are unrelated to the werebeasts of Wicked Deity world.

More explanation will be supplied when I review, update and upload the information-only chapters. In the meantime, feel free to comment, give feedback, or ask questions.
Chapter Summary

It's time to properly request what will be useful against the werebeasts' at the blacksmith's. Just what sort of weapons can they get? And will the horrifying creatures lurking and hunting just outside the city wait for them?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peris was a middle-aged, brown haired man with green eyes and a robust but fit physique.

- What can I do for you?

Keita started.

- We’re a group from outside the city. To be frank, we’re going to try and beat the werebeasts that live in the nearby woods. We’d like to get our equipment prepared properly for that and we’ve hear that you’re about the best we can hope for in this area.

- Prepared? You mean that silver stuff rubbish? Trust me my friend, I’ve seen people armed head to toe in silver try to go up against them and die.

- You don’t really need to be worried about that. We’ve received confirmation from a very reliable source that using silver is, in fact, effective when used correctly. Of course, silver isn’t really a metal you’d make a weapon with entirely, so I guess that’s why I should ask you to make a proper weapon that contains silver, rather than a “silver weapon”.

- You have guts informing me on what I’m supposed to do, young man. Anyway, what are you interested in?

Alessa took over from here.

- We have a small plan on how to improve the weapons of this young man here and his brother, but in case of my brother here, we wanted you to make a special new sword for him...

- A special sword? That’s interesting...

- The problem being, dear sir, that my brother here...

Keita was honestly too shocked at being introduced as her *brother* to bother interrupting the conversation.

- … my dear brother here is really attached to our family heirloom sword from the Zipangu side of our bloodline. Unless the new sword were to really be superior, it is nearly certain that he’d abandon it in favor of said heirloom, and since it’s just a regular sword of no special ability against the werebeasts, it might even mean forfeiting his life... I... I couldn’t live with that.

The lie wasn’t inconceivable. Alessa and Keita both had a similar hair color when she was in her
human form, Keita appeared older than his real age was while Alessa’s was hard to determine. It was certainly conceivable that they could be siblings.

- Well, young man, you shouldn’t worry your sister like that. Can’t you just make him promise he won’t do it?
- My poor brother always put attachments over honor. It’s certainly a bother, but it’s very sweet of him to do so when it concerns our family, but I’m worried he’d do the same thing again...
- I... I’m very sorry for worrying you, Onee-san.

Alessa did her best to conceal the smile that started to appear on her lips.

[“Onee-san? Seriously, Keita, I’m an “onee-san” now? That’s a pretty good compensation for all the stress your stupid aromanticism and sexlessness are causing me!”]

- Well, it’s good that he at least knows when to apologise. Since I cannot really keep a pretty kind lady like you stressed out, I’ll do my best, but the payment may still be quite steep. Let me tell you, a proper way to make a weapon that contains silver and may be used against the werebeasts would be to form the core out of other materials then carefully form the blade out of silver. I’ll do some melting straight away and we’ll try to do something in a day or so.

Alessa smiled.

- Thank you, good sir. I’m sure you’ll do a great job. Now, as for the rest... My brother and this young man here will explain as soon as you’re done with preparing the materials for the sword.

In a few moments, the blacksmith had some molten metals ready as he explained some stuff about making a sword of that kind and Alessa quietly asked her companions.

- Delay him for a moment. I need to do something. Keita, please give me your dagger.

Without much ado, Keita did hand his dagger to her and they discussed the “improvements” on their weapons. Specifically, a sapphire was to be added to Deryn’s sword and Conall’s partisan, and Deryn’s flanged mace was to be partially covered in silver.

Alessa approached the containers with molten metals and grabbed Keita’s dagger.

[“Well, this is somewhat too high-risk low-reward for my tastes, but there’s no better immediate method...”]

Moment later, she cut herself, and her blood flew. Droplets went straight into the liquid silver and iron, a strange, quiet hissing sound reverberating in the air that couldn’t be heard clearly by the trio standing some distance away.

The metals took a different color for a moment, then slowly started to get back to their old one. Alessa wondered what would come of that. Certainly, having a man fighting with a blade crafted with use of her own blood seemed appropriate and romantic, but, well, there was a very small number of people in her life she’d far more like it to wield that kind of blade than any of her current companions - but there were *some*.

She stepped away from the two containers and moved to cover her hand up with her cape as she faced the three men.
- Very well Miss, Miss’ brother, young sir. I should be done with the weapon adjustments tomorrow.

Upon that, they left.

- So... That just leaves one problem.

- Yes. If the town comes under attack during that one day, we’re short on weapons. - Keita answered to Alessa’s statement,

- Let’s rent a sword and a partisan from the city guard.

- What about the mace?

- We’re a bit low on funds. As long as there are no witnesses, I can temporarily cover for Deryn’s secondary weapon.

- Wait, *you* can cover? You mean you have the capability to serve as a weapon? What do you do, turn into a magic sword or mace or whatever one needs? That’s... pretty cool, actually. - Conall summed up what run through his mind.

- Are you an idiot? I can *make* him a weapon that should last for a few moments or so.

- That’s... too bad. I was already imagining our relationship as the hero and his faithful intelligent magical blade... Or polearm, as the case may be.

- To be honest, this one time I’d prefer if you imagined a somewhat more naughty relationship, though Glaw would surely be pissed by this. Come to think of it, she’s a slime, so maybe in the winter she could freeze herself as a polearm and do this for you instead.

- That would be weird.

- Truth be told, once we’ve gotten our weapons out of Peris’ hands and paid for our quarters, we can just get some pretty economic rations and we’re pretty much out of money... So we’d better get this done right and actually claim the prize this time, or we’re screwed as far as travelling goes - Keita added.

They did as Alessa suggested, renting some weapons, and went back to their quarters. Deryn returned from Glaw’s hiding place, claiming she’s okay, but certainly wasn’t too happy about being left with one rented sword rather than his own trusted blade. Keita was in the most luxurious position, since his weapon wasn’t being adjusted, but rather a new one was being made.

Of course, the laws of the cosmos often have people being hit at their weakest, and though the situation wasn’t exactly what the quartet would call their “weakest”, as long as they were in the city Glaw couldn’t help them, Alessa couldn’t really use her abilities, Deryn and Conall didn’t have the weapons they were used to and Deryn was limited to one of the two; thankfully, his slight hangover was over and done with.

However, the sound of people being apparently scared half to death or mauled straight to death was enough to bring them all straight out of their quarters and onto the streets.

This time, there was at least one flying creature out there, so the immediate conclusion was a werebat; two werewolves, and one... something.
Alessa, with her darkvision superior to that of a human could immediately tell from the build and the tusks that it was a wereboar, and guess that it was a female one.

The guards weren’t much of a challenge compared to these creatures and seemingly died one after the other. Alessa turned to Deryn immediately and spilt out the words:

- **Intense Ice and Earth Magic Weapon : Froststar!**

Suddenly, the earth beneath them cracked, sending upwards a large, half-hollow chunk of ground into Alessa’s hands. She grabbed it and it immediately shone with a pale blue light, and suddenly sharp edges of ice appeared at what now seemed to be the damage-oriented end of a proper morningstar.

- I know this isn’t your favorite, but it’ll have to do, Deryn. Make sure you’re quick about this; in hands of anyone other than the caster, magically created weapons have a tendency to be weaker and quickly dissipate.

He caught it as she threw it at him, and immediately jumped down, straight at the incoming werewolf.

Alessa wasted not a moment more, grabbing Keita’s waist, causing him to yelp in surprise, and relieving him of his kusarigama.

A well-aimed throw of the sharp part caused blood to flow through the air and the approaching bat-morph to suddenly release a screech.

- What are you, sleeping, Keita-kun? This is my human form, surely your own reflexes can do better than mine in this situation!

- Well, Alessa-san, I’m not sure how much experience you’ve had with that kind of weapon, but I presume you’d rather be away from the town right now?

- Damn right I would!

- In that case, since we’ll be the only ones fighting at full capability... are you confident that...

- Yes, Keita-kun! If we are out of town, I could fight so damn well that one of you might fall in love with me just by watching, so stop concerning yourself about it and help me lead these beasties out!

- As I mentioned, since we’re fighting at full capability, which one of these four... because I’m seeing four of them right now... are the most dangerous ones?

- The werebat is a given, and since we’re the ones having any kind of long-distance attack capability I’d suggest one of us takes it down. I’d say that naturally the wereboar and the werewolf are about the same level, but the fact that a female wereboar is here in the first place may be the key. Since she’s armed, she’ll be tougher and hit harder than the werewolves, but she’s also slower. Safest bet is when we take care of these two, especially since Deryn and Conall demonstrated they have no troubles fighting a werewolf.

- It was four on one, though.

- This time, it’s four on four, but the guard will back us up properly at some point. Remember, survival comes before proper victory here, guys! We don’t have to kill them or even defeat them right here, we can do this on our own terms and full ability later!
Keita slashed at the werebat, attempting a flyby attack on Alessa.

- Thanks! Now, help me lead these two out of the city!

Keita wasted no time, getting the drop on the wereboar female by jumping down a wall and slashing at her back. Alessa was soon on the same wall he just left, swinging her companion’s kusarigama and threatening the werebat with it.

It was a pretty dangerous hazard. After all, her human form, with her magic cut off, was probably a little kid in proper weapon combat compared to Keita; on the other hand, pitting him against a massive opponent like the wereboar has proven to make him break his weapons in the past, and, in general, she’d feel safer if they were already out of town and she could just act like a proper Echidna with quite the sorceress’ abilities would.

The werebat was way too fast for her to properly strike again with the kusarigama, even after being struck twice already, so she instead run across the wall and jumped down behind Keita. Deciding that it was the proper moment to use a little bit of non-flashy magic, she used one of her easiest spells.

- Faint Earth Spell : Stone Shot!

The spell did pretty much what it’s name suggested - a normal-sized stone would fly at the opponent with strength and speed varying depending on the caster, but never anything spectacular. To an onlooker, it might’ve looked like a random citizen tried to help the people fighting the werebeasts by throwing a stone from concealment.

Keita was having less trouble than she predicted with the wereboar, but these things were tough.

[“This guy overstrains himself as he is. Lack of sleep, drugs, always picking opponents that will harm him, never directly trying to get help from others... I should give him a weakened enemy to fight with for once, so he can properly recover after a battle.”]

- Keita-kun!

He crouched as her, well, technically his, Kusarigama hit the wereboar and immediately followed suit as she ran towards the gate.

- Should we try to lure them in so Glaw can help us?

- If she learns we’re fighting, she’ll go straight to Conall to help him, right into the city. She’s simple-minded like that. I’d rather avoid having Glaw follow us around unless we’re out of town.

- Do you think we can take them two on two?

- Keita-kun, I’m an Echidna, you’re the man who passed through my dungeon, the two of us can do absolutely anything!

[“Technically, we should be making babies right now, according to tradition, but, well, with our current relationship and state of affairs... not gonna happen.”]
A few exchanged long-range strikes and quite the run later... They managed to lure the pair outside the city. Truth be told, they didn’t seem particularly unwilling to be separated from their comrades - apparently tactics weren’t of much use to the kin of the King of Fangs.

- Alessa-san, you may want to note that this werebat is a lot faster than us...

- Just get halfway up this hill, lure him in, and it’ll be perfect...

- Alessa-san, it is approaching.

- Look, Keita-kun, you have to learn to be delicate with women! Many of us don’t... perform... well... under...

A sudden smack as the shadow was just about to ram into them. In a small flash of light, Alessa’s legs started to change into the tail that send the werebat flying into the closest tree.

- … Pressure. Oh well. Normal Earth Spell : Shredding Dust!

Apparently normal yet somehow shiny sand-like dust flew at the werebat rammed into said three. It suddenly scowled in pain as many small cuts covered its body.

Alessa was already a half-serpent and her skin started to change tone.

- Normal Earth and Negative Water Spell : Salty Torture!

- Freaking’ bitch!

The werebat’s quite impassioned name-calling was interrupted by another strong yell of pain as a crystalline substance suddenly materialized over the cuts delivered by the previous spells, as well as Keita’s sword and the kusarigama in the hands of Alessa earlier.

The Echidna handed the weapon from his homeland to Keita and nodded to him with a smile.

- Ke-i-ta-kun, I believe you’ll find it easy to take things from here. It’s a shame I won’t be able to play with this fun bat here anymore, but I think I have a catfight with a slightly overweight girl coming my way.

- Are you sure you can ha...

- Keita...

- But the energy conservation and...

- As I’ve mentioned, I’ve done nothing yet that you need to worry about. As long as I’m in my natural form weaving magic like this isn’t so hard on me. Please take care of yourself and be sure not to lose. I think I hear my opponent approaching.

Slithering down the hill, Alessa met with the wereboar at the bottom of it.

- Well, hello there. It is a pity indeed, it would appear the boys at the town won’t be able to enjoy this
- You... You were a monster? Doesn’t matter, gonna tear ya to pieces, anyway!

- Oh my, oh my, so brutal. And here I was hoping the fact that the two of you could actually *talk* may change anything about your attitude. Oh well. The name’s Alessa. Now, since it’s been a while since I’ve been able to enjoy this much exercise, please be gentle with me and let us enjoy this.

The wereboar apparently was going to enjoy tearing the echidna to pieces, since her axe was already travelling towards Alessa’s body.

It was a show of reflex and flexibility, the way the lamia-kindred dodged the weapon and pointed her finger at the wereboar from the new position, bent backward and head turned halfway upwards, but her almost golden eyes looking straight down at her opponent.

- Normal Earth Spell : Rock Barrage!

If “Stone Shot” was equivalent of a single person throwing a rock, “Rock Barrage” was the equivalent of a group of people doing just that.

Even a wereboar would feel that, but this one wasn’t going down easily, and swung her axe *again*...

Just to find a strange, rocklike growth grabbing her arm mid-swing.

- Normal Earth Spell : Stone Roots.

Alessa wasted no time getting physical, punching her opponent in the gut, then pirouetting and swinging her tail right at her opponents throat. The wereboar managed to back up enough so the swing instead landed at her chest, but that one will probably leave a painful welt.

The werebeast female managed to crack the imperfect “stone roots” and shoulder-charge Alessa, her attack finally connecting.

- My, my, aren’t you the tough cookie. Maybe it was a better idea to have someone here after all, or get Keita to deal with you.

- I don’t know where a slut like you learned how to fight, but even with you helping the humans, it changes nothing!

Another charge.

- Normal Earth Spell : Shredding Dust!

Numerous cuts appeared on the wereboar, but her charge did not cease. Alessa wanted to form a weapon for herself, but she realized that’d mean the one she handed to Deryn would definitely disappear immediately.

So, she struck at her opponents legs with her tail and then met her reckless dash head-on, surprising the heavier female by overpowering her out of the blue, and sending her onto the ground.

Alessa, taking advantage of the surprising show of strength, leaned over her opponent and... bit her.
The wereboar was pretty pissed, grabbing her and throwing her away at a tree.

- Well, pretty girl, that’s it for me. There’s no need to drag this on any longer. Dear me, you’re certainly violent. This was a show, not an assassination attempt. - Alessa explained, smirking confidently.

The wereboar simply ran at her again, ready to hack at Alessa with the axe and finish the fight early.

- Normal Earth Spell : Stone Roots! And... Normal Earth Spell : Rock Barrage!

The roots temporarily holding the wereboard at one place, the stones bombarding her, Alessa once again showed that if she tried, she could get the advantage. That’s what this was - a show of power, nothing else.

- If I really wanted to pump you full of poison, I would, woman. You’re a tough one, just as I expected, and if all your friends are this strong, they’ll certainly be able to help me accomplish my goals.

- What do you mean, snake-slut?

- You have a real attitude problem, you know that? What I’m saying is this : You’ve said I’m “helping” humans, but why would I be doing that? Humans are our enemies, they want us gone. We use them as a source of food, energy, or as slaves. They’re of no great value to us, but they’re only of any value when they’re alive. I don’t know what you people are attempting to do here, but it’s clear some kind of deal could be cut.

- A... deal?

- Me and my boytoys are already in the city. Give me... five days. I’ll have all the guards at entrances and towers killed, their main forces as cut off from rest of the town as effectively as possible and the town ready to be struck at and plundered. In return, I merely want, say, one third of the males of this city chained and packed nicely on some sort of transport measure so I can enjoy them in peace. You can do whatever you want with the remaining women, children, and the survivors I won’t be taking. I suppose these conditions are acceptable?

Suddenly, the two women heard a loud scream from above. One that sounded like a dying scream more than anything else.

- Ohhh, I’m sorry, but that decision will have to be quick... This one of my toys is especially over-enthusiastic about beating things that tried to hurt his Mistress, but it’s not like the other two are harmless. You do want your companions to live as well, right? I’ll be sure to punish him properly, though I worry he may end up enjoying it...

- … Very well, snake-slut. We’ll be back in five days, although I can’t promise my elders will look completely kindly at your demands... Though, since you’ll help us, I can at the very least guarantee that you’ll live.

- Excellent. Go get your wolfy friends and get out of here, then. - Alessa answered with an evil grin.

[“Just as planned. Well, Keita was supposed to be taking a bit longer to kill that bat-like thing. I did soften it up, but seriously, Keita, what the hell, you didn’t even have a silver weapon at your disposal.”]
Keita’s fight didn’t exactly go as simply as it should. The werebat climbed up a three immediately upon Alessa leaving, but his kusarigama was capable of reaching it. It jumped over it and fell down at him, though, slashing his back and being cut by his sword in return. Suddenly, the beast screamed right at him, and it was a shout different than before - he barely heard it, yet felt it all over his body, causing vibrations.

A sonic weapon. He should have known.

Not paying much attention to the pain in his muscles, Keita jumped right at the creature. It attempted to take flight and was successful, doing a flyby attack and hurting him again.

It was a weird exchange of sword cuts, kusarigama attacks, flyby attacks, and quite a bit of blood.

Keita was honestly tired of it all. He didn’t get proper sleep, he got his weapon stolen by a woman in a rather odd, inappropriate manner, after being force to call said woman “Onee-san” the very same day. And now, he was fighting an annoying, flying creature that he should supposedly defeat much easier since said woman pretty much softened it up for him.

Sleeping was never one of his priorities, but he surely could use some sleep now.

Another sonic attack, right as the creature attempted to fly at him and follow it up with a physical strike, Keita’s irritation about the day, tiredness, and the rather harmful results of the constant shouts and attempted scratches, bites, and punches reached their apex.

In the darkness of the night, the spread bat wings begun to look like spread legs of a spider, and the fine fur covering the bat-like humanoid reminded him of a different creature altogether.

Keita was in a world of his own for a moment as his body seemed to disregard gravity, almost soaring rather than just leaping towards the flying werebat. Keita’s sword nearly cleaved the werebat’s form in two as he soon landed behind the enemy, regaining his vision, as well as full consciousness and control.

One down, three to go.

Chapter End Notes

This was originally addition to the chapter before it, but due to the formatting of the place I was originally posting the story at, it wouldn't fit into the post back there. Later, I decided to just split the chapter into before and after they meet the blacksmith.

As a result, this chapter wasn't beta-ed by the person who supported me at the time. Sorry for any inferiorities in language and/or formatting. This person doesn't have an account here from what I know, and I don't want to give away their data without permission, but if they see this (we haven't been in touch for a while), they have my thanks.
Once their weapons are ready, eventually the group has to move out and find a way to catch up to, and then, eliminate the werebeasts. This time, they'll be getting paid for at least some of their heroics, too. Do they have what it takes to slowly meld themselves into a team, or a group of friends who understand one another?

Within the town, Conall was actually fighting with Alessa’s advice in consideration. It’s not like his partisan was much superior to the rented one, but a fighter does get used to his favourite weapon. However, he wasn’t much weakened by the change of arms and could fight against the werewolf almost perfectly the way he wanted; he tried to keep enough distance between them and to fight defensively.

As long as the battle wasn’t one in too close quarters, Conall would be able to dodge the werewolf’s rushing attacks safely; up close and personal, not only would his own attacks might be less effective, the werewolf would probably overwhelm him with greater speed and strength.

Unlike Keita and Deryn, Conall did not have incredible speed, reflex or agility to level the field in a fight against such a physically superior opponent, so he had to compensate with more tactical fighting style and greater focus on counters. He was used to this, though; when fighting someone together with Deryn, they exchanged roles during the fight to catch their opponent off-guard, but he played the ‘bait’ and the ‘defender’ more than his brother did.

Deryn, on the other hand, was in no position to play it long… quite the opposite. Alessa had warned him explicitly that his magically created weapon would only last so long, so he was pretty much diking it out with ‘his’ werewolf, taking some damage while dishing out everything he had.

Alessa’s magic weapon was good enough; heavier than his usual mace, but also with significant destructive potential, the frost radiating from the head of the ‘morning-star’ apparently numbed the muscles of his opponent and increased the damage to his body further.

The earth also served well in defence against an opponent who used their own body parts to attack, being able to block the creature’s hands and claws. Any penetration of said weapon by its fangs or claws ended up harming the creature with the frost energy contained within, temporarily weakening the werewolf and causing it to take its own beating for a while.

Deryn was the somewhat dominant player in the fight until the ‘froststar’ started to definitely lose strength and cohesion. It was about as quickly as he figured from Alessa’s warning, but the werewolf was tougher than he had hoped.

Suddenly having your magical weapon torn to pieces as you’re smashed against a wooden house *isn’t* the way one wants to end their day, definitely.

But, Deryn certainly wasn’t a pushover defensively nor was his endurance that much lacking compared to his companions. He was used to his offensive fighting style and it was some time since he was forced to fight just with his sword, especially against a non-human opponent, but he believed the advantage he gained earlier would turn out to be enough.
After a short exchange of blows, he realized his belief might’ve been wrong.

The werewolf literally rammed itself into him, cutting out any attempts at fighting methodically and keeping his distance, and tried to shred him into pieces before grabbing him and throwing him against a stone wall.

Being the shortest and lightest out of the group did not help.

Another rapid strike he managed to counter with his sword, but the werewolves’ bones were hard and strong, managing to withstand the slash. He in turn was raked by the beast’s claws and bleeding more and more profusely.

Conall was in no hurry to finish his fight and was a fair distance away, so changing this into a two-on-one or a tag team battle seemed out of the question.

He parried the claws with his sword, causing the beast to withdraw and cringe, and immediately followed with a flurry of slashes, causing the creature to bleed from multiple wounds just as he did. The werebeast jumped away, landing on all fours in an animal-like manner before jumping right back at him, sinking its claws in his leg for a moment before his sword would pierce through the back of its neck ensuring its death. It did manage to react to Deryn’s potentially fatal strike and move away, only getting its neck and shoulder lightly cut.

Immediately straightening, the creature smacked Deryn once again, leaving a painful welt. A counter attempt was met with a rare sight of a Werewolf kicking his opponent, the beast’s powerful leg muscles sending him onto the ground and threatening to leave him there for a few moments, which might’ve ended up being his undoing, if not for a strange animalistic voice at the gate...

The strange, pig-like giant beast armed with an axe that was lead out of the town by Keita and Alessa before was at the city’s gate, apparently ‘shouting’ something in an inhuman language to its two ‘companions’.

Deryn saw red when he realized it being here alive might’ve meant either Keita, Alessa, or both being captured or killed. He wasn’t particularly emotionally tied to either of them yet, but he certainly did not like the thought of his companions being killed by something they were supposed to be slaughtering themselves.

The fact that the werewolf turned to the pig-monster, leaving itself wide open, combined with Deryn’s self-trained instinct and his frustration at the situation spelled its doom.

He simply run his blade through the werewolf at heart level, causing it to howl, then turned and screwed it inside the beast, messing up one of its most important organs, causing it to cough up a large glob of blood before falling onto the ground.

Irony being, the other werewolf was already withdrawing, and the face the giant pig made at the sight of the werewolf being killed by a 5 foot 8 inches and something tall guy from behind with a regular sword, while definitely suggesting intelligence, was something Deryn was almost capable of laughing at.

Of course, turned out Alessa and Keita survived. Alessa claimed that the wereboar ‘retreated’, while Keita said he ‘didn’t even notice’ killing the werebat with a strange expression.
That was not the end of it. Apparently the townsfolk were so happy at another attack being pushed away by people sharing the same descriptions as the ones that won against one of the two werewolves barely two days before had them become something of a ‘mysterious group of heroes’, and townsfolk favourites. The pressure from said townsfolk forced the nominal city guard, who somehow let the werebeasts in easily on both occasions, to take care of their food and sleep expenses, award them officially (supposedly it was going to be done on the noon of the next day, right after Keita was to get their weapons back from the blacksmith), and issue a small monetary compensation for their problems.

And that meant they weren’t nearly bankrupt anymore, since they’d save on the rest expenses and get a little bit of cash immediately.

In the morning, Alessa and Keita went back to the blacksmith to get their weapons, taking all of their funds along just in case. When the blacksmith saw them, he made a strange face, but invited the duo in.

- Apparently, the two of you had a little bit to do with driving away a group of these creatures yesterday evening. Didn’t even need your special weapons for that and stuff.

Alessa smiled. - What can I say... My brother and his companions can certainly rise up to the task, when the situation calls for it.

- Oh... So you claim to have no hand in this event at all, m’lady? You’ve certainly been recognized for travelling with them alone.

- I’m just a fragile little woman that tries to keep their morale up, make them stick together and looks after her brother like a worrywart. But, we’re not here to discuss last night’s lucky victory, are we?

- Hmm, certainly. Please wait for a moment.

The blacksmith went back and carried out a sword with a sapphire embedded in the pommel - clearly Deryn’s - a newly-silvered flanged mace, and a partisan with a sapphire at the spot where the pole and the blade met on each side. That made it three weapons out of four.

- Excuse me, Mr. Peris, but... have you managed to finish the silver-enhanced sword we asked you to do?

- Indeed, but... - Peris hesitated for a moment. - Something must have been messed up with the metals I’ve used, or with the creation process itself. I’m not satisfied with it, so I’ll simply make you another one.

Keita simply looked at him with his head leaned towards his shoulder, and was about to acknowledge the situation, but Alessa interrupted. - I’m... sorry, Mister Peris, but why are you ‘not satisfied’ with it? What went wrong?

- It’s a bit difficult to explain, miss. It has... unexpected, weirdly-coloured markings and it is heavier than expected. Since you insisted on a superior weapon for your brother, I...

Oddly Alessa blushed at that last line and suddenly burst out, as if offended and shocked. - He...heavier? Heavier? Why would it be heavier? I’m certain, mister, that you just imagined it and the blade is just fine! The colour design is probably very pretty as well, so please bring the blade
here so my brother can decide on his own whether it is well-made or not!

Peris sighed and nodded, then went back to his workplace to look for the sword.

- He... heavier. So rude and insensitive. - Alessa muttered.

- You seem... weird. Almost offended for some reason, Alessa-san.

- Of... offended? It’s because this blacksmith said something so ridiculous.

- Blacksmiths make mistakes. Certainly he could have used some faulty metals or made the blade heavier than he wanted it to be, couldn’t he?

- No! No no no! The weapon is certainly great! What do you think I’ve been doing when I asked you to lure him away for a moment? I’ve given my... personal input into this weapon, so I’m certain it turned out all right and well.

Keita cocked an eye at her. - Personal input?

- Yes! Of course I wanted to make sure your weapon turns out better than simply some silver-covered piece of metal with no other properties than cutting werebeasts slightly better or something!

- Should I be touched, or grateful? I apologize, I had no idea you went out of your way to try and make my weapon better. I still find it odd that you found it offensive that the weapon seems hea...

Peris walked out of his smithy, carrying a longsword. The cutting edges certainly seemed more ‘silvery’ than a regular blade. It seemed sharp and didn’t really look ‘heavy’.

The very centre of the blade, however, had a line of dark red running through the entire blade, wide at the bottom, sharp and narrow at the tip. It was visible on both sides of the blade. One side, however, also carried two curvy, rather thin and irregular lines of green between the edge of the blade and the thicker line of red in the middle.

Keita took the blade from Peris’ hands, looking over the solid hilt as he did, and swung it a few times, delicately, then with some more energy, then at full strength. He brought it up to an en-guarde pose, before he held it straight out and level, allowing his eyes to run along the edge. Peris watched with a raised eyebrow, impressed despite himself at the clear skill and training this young man displayed. Alessa was also impressed, but her thoughts were more… carnal.

- It is certainly a bit heavier than it looks... - Keita confirmed Peris’ words.

- Muuu... - Alessa seemed depressed and disillusioned by these words.

- But, I disagree with your assessment. Weight or no weight, this is a good sword. I can still swing it effortlessly, and you probably haven’t noticed, but the blade’s velocity increases unnaturally fast with each swing, almost like if it was really light. This combined with the sword’s sharpness and weight gives it strong cutting power, much more than one would expect. This is certainly a very good weapon.

Peris looked taken aback, before he sighed. - Well, I hope you know what you’re talking about, kid. I was dissatisfied with it and you wouldn’t get it if the miss here did not complain, not to mention I did put my mark on the handle of that thing, so I guess I’ll give you a discount. If one of the town’s ‘mysterious heroes’ is wielding it, maybe the thing will gain some reputation of its own after a while.
Get named, stuff like that. And in a few decades, people may even feel honoured they can bear Master Peris ‘Weirdly coloured heavy longsword’, hahah!

- I’ll see what I can do about it gaining reputation. - Keita confirmed.

- Yup, he’ll certainly will. I’ll make sure of that.

Keita half-smiled at Alessa’s mood suddenly brightening from the praise he gave to the blade, and then started discussing the price itself with Peris.

A couple of hours later, a smiling Conall took the monetary reward (a large bar of silver from the guard and a jar of coins from the townsfolk) from the hands of the Commander of the Guard and shook said Commander’s hand before receiving a small silver and bronze badge in recognition of his deeds.

He was certainly the only member of the group so pleased at this being a public ceremony. Apparently the elder Amberwing brother was the type that liked being recognized and awarded for his deeds.

This couldn’t have been said about any of his companions.

Alessa was completely freaked out by the entire thing, worrying that people will find her inhuman, suspicious, or that the guardsmen will suddenly declare her a witch and put her in jail. She definitely did not expect humans to recognize and reward such a little thing; in fact, she expected they were gonna go out, slaughter a bunch of werebeasts, return, get the reward and no one except the reward-giver will *ever* known it was them. It’s like it was supposed to be handled; otherwise, ‘heroes’ would certainly get too much interest and outside involvement into their private lives which, in her mind, was something no one would want.

To add to the problem, she did not have any sleep last night due to the circumstances of her plan regarding the werebeasts. This only made her even more jumpy.

Keita was completely neutral on the thing. As far as he was concerned, recognition or lack of it meant little; they were getting money and unless they killed *all* the werewolves and this was made public, this small ceremony would be forgotten in a month or two.

Deryn did not mind the attention - or rather, he wouldn’t if he hadn’t heard what he did in the tavern a few days before. To add to his nervousness, Sela herself was amongst the crowd, alternating between smiling, grinning at him and winking at him. He blushed slightly and allowed himself to - subtly, he hoped - wave at her.

Conall, however, enjoyed it and still seemed to be in a bright mood as they went back to get Glaw before moving out in order to find and kill or capture the werebeasts’ leaders, or simply slaughter them.

- I feel nervous. Is it really a good idea to leave the town unguarded? I mean, sure, there’s the city guard but so far they haven’t been doing such a good job, it’d seem. - Conall voiced his doubts as the town disappeared into the woods behind them.

- There’s no need to be so nervous. Assuming everything went according to my plan, the town won’t be attacked for a few days.
- Your plan? - Glaw asked. - Your ‘plans’ are only any good when keeping people prisoner is concerned!

- I apologize. I should’ve left planning to the easily captured goo girl so obsessed with feeding on a certain brown-haired male so much that she started stalking him.

- I’m a red slime! I know I should sympathize with you for not being able to find a good guy if your life depended on it, but Conall is mine and you should stop being jealous.

Alessa completely ignored Glaw, which seemed to infuriate the slimegirl. - I tried to ensure the werebeasts won’t attack town while also getting a way of tracking them down. This is why my opponent managed to ‘retreat’ during our last clash with these creatures.

- A tracking method? - Keita asked, glancing at her curiously.

- I’ll explain it in a while, but since we’re out of time and I can stay in my snake form, would you guy’s mind it if I changed into my battle armour?

Deryn and Keita lifted an eyebrow. Conall’s jaw almost dropped and he suddenly shouted.

- You have a ‘battle armour’?

- Sure I do. You think I’d leave my place and not get any at the town if I knew I would be fighting dangerous creatures? - Alessa asked mockingly.

- T.. then why do you keep walking around in just that cloak with nothing but that all-revealing parody of bra underneath? - Conall spluttered.

Alessa stilled, then smiled playfully. - It’s obvious, my dear Conall. Are you sure you don’t know? Are you sure I should tell you the reason?

- What... what are you going on about! Of course you should explain, since it doesn’t make sense! - Red was starting to creep into Conall’s face.

- Very well... I was just being kind and allowing you to continue devouring me with your gaze...

- W...what? - Conall’s face was now completely red, though it was obvious that it was not from anger.

- I can see it in your eyes when you look at me... these impure, improper thoughts, this feeling of animal-like craving... ‘Such beautiful sleek and solid shapes, not at all like jello... Such an exotic but natural-seeming skin tone, and real, beautiful and long hair... And proper eyes that oh pierce me so... So superior to that weird blob that keeps following me around, jiggling oddly and imitating something it clearly-is-not! If only I could have someone like *that* being my stalker’ is what I always figured you were thinking when you looked at me that way...

Glaw begun to shake furiously. It was a sight to see, given her all jelly-like curves. - Is this true, Conall? Did you somehow find me lacking compared to this stupid snake-woman! Idiot! Halfwit! Pervert! - Her jelly-like hand suddenly sprawled all over his head, sending pieces of wet slime about.

- Ah, ouw, no! It’s not like this, Alessa, Glaw! Any accidental glances at either of you were caused by instinct, I mean, I see something moving in the corner of my eye and...
- And that something just happens to be breasts or butts? - Alessa smirked, eyes dancing with mischief.

- Yes, I mean, no! I certainly don’t look at you like that, my eyes just follow movement in case it was an enemy! I don’t have any improper thoughts!

Glaw begun to shake even more. - You mean, even when I try to put on an attractive show for you, you only glance at me *accidentally*? Idiot! Sick person! Homosexual!

Alessa smiled at Glaw’s unrestrained fury, before deciding to ease up on the poor young man. - Relax, both of you. I was just yanking your chains. The real reason, Conall, is because I was simply going for whatever felt comfortable; I never really owned many clothes. And, in the case of my battle armour, it’s meant to fit my natural form, not my human form, so I only wear it when I’m supposed to battle *and* I can stay in my Echidna form for extended periods of time. Now, let’s see...

She started to search through their belongings until she found what she was looking for; her personal chest, one quite adorned, pretty and relatively sizeable, but not big.

Then, she opened it, and started searching for something inside.

She pulled out... another chest. This one was clearly placed in the other one with its length being set *vertically*, which would already be weird in terms of space compared to the other chest even without the fact of it being *precisely the same size as the chest she pulled it out from*.

- Alessa-san... how is that possible? How did that chest... and the one you’re pulling out right now... fit into the chest you always carry around?

- Ah, oh... Space and matter distortion magic item.

- You make it sound natural. - Dreyn commented warily, his eyes jumping between the chests.

- Not at all! Even minor things like this chest of mine are pretty rare! I received it from... an adventurer friend of mine, a long time ago. It possesses a relatively minor enchantment that increases the space in which it can contain items while decreasing their weight. Word is there are artefact-level bookcases that can hold an entire large library in them and wardrobes the size of a ball room on the inside, but obviously there’s only two or three of these items in the entire world. This thing has just a little more room left after stuffing those two chests in there. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I wouldn’t mind a little privacy. Of course, if you insist, I could change my clothes with you all still here...

Keita and Conall were gone immediately. Deryn stayed behind for a moment. - Make sure to scream if anything bad tries to approach you, or something.

- Thanks for worrying about me. Now, are you staying behind for a show or something?

- Nope. Moving right to the guy-part of the forest straight away.

- See you in the guy part later!

Deryn chuckled lightly as Alessa started undoing her upper clothing. Glaw cast her a hateful glance
before also leaving; though, truth being told, she knew Glaw had nothing to be jealous about in terms of body and, as far as breasts were concerned, once she started feeding regularly on someone it’d be Alessa who would get left behind.

A short time later, she approached the guys and the slimegirl in her new attire.

Conall’s jaw half-dropped again.

- HOW is that any better?

- Well, it certainly is armour, though its functionality is less than one might’ve expected. Too little... upper body cover. - Dreyn commented.

- It’s covered just fine! - Alessa retorted.

- Not in the chest part, it isn’t! - Conall yelped.

Deryn just cut the argument short. - Say what you want, I benefited greatly from this. I guess *now* I can tell what do people exactly like about leather-clad women.

Alessa smirked. - Oh? Have I earned my place in your dreams tonight, Mr Amberwing? - She said, stretching her body as if flaunting it.

Deryn decided to continue the joke in good nature. - Well, between you, a certain town-girl I met not long ago, my brother-obsessed slimegirl here and a giant pig-like furry amazon, as well as a bunch of goblins and an insect chick it’s not like you have no chance of winning... you have the curves just fine, but,

snake-woman, as a snake-woman, you clearly lack something very important: Legs!

- L... legs? - Alessa froze, her expression one of stunned shock. - What’s... wrong with my tail?

- Legs are very important! They give definition to a feminine shape, join in a most delicious way with a woman’s hips and her backside when they’re long enough, and are the object of many a man’s fantasies! “I want those legs wrapped around me” and “I want to lay my head in that girl’s lap!” are amongst the most frequent things an adult male thinks of when looking at an attractive woman’s legs! - Dreyn expounded.

Alessa seemed mildly offended. - One can lay their head on my tail or get wrapped by it just fine!

Glaw seemed frantic about something else. - Conall, do you share his tastes? Do you like legs? I can make legs just fine! Unlike this snake woman, I can have any kind of legs you’d like!

Keita shook his head. - You should stop worrying about trivialities like this. Anyway, Alessa-san, this armour looks okay, but have you ever used it in a battle, actually?

- Yup, works like a charm. - She replied smugly.

- Excellent. - Keita nodded, satisfied.

Alessa’s armour, which prompted such responses, seemed a bit more of a mix between a corset and actual armour. It was made of black, studded leather interwoven with something that appeared like
black chitin. It covered her nipples, but left a large hole in the centre that gave her breasts some freedom to slightly jiggle when she suddenly moved, with the cleavage between them displayed clearly and their upper part also visible; although, from her sides, two blade-shaped extensions rose to cover at least a part of her chest above her breasts, almost up to her neck. It lacked a proper cover of her shoulders - instead, one shoulder was adorned with what seemed like a piece of grey marble while the other one had a few black feathers on it.

It was a bit *too* obvious that the armour was meant to look good on her, while keeping as much of its functionality as it could in order to do so.

- *Come to think of it, Alessa, what’s that thing on your shoulder?* - Deryn asked.

- *I assume you don’t mean the feathers... Once, I had to calm down my gargoyle servant by force, and accidentally tore of a part of its wing. This is it.* - She flicked the marble-looking object with one finger. - *It looks like stone by day but becomes a lot more fleshy at night. Cool, isn’t it?*

- *Hah. I just always figured that when you’d wear armour, you wouldn’t go for cool gadgets and looks and just have it as protective and no-nonsense as possible.*

- *All women that embrace their femininity like to look good in their clothes, be they work clothes, house clothes, ball gowns or armour.*

The group travelled according to Alessa’s apparent sense of where the werebeasts gathered, but she warned them it’d be quite a walk and they’ll probably take a day or two to get there.

With sunset approaching, the group found a cave... But it was already being inspected by a group of odd-looking humans.

Namely, said humans were half-naked and unarmed... while in the wilds.

It didn’t take any of them long to figure what that meant.

- *They are werebeasts.* - Keita stated plainly, his eyes already hard.

- *In human form.* - Dreyn pointed out the obvious.

- *Yes. Human-transformed werebeasts cannot take their non-human form in the light of the day, unless they’re in possession of shape-change-aiding magical items or through direct usage of magic. Those that control themselves and have adapted to their transformation can morph just fine at dusk or in caves or closed spaces where daylight doesn’t reach; others can only assume the beast form during the night or a solar eclipse.* - Alessa filled in some details to the clearly slightly confused Dreyn and Conall. - *Also, many werebeasts’ strength is dependent on the lunar cycle, to the point that some are incapable of transforming during the new moon, while being incapable of de-transforming during the full moon. Of course, this applies to a lesser extent or not at all to werebeasts that were born like this or ascended from animals.*

- *Should we just... take them down with a surprise attack?* - Conall asked, fingering his Partisan.

Deryn voiced a better idea. - *Let’s incapacitate them. That way, when night strikes, we’ll be sure which ones are werebeasts already and we can simply decapitate them. We still have Keita’s old sword, right?*
Yes - Alessa responded. - I figured it’d be good idea to keep a spare for you or Keita-kun.

Well, then, if we have more proof in terms of werebeasts slaughtered, we have a higher chance of them giving us the whole reward. If they’re decapitated after they transform, they remain like that, right?

That is also correct.

Well, I’d say we should try and get the proof, then.

Keita nodded. - This is a good plan. We won’t be killing regular humans and we’ll be able to gather proof of the quest being completed.

Or, we’ll just come across as animal-slaying sociopaths. Who knows. - Dreyn commented wryly.

Will you aid us, Alessa-san?

Aid you? I’ll be starting the party!

Defeating the human-form werebeasts turned out to be a piece of cake, with Alessa’s Rock Barrage knocking a few of them out immediately, a quick follow-up by the rest of the group sending the remaining ones on the ground and only one of them managing to withdraw into the darkness of the cave before animalistic noises started to resound from within.

Alessa was the first to move inside, the werewolf jumping at her and swinging its fangs from the side. The echidna was quick enough to withdraw a bit and grab its arms, grinning as she whispered.

Normal Venom Spell: Acid Splash.

She then spat out a small amount of fluid with a green light inside; said light suddenly pulsed as the amount of fluid rapidly increased, splashing over the creature’s chest and eating away at its flesh, causing it to howl in pain.

Glaw was already behind the beast, her slimy appendages grabbing it and sending it deeper into the cave, against a wall just as Alessa let go of it.

Deryn and Keita moved from both sides of the Echidna, running straight at the werebeast, both running their blades through the creature as Deryn smashed its head with his mace.

Are you OK, snake-woman?

Are you all right, Alessa-san?

The duo of swordsmen spoke simultaneously. The echidna couldn’t help but smile. - Which one would get me more of your sympathy? “Sure, I ain’t no pushover; a girl’s gotta be strong enough to punch a werewolf or two and take some fun in it”... or maybe “Oh, I was so scared of this beast in the darkness, please embrace me, I’m shaking!”

She’s fine.

Yup, seems so.

All of the captured humans turned out to be werebeasts.
The group spend a good part of their evening after dusk setting up the camp after they had cleared the bunch of bodies, picking up bodyparts to put into what Deryn and Alessa came to call ‘the proof bag’. Then, they sat in the cave, looking at Alessa.

- It’s just a bit over a day of travel from here. I’d actually suggest we let Glaw keep watch all night and all take a good rest, and then move so we can attack at dawn.

- Why then, particularly? - Dreyn asked.

- They’ll probably gather before dawn breaks to be safe during the day. We’ll have the advantage of some of them being unable to keep their werebeast form up in daylight as well.

- But, for a short while, we’ll have to contend with a bunch of werebeasts. Attacking during the day would probably have them all spread out and escaping or trying to fool us. - Dreyn mused.

- Correct. Besides, sudden weakening of opponents is more of a tactical and moral advantage then attacking them at their supposedly ‘weakest’ moment. That’s of course assuming that there are beings they keep at their main base that can’t maintain monster form during the day.

- *Werebeast* form, Conall. Werebeast. Please don’t put them in one bag with us monsters. - Alessa cut in, a slightly hurt look on her face.

- Come to think of it, Alessa-san, how are you able to pinpoint their location so precisely?

- Magic. - Alessa took in at the deadpanned looks she was getting from her answer to Keita’s question. - No, I’m serious. During our fight with the werebeasts, I implanted my opponent with a variant of a pretty unique spell of mine. Since the spell is still active, I can track that particular werebeast with no problems. There is a single downside, though. I have no idea how the spell will react when I go to sleep, and the spell itself is not meant for subterfuge; at some point, it’s bound to become hurtful to the person spied upon, so I can’t use it on anybody who’s not a clear enemy.

- Well, that means we better move quickly if the spell reacts unpredictably to Alessa-san sleeping...

- Yup.

- I agree.

Alessa nodded. - We all need our rest however, since I didn’t sleep last night to allow the werebeast clear and safe return to her base. I’ve assumed she will want to report what I ‘told’ her during our fight as well as the ‘failure’ of their attack. Essentially, she’s a sleeper agent, but I can’t keep myself awake much longer.

- Thank you for pushing yourself so hard to ensure the mission’s success, Alessa-san. I had no idea...

- Well, we’ll have a bit of money after this. Maybe we should give her a small reward of her own - Conall suggested.

- She did say she loved cheese, so a good meal should be okay.

- Thanks, guys. - Alessa blushed a little, touched at the thought. [Though I know what I’d rather be ‘rewarded’ with...]
Glaw interved. - Hey, hey, I’m the one keeping guard and I haven’t done anything bad last time! Praise me and feed me, too!

- Thank you, Glaw-san.

- Brother, you’re in charge of feeding her, I assume. - Dreyn leaned back, linking his hands behind his head.

- Uhh, um... heh heh... That’ll be a problem.

The others shared a small laugh at Conall’s expense before getting into their respective sleeping bags and getting their well-deserved rest.

Conall had what might be called a proper sleep, without any dreams.

In Deryn’s case, it was a bit different. Out of his ‘options’ mentioned to Alessa, it did not turn out to be a nightmare about the wereboar female, one of the goblins nor Triel.

It was not a dream dominated by Glaw’s jiggling, half-liquid form nor Alessa’s leather-clad curves either.

Instead, he dreamt about the girl, Sela, and an *alternative* version of their meeting in her room.

Well, any male would consider that an option when invited.

Or maybe it was just Deryn’s joke talk about the legs earlier that got his mind fired up...

He did have a similar dream a few nights before, only then, one of the sources of his bounty walked in, introduced itself to Sela as such, and then proposed they’d punish him like the bad boy he is.

Suffice to say, the previous erotic dream turned into a wet one. Thankfully, this one didn’t, but it was quite arousing and vivid.

Alessa was cold again. They were in a freakin’ cave with no fire at night, so it wasn’t much of a surprise. But it was irritating and tiring nevertheless.

She didn’t *like* the cold. There was a time when she didn’t have to suffer it because she lived somewhere where it was fightable. There was even a time when she didn’t have to care about it, because someone else did it for her.

But now, her body was cold, and both her body and her mind missed those times.

[So cold.]

She shivered.

[Why is it so cold?]

Another shiver.

[There’s no fire tonight.]

[That’s why it’s so cold. Maybe if I move somewhere else, it’ll be warmer a bit.]
Her body squirmed in her nearly complete sleep.

Or maybe it was lunacy.

*There is something warm nearby, I can feel it.*

Her snake tail contracted and stretched, pushing her to the side, ruining her sleeping place by throwing stuff around. Then the end of her tail reached what it was stretching for.

*This… this is warm.*

Reaching out to the warmth, she touched it.

*It’s nice and warm, soft… and I can touch it. Great.*

Her body was honestly moving on its own, her dream showing the warmth source as an every-growing piece of large, green, lush plant covered with delicate, warm hair.

*That’s a pretty nice big heat source.*

She put her arms around that thing, but something irritated her, so she squirmed. In a few moments, her body was shifting and snaking around, until she managed to press as much of it as she could against the heat source.

*Pufff… Munya… This is so nice… Now I can sleep like this.*

She pressed strongly against her precious warmth source. Nobody was taking it away from her.

Keita was slowly waking up.

There was the sound of birds singing outside, and his companions squirming around, probably waking up or already on their feet.

Rare of him to wake up last.

In fact, he not only did not have nightmares that night; he enjoyed a good night’s sleep and felt really well-rested and refreshed in the morning… Or whatever time it was.

He wished he could lay and sleep more. Apparently, he didn’t have insomnia at all… he just needed good sleeping conditions.

For example, his body was wrapped up gently like this, in something warm.

His head and chest were leaning towards his soft pillow, and he was breathing gently. He could feel his heartbeat, slow and calm.

*People rarely hear their heartbeats* The sudden thought shot through him.

An odd sound in his ear.

*My heart is unhealthily slow*

Something *shifted* in his sleeping bag.

*What… was that?*
It was so warm, nice, cozy and comfortable. Why did he have to get up already? This was a rare opportunity…

[I did not bring any pillows]

This realization made Keita’s eyes shot open. It was definitely long past dawn.

In front of him, a strange blurry image of black and pale violet.

[Two pillows?]

He tried to move, but he barely could. Something was wrapped around a large part of his body and it reacted by gripping more strongly when he moved.

He raised his gaze.

A face framed by black and green hair welcomed him. Its eyes were closed, lips slim, darker, and with a tint of red to them, contrasting the violet-grey skin of her body.

[Alessa]

- A... Alessa-san?

Her arms were thrown around him, her chest raising and falling in calm breaths right in front of him, occasionally pressing against him.

It was her *tail* that was wrapped around him, pressing against his barely-clothed body (he took his armor off for the nights), almost protectively, gently, but reacting with strength to his every move.

[How was it comfortable to sleep like this?]

- A... Alessa-san? C... Could you...

She moved, pressing his chest against her breasts and burying his face in the skin of her neck for a moment. - Just a few more minutes, miss... It’s so warm... - She muttered sleepily.

- Alessa-san, wake up!

[They’re already awake. They’re awake and seeing this. But… that’s not the problem, is it?]

Her arms shifted on his back, as her tail also moved and rubbed against her body. Her breasts rose in another deep breath, crushing against his own chest.

- So nice... - Alessa said softly, dreamily.

One thought shot through Keita’s mind. [Ushi-oni]

And yet… Her hands were small, gentle, feminine… incomparable to the beastly hands of the spider-like female monstrosity he battled. They grabbed at his back, almost with desperation as he squirmed, unwilling to let him go.

[Something’s wrong. This is... different, somehow]
Her touch carried none of the sadism he had to endure in his first and only sexual experience with a woman. She grabbed at him like he was something precious and something she did not want to let go of, though apparently she was just using him as something to warm up with.

Again she muttered softly, Keita barely hearing her. - *Feels so nice...*

- Alessa, Keita, it’s time to wake up... Wait, they’re both? - Keita groaned softly at the sound of Conall’s voice. Clearly, he’d caught sight of them.

Her breasts weren’t lumps of flesh offending in their matronly domination. He could feel her heartbeat, which he previously had mistaken as his own, speed up slightly as she shifted in his sleeping bag.

- *Don’t wanna...*

[Why was it so comfortable to sleep like this?] He wondered at his own reaction. [What the hell is wrong with m...]

Her head bent so their foreheads were close. He could feel her breath, not only her chest expanding from it.

- Alessa, Keita... I have no idea what you’re doing in one sleeping bag, but get up now! - Conall now half shouted.

Alessa’s eyes darted open. Something inside him changed and reacted. He could feel her heartbeat suddenly speed up to far quicker than usual. *K... Keita-kun?*

Her eyes closed as a pained sigh escaped her lips. - *So, it’s... No, wait...*

Her eyes darted open again. He felt light headed as the two golden orbs’ gaze pierced him. - *Keita!?*

- A... Alessa-san... It would appear...

- *I certainly didn’t expect that you would...*

Conall spoke again, cutting them both off. - You’re awake, finally. It’d seem Alessa moved at night for some reason. I won’t inquire what you were doing that caused you to oversleep... - Keita got a close look at Alessa’s blush at Conall’s words.

Glaw added insult to injury. - *You can take the scary gray haired guy, Snake! Conall is mine! You showed your bad side to him, so he is mine now! No chances for you anymore!*

Alessa closed her eyes again, and breathed deeply. Keita felt more light-headed from the ever-intense touch of their chests. Conall moved to the entrance of the cave - maybe it was to wake Deryn up.

Her eyes opened. - *S.. Sorry. I must’ve sought warmth.*

- *Just please let me go now.* - Keita ground out, feeling his cheeks start to warm.

- *So cute, you’re blushing. It must’ve been uncomfortable, with your sword in between us and all.*

Keita frowned in confusion. - *My... sword?*
- Well, there is something po...

Suddenly, her face flushed slightly. - Wait, don’t tell me...

Her coils moved, part of them unbinding him as the tip of her tail moved between them and prodded. He felt an odd touch on his groin, one that soon insistently pushed against something he got so rarely since two years ago that he might’ve forgotten about it like today.

A morning erection.

She whispered. - You’ve got a stiffy! - There was a note of unbridled joy in her voice.

- Alessa-san, let me go. - In contrast, Keita’s was mortified.

- But, that’s so unexpectedly normal and healthy of you! Is it because it’s morning? Are you often so energetic in the mornings? Or is it... because of me?

- Alessa...

- A little bit of both, probably. I have to say, I’m flattered.

He struggled, but she kept her grab on him firm. Her tail pushed against his erection, and Keita cringing at the touch. Now, the tail’s touch on him was *far* more similar to a certain traumatic experience.

- Please, stop this. - A coldness was entering his voice.

- There’s no need to be embarrassed! This is natural... this is good, in fact.

- Wait, Alessa-san. I’m telling you to let me go. It’s not... like that. I don’t...

- It’s okay, Keita. As I’ve said, it’s good. - Alessa seemed to be lost in her own world, not hearing what he was saying. - Ummm, I’m not describing your erection, of course, it’s the fact that you have one. But, I’ve got to say... the size *is* good as well...

- Let me go right now! - Keita snapped.

- Ohhh, don’t be so stingy. Hey, Keita... since this is rare for both of us...

Her tail’s tip shifted. It was no longer pushing and prodding against his erection. It curled around the tip instead, almost... wrapping him up. Keita shivered at the sensation. The touch on his upper body, comforting and warm, was conflicting with the touch on his lower body, trauma-reminding and inhuman.

- I can take care of this for you, if you’d like. I’ll make you feel *good*. How do you want it? You have an erection, so you *probably* want it, right? Should I just lie like this and let my tail do the work? Or maybe you want the touch of a hand different that your own?

Keita hissed and struggled to get free. The rational part of his mind, waking up now, decided that this was *not* what he wanted. This woman was a monster. He would not submit to her like this. He did not need to ‘feel good’ or someone to ‘take care of this for him’. He wanted nothing to do with such things.

- Oh? Struggling so much? You want to push me down and... ohh, you beast!
With a sudden sharp flex of his entire body, he shifted and then put the strength of his neck and his back into a strong headbutt. Alessa squirmed in pain right after, grabbing her face as her hold on him lessened. He struggled out of it and immediately got out of the sleeping bag.

-I’ve told you not to do it, you idiotic serpent-monster woman! You’re the same as that freaking monstrosity! - He grunted as he grabbed his things and moved away. Alessa rose from the bedding to try and stop him, but he was already out of the cave. Then the full flow of events and words ran through her head… along with the enormity of what she’d done. Aghast, she sank back into the bedding.

[His trauma. I was too... direct]

Deryn was apparently looking at the end of said scene, blushing slightly, but also being nervous.

[And I touched him with my *tail* too… the one part of me that’s *not* normal to him at all. Fuck. Fuck! Alessa you dumb idiot! How will you ever help him recover like this?]

She looked at Deryn again. He was obviously pitching a tent with a morning erection as well. A pretty big one, too. Seeing her gaze, he blushed. - It’s... I’ve dreamt of something that... and it wasn’t you... just don’t embarass me anymore, okay?

Alessa smiled sadly at him. Well, at least one guy perceived that reaction as something healthy if embarrassing.

- I’d actually extent my offer to you, but Keita seems to set eighteen years old as the limit and he’s already angry with me, so I’d rather not piss him off even more.

- You’ll apologize or this is where we say goodbye? Sorry that he’s not into you, but you need to be on good terms with him, right?

- You’re understating the problem. Keita-kun’s not into *anything*, but this is something he should tell you about when you’re friends. And of course I’ll apologize. Right away, in fact.

She smiled at Glaw grinning with superiority at her as she passed her and Conall to look for Keita.

She found him already mostly changed into his armour, with his sword and dagger lying next to him. Watching him, her eyes took in his lean body, before they fastened on the bandages that completely covered his left arm.

[His left arm... is always wrapped up and covered. When he’s in withdrawal from the drug, it hurts him, he said so himself. Is it so badly scarred? Maybe infected? How badly did these two cursed creatures wound him when they had their way with him?]

She sighed. [I’ve messed up]

Moving her body, she slowly gathered the courage to approach.

[I acted all happy because he reacted like a healthy guy, but the problem is mental first and only then, maybe, physical. Thankfully, the physical problem seems to only be a small one]

That sounded just wrong.
[Although once the problem is out of the way, there’s no size issue to complain about... Get your mind out of the gutter, Alessa!]

Another sigh. [He’ll take time. Patience. I may have made him too angry with myself to help him on my own after all. I hope not.]

Shivering as she pushed the thought away, Alessa slowed her approach to stop a few feet away from Keita… far enough that she would be safe from his sword for the moment. Swallowing nervously, she softly called out. - K... Keita-kun.

- What is it, Black Moth?

She cringed. No honorific, no nothing, just her alias, like western strangers.

- I’m... I’m sorry. I didn’t think clearly. You must realize I’d... I’d never force any such thing on you. Your reaction was healthy and I got carried away. I’m very sorry, Keita-kun.

- Don’t call me that.

- K... Keita-kun?

- I’ve said to not call me that!

He rose and turned around to glare at her. He was visibly angry, eye narrowed almost to slits. - I won’t be adding ‘-san’ to your name, either. Our relationship clearly lacks the necessary respect to use any honorifics at all.

- I... I respect you. - She replied softly.

- As what? A warmth source? Food? Breeding machine? - His voice was laden with sarcasm.

- I’ve said I’d never force such a thing on you! Me and... those things that... did these things to you, we’re different!

- You have a monster’s sex drive, don’t you? Who cares if the guy has none, let’s just ‘convince’ him directly!

- No, Keita-kun! I wouldn’t! I... Of course, my body has its needs. They were left unattended for years now. Maybe travelling with three guys and suddenly sleeping next to one made me react like this, but... you’re a person. You’re a person and I’d never trample over your will like this. If I did, I’d let you kill me afterwards. I respect you too much to just... - Alessa trailed off, aware that she’d almost ‘did’.

- I’m just a masturbation aid for you, like men are for monsters! That, or a bowl filled with soup or something! How is that “respect”?! The rage had faded a little from Keita’s eyes, but that only allowed the hurt at her ‘betrayal’ to start to show.

- You’re... wrong. You’re a skilled fighter whose noble attitude brought me out of the closed boredom of my dungeon. You’re a great, open-minded person who didn’t hate an entire race when he had a reason to. You’re someone striving to make the world better for all things that can feel attachment and pain and anguish and loneliness, and sadness, and happiness. For these things, I *really* respect you. - Seeing that his rage was ebbing, Alessa risked moving forward a bit more to stand before him, allowing him to look her in the eyes, letting him see the regret in hers. - I’m terribly
sorry for acting like I did, but I’m not the type to trample over someone’s will. I hope one day you’ll recover from your trauma enough that you’ll be able to enjoy intimacy with someone, whoever it may be, but I’d never force such intimacy on you and I’m so sorry for what happened, even more so if it has re-opened old wounds. Please, forgive me. - She was almost begging, her own regret filling her tone.

Keita exhaled, the anger leaving with his breath. - Maybe you should reconsider if the presence of three men is causing your monster instincts to awaken.

- We have... an important goal. Indulging my instincts can wait, no matter how starved for attention they are.

- So, you’re in control? - He looked her firmly in the eye.

Alessa met his gaze with one equally as firm. - Yes.

- Very well. But... the point still stands. From now on, I’m Keita and you’re Alessa. No pretending, no “kun’s”, no needless familiarity and liberties. We focus on what’s important. Maybe in time, we’ll earn different honorifics or become friendly enough we don’t need them, but for now...

Alessa nodded, accepting his terms, though not liking them one bit. The honorifics had given her a connection with him, she’d thought. Still, there was another aspect they need to discuss. - It is not just my fault, you know. You did spend an entire night without even *noticing*. - Keita flinched slightly. Alessa pressed on, her tone gentle. - Your morning reaction was very healthy, Keita... I need you to understand this. As long as it’s with someone close, there’s nothing wrong with scratching that itch you may have, even if it brings painful memories to consider it. Love and intimacy are wonderful, Keita, and they’re not lost to you, you’re just turning away from them.

- And now you’re lecturing me.

- I’m sorry, but I don’t want you to think less of women, yourself, or a proper reaction for your gender because of me being hasty and not caref... caring enough. - Alessa countered softly.

Keita was silent for a few moments. - But, you are right... I did oversleep even though you crawled into my sleeping bag. I reacted badly, too... I did oversleep, so it’s not like I was immediately reminded of... that day. I just don’t want to consider those things, Alessa.

Not as much as she’d hoped, but better than she’d expected. - Could we start fresh then? Can you forgive me for that little transgression? I promise I’ll try my best to *not* use you as a heat source from now on, and “let go of me” means “let go of me”.

- Fine. - Keita sighed before looking at her with appreciation. - You’ve pushed yourself a lot to help me anyway. Let bygones be bygones. Come to think of it... how did your spell react to you sleeping?

Alessa focused on the spell... then smiled wickedly. - It’s... interesting. It seems when I’m not controlling it, the spell develops like it would naturally if I used it for its actual purpose, that being battle. Thus, the spell is still useful for its purpose of tracking, and if we manage to attack before I go to sleep again, it will actually be a very good advantage in battle.

- Great. Let’s gather our things and move out as soon as we determine if Glaw-san needs rest.

- Ahhh, you’re using honorifics with her! I’m jealous now! - Alessa playfully whinged.
Fortunately, Keita seemed to pick up that she was only playing.

- As I’ve mentioned, if we’ll get back to our former level of trust, maybe we’ll simply transcend the need for honorifics.

- I’m awaiting that time impatiently. While keeping my hands out of anyone’s pants, of course.

- You’re irredeemable.

- No truer words have ever been spoken. Must’ve come with my age. Thank you, Keita. For listening, understanding and forgiving me. I hope I didn’t damage the chances of your attitude towards intimacy becoming healthier. - Alessa answered playfully, enjoying the banter.

- Ir-re-dee-ma-ble, Black-Moth-Chan!

She smiled happily. - That’s a sudden shift of mood. - She said to herself as she turned to return to the camp.

Behind her Keita shook his head slightly as he slid his weapons home. Following Alessa, he marvelled at how he felt. - I’m rarely that well-rested... - He practically whispered.

- What was that?

- Nevermind. Let’s go.
Arc III - FotN : Priest of the Fang

Chapter Summary

The group tries to become more close-knit as they approach the big fight against the werebeasts with caution. Alessa tries to send an important message: Humans and monsters are very different in morality and ethics, but with monsters finding humans necessary and quickly developing tender feelings for them as a group, the desperately need human understanding for their relations to better.

Chapter Notes

This is the penultimate chapter of Arc III. Violence and occasional scathing comment are what you should expect. I have the Information Chapters almost ready, so I will try to begin uploading them here or elsewhere asap so the important details can be explained - the information chapters work best right after reading arc III, anyway, at least in my original design. Do leave comments and appreciation if you enjoy it. Because of how my relation with the beta-person started and followed, this chapter and several next are only once-checked by me, then once again chapters have a native person's input on them.

As a side-note: While almost all the protagonist pairings and love life is decided in the fic, I am not entirely opposed to throwing quick side-pairings as 'characters of the week' in the future, complete with sex-scene 'fanservice'. I cannot promise anything, of course, but if you have your favorite monstergirl, you can feel free to suggest any of such. I'll however add that I do not write 100% Yuri scenes often, nor is a full-blown harem scene something easy to pull off.

For a bunch of misfits, they sure travelled fast.

Nobody really dared to touch upon the subject of Keita and Alessa oversleeping, together no less, in the morning. Glaw was obviously very happy about the situation and gloating about it. Keita's conflicted emotions showed on his face and the occasional glares interwoven with absolutely blank and absolutely confused stares told a clear message: “Let’s not talk about this.”

Alessa was mostly troubled. She jumped at the first chance to re-introduce sexual pleasure to the person she wanted to re-introduce it to - for what she herself believed were completely innocent and altruistic reasons, mind you - and it almost made the situation worse.

The slimegirl's idiotically happy “face” did not make her feel better about it.
But, for some reason, Keita showed a pretty good mood at the end of their conversation, something which was *hard* to draw out of him. His sense of humor was more of the dry or sardonic type, but this one time it seemed really good-natured and light-hearted. He even smiled in a particularly bright way.

Not that it suited him, but Alessa believed people should be cheerful every once in a while.

The group was rapidly approaching what seemed to be the gathering spot, or the base of operations, for the werebeasts. They’d probably even have to wait someplace for a while before they could utilize their “strike at dawn” plan.

The efficiency probably had something to do with the fact that due to both their oversleeping and, in the echidna’s case, the circumstances of it, both Alessa and Keita felt simply great physically. Alessa woke up nearly totally warmed up and the “prospect” of a male to “play” with got her blood going really fast right after that, not to mention somehow sleeping with someone was *more* comfortable for her.

Keita shared the latter weirdness for some reason, on this occasion, but in his case it was mostly the fact that he slept very comfortably with no dreams at all, not to mention nightmares, that contributed to his good physical condition.

The sun just went under the line of horizon, and they were nearby what Alessa seemed to deem the “base” of the werebeasts so they needed to find a place to hide until dawn.

Then, they all heard a strange, feral sound. Similar to a boar’s...

Alessa and Keita were the first ones to react, sword being drawn just as the Echidna practically hissed out:

- *Normal Earth Spell : Stone Roots!*

The gray-haired swordsman immediately lunged into the cover that the forest plants were giving to whatever made the sound, and a sword cutting the air and then flesh could be heard. Moments later,
Keita gave a small laugh as the rest of the group approached.

- *We’re way too jumpy, but... oh well, I guess we’ll be having wild boar for dinner.*

Indeed, what made the sound was merely an animal - a somewhat big one but nothing really special. The rest of them all gave a giggle - except, for some reason, Glaw, who remained silent - and Conall walked forward to take the board onto his back.

Alessa spoke suddenly:

- *If you guys want, I could check the trees for some bird eggs as well. It shouldn’t be too hard to find some. Not that I’m not okay with just the boar... in fact, I prefer meat.*

Deryn nodded

- *Maybe you do that and we’ll find us someplace to rest.*

- *Fine. Meet me here once you’re done.*

- *Shout if your run into werebeasts.*

- *Likewise.*

The group spread out, the three guys remaining at safe distance while exploring and scouting the area, with Glaw simply blindly following Conall, much to his distress, and at continuously small distance to the boot.

Finally, Keita moved into a small clearing and noticed something.

Moving closer, it looked like a small valley with an additional chasm in the ground, a quarter of it buried in the sand. Even closer, he realized said chasm was covered with wood, as if someone closed an underground passage.

- *Conall-san, Deryn-kun, I believe I’ve found something!* 

The duo approached. Conall was almost jumping to him, in fact, with an annoyed slimegirl attempting to increase her pace of following him.

Deryn was slower as he walked towards them.

- *It seems like an abandoned mine, or something of the sort. If we removed these wooden planks, we*
should be able to get in, although...

- Although it wouldn’t be surprising if there was a bunch of wererats living in there.

- Precisely, Deryn-kun. It might be better to look for something else as well.

- No worries. I’ve found a place. There’s an abandoned wooden cottage... no, it’s not “abandoned”. It’s creepy, but it appears the werebeasts slaughtered the previous owners. There’s even some dried up blood on the wall and one of the carpets, but if all of you are fine with it, as long as we don’t make too big of a fire or find some way to block the windows, it should be a safe place to stay at.

Glaw caught up with Conall. Her hand was put on his back as the excess material down on the ground attempted to wrap itself around his ankle. The young male quickly tried to shake her off as he spoke.

- Well, as long as we’re careful it’s probably a safer bet than an abandoned mine.

- I agree. Deryn-kun, lead the way.

Soon enough, they decided on the cottage and then, Conall and Keita went but for Alessa while leaving Deryn with Glaw. She seemed dissatisfied with that turn of events. Suddenly, she spoke with her strange, somewhat gurgling, rather androgynous voice.

- H...hey, black kinda spiky, kinda slick hair, does Conall hate me or... or something?

- Deryn. My name is Deryn. You learned my brother’s name, so you should take the effort to learn his family’s name as well, even if you’re incapable of learning all of our names.

- S... Sorry. It is just kind of a bother and I have always been a bit slow with learning such things, I guess my mind and thoughts are focused on something else. A... Anyway, Deryn, does... your brother hate me or something?

- Well, you did rape him, but rather than hate, it appears he’s a bit uncomfortable around you. If he really hated you he would’ve attacked you the moment you re-appeared.

- Rape? What’s rape?

Deryn sighed.

- You “fed” upon him without his agreement to it, remember?

- Um, is that a big deal? Is that not enjoyable for you as well?

- You see, it’s more of a big deal for women than for men, but if you force yourself on people like that, they’re bound to think of you as an enemy. Yet, you suddenly helped us when we needed it, so I guess he just doesn’t know what to make of you.

- But I’m not an enemy! I like Conall. I want him to give me food on his own, too.
- Give you... food? Oh, wait, I get it. You see, with us humans, it’s usually that a bit of time has to pass until we’re ready to... give each other food, heh.

- I’ve heard that! That’s why I’ve been patient! But just now, he was all sweaty and he didn’t even let me get that! That means there was no progress at all!

- Sw...eaty? Are you a fetishist or something, by chance?

- What does “fetishist” mean?

- Why did you want to get his “sweat”?

- Sweat is as tasty and a bit more filling than that wet sticky stuff you have in your, ummm, “mouths”, although it is a lot less filling and tasty than the white stuff.

- I...see... so sweat is “tasty”... nevermind that. Anyway, it’s a possibility you’re moving too fast, he doesn’t understand your intentions or you’re simply not his type. Conall isn’t one to quickly start to have feelings for someone.

- It is a bit frustrating. Could you give me some advice on how to make him like me more? He seems to like you more than the snakewoman and the scary guy, so maybe you know how to make him feed me. I’m really hungry.

- Well, I’m his family, so it’s natural. You see, as I’ve said, it’s a big step. But, you won’t be any good if you go hungry, either...

- Please? I really need some help, he does not seem to like me at all.

- It may be for the better. I don’t really approve of my brother going out with a rapist.

- Please? I’ll try to help you when I can, too, and I won’t rape anyone again! I like Conall, anyway! I’d only rape him now if I was really really really hungry, but he is not helping with feeding me?

- Stop threatening me.

- I am not threatening! I cannot ask scary eyes or the snakewoman for help, the snakewoman is after Conall, too!

- I doubt she is.

- She has to be! The scary eyes has a bad... feeling about him and you are, well, you are not as cool as Conall, so why else would she be here!

- This is a really bad way to talk about someone you’re asking for help.

- I am so-rry! If Conall was not here I would probably ask you if I can feed on you, but I really like him! It is not like I think you are bad quality or something!

- You’re making me scared now.

- I really am sorry! Please, I need your help!

- You’re just sorry that you don’t get to feed on anyone, not sorry that you insulted me and raped my brother.
Suddenly, the he found his head held from both sides by the slimegirl as her lower body and excess substance suddenly stuck to his legs, giving him a wet feel of her shifting slime.

- Hey, what are you...

- Please! I am still bad with humans, I have no idea what to say to convince you! At least help me convince yourself to help me!

- The proper way to say that is “throw me a bone here”.

- Bones are dry and do not produce any tasty stuff! They are useless weight!

- Repeat after me: Master Deryn, please throw me a bone here.

- Master Deryn, please throw me a bone here!

- All right. Now, take your... slime... off me. Remember, physical contact isn’t a good way of convincing humans, unless they’re your enemies.

- All right.

Her slime withdrew from his body, and upon his glare, she took his hands off his face too.

- Now, you see, I have an idea how to both make you feed and have Conall warm up to you. But, you’ll have to listen to me very carefully.

- Yes.

- I still don’t approve of you being with my brother, but... you did help us in need, and it’s probably partially because of me that he hasn’t got any more normal girls chasing him, so I won’t intervene for now, because it seems that you’re being honest about your feelings.

- Yes, please help me.

- Since Conall will be pretty sweaty after the battle, you should just offer to him that you’ll let him “use you as a bath”. Now, he’ll probably be very upset by that offer, so you’ll have to promise him that you *won’t* squeeze out any of his semen.

- But semen is the most delicious and filling part! Why cannot I...

- He’ll get very angry with you if you insist on taking his semen! It’s far too early to do that. At some point, it’s very likely he’ll agree to it on his own.

- This is some weird crap! Why can I not just take in his semen along with the sweat straight from the start?! It will feel good for him, too!

- You don’t understand. At this point, even if he allows you to take his seed, he’ll treat it as a duty. If you start off with semenless feeding, you’ll gain his trust and then when he allows you to take his semen as well, you’ll know he started to really like you.

- This is bullshit! Semenless feeding?! Thank you for nothing, slick black hair!
- Well, I tried. Go ahead and ruin whatever you want to ruin. Oh, here they come.

The group was carrying quite a number of eggs, meaning that Alessa was indeed pretty good at finding them. She’d probably have troubles bringing them all back on her own.

They entered the cottage and looked around. There weren’t many signs of people leaving here left... or of what killed them, except for the two stains mentioned by Deryn. As well as some charcoal, apparently still quite useable.

- Well, it’ll be better to have some properly prepared meat and boiled eggs, so... Normal Earth Spell: Stone Roots!

Alessa’s stone roots took shape and crawled over the walls to slowly but surely block the light from the walls, leaving just one window intact, for now.

- Let’s get ourselves some warm fire, shall we?

Conall and Deryn took to it while Keita checked all the windows and started to skin the boar.

Some time later and after Alessa blocked the last of the windows, they dug in. Glaw was sitting nearby, not interested in the food, resting to help maintain her cohesion and battle capability.

Suddenly, she spoke.

- H... Hey, Conall...

- What is it?

- If I do well battling those were-whatevers, can I get some food, too?

Alessa noticeably shifted. Deryn raised an eyebrow. Keita, apparently, wasn’t interested in the conversation at all.

Conall was apparently quite clueless still.

- What do you mean “if you do well”? If you’re hungry, you should come here and get some food straight away.

- Can I? Really?

Alessa suddenly spoke in a loud and clear voice.
- Do you remember what *precisely* she eats, Conall?

The young man suddenly blushed and nearly choked on his food.

- No! Nononono, you can’t feed! Certainly not in any way that includes me!

- But, I am really, really hungry!

- We will not be having any sex, okay? This is something to be done between a man and a woman of the same race who love each other, okay?

- But my race has no males. Please? I am really hungry. I soon will not be of much use in a fight or anything like that, to be honest.

Keita seemed mildly annoyed by the slimegirl’s whining.

- Conall-san, if this is going to become a problem, maybe we should...

- Please wait Keita-k... Keita. Conall, I’d like to discuss something with you. In private.

- Do not go with that woman Conall! She is a bad one! You saw that she will go after anyone! She does not like you the way I do!

- Relax, Glaw. Conall has now seen my bad side and what a trashy woman I am, so clearly he isn’t interested. This is a different matter altogether, right?

- Right. L.. Let's go.

Closing themselves in a separate room, they heard the slimegirl release weird but angry sounds from her lying spot.

Deryn spoke to the remaining male:

- We’re not going to eavesdrop, are we?

- Whatever Alessa and Conall-san are doing or talking about in there is their own private business.

- Wow, no pause at all, completely cold... and after you two slept together, too...

- Deryn-kun, do you intend to anger or challenge me? I’d welcome the exercise, but I cannot guarantee your health afterwards...

- Sorry, sorry. But, let’s say, I worry what kind of weird ideas the snake-woman will put in his head.

- Alessa-s... “The Snake Woman” is perfectly capable of being reasonable when she tries to be, apparently unlike the slime-woman here.

- Are you that scary because someone ate your manparts or something? - Glaw said without a care in the world.
- Shut up. My manhood is where it belongs, and that’s away from monster-whores like you and other kinds of sluts.

- So jaded, you must taste really bad!

- Do you also want to fight me? I believe you still remember the last time you tried.

- Calm down, both of you. This is not the time nor the place to fight each other. Just enjoy your rest, Glaw, and I’ll enjoy the boar with Keita here.

- Fine by me. - both of his “roommates” answered.

Tensions were raising. Deryn felt almost like in the past, when important figures turned on each other and started fighting...

Conall only now noticed how dark it was in the room... He got a bit nervous.

- Glaw likes you.

- Well, I can’t precisely tell how tasty I am, but if you’re talking about us, humans, sex is...

- That’s what you need to understand. Your view of the issue and her view of the issue are so vastly different she’ll never be able to look at it from your side of things. Well, maybe not “never”, but definitely not anytime in the close future.

- And I’m supposed to be able to understand hers?

- That’s why we’re talking. I want to try explaining it to you.

- … That’s weird. Don’t you two hate each other or something?

- She obviously has a strong dislike of me since I’ve put her in a dungeon “against her will”. I also kept her safe, but she’s barely capable of recognizing that, and probably doesn’t even try to find good points of her “slavery”. I’m trying to put the past behind, but her constant suggestions of me trying to chase after you, paranoia, and obvious dislike of me are really pissing me off.

- Yes, I mean, she seems pretty clueless. The race is obviously between Keita and Deryn here.

- W...what race? What are you talking about?

- Well, your relationship with Deryn has obviously improved and you’ve originally left your dungeon because of Keita, so I figured if you like anyone, it’d be one of them...

- That is not the issue here! The issue is your relationship with Glaw!

- We don’t have any relationship!

- Well, her opinion is and will be different, Conall.

- Then I just need to be firm in telling her that.
- Conall, eventually, she will have to feed. Hunger drives people crazy. She’ll either turn on you or other humans, and then Keita will probably kill her and it’ll be the end of that. Surely you don’t hate her enough to allow this to happen.

- Can’t she... I don’t know, get it from someone else? Or from animals, maybe?

Alessa raised an eyebrow.

- ...Ssso, lusting after animals would be “all right” in your books? That’s... interesting.

- Well, obviously not if she was a human girl, but...

- She’s not. However, no matter how high your standards are, at the barest minimum she’s *very nearly* a person, and you have to at least acknowledge that. In many ways, red slimes are like human children most of their lives.

- What do you mean?

- Her... extracting your semen wasn’t sex for her. Not at all. For her, it’d be much like breastfeeding is to a human infant - it’s a feeding and bonding process. Except, well, the bonding is at least slightly romantic in nature.

- How is it *not* sex?

- Their understanding of the issue is extremely simple. You see, sex makes babies. That’s obvious. They take it to an extreme: for an intelligent red slime, *it’s only sex if babies happen because of it*. Since Glaw is far from spawning, her draining your semen is simply feeding with help of a guy she likes while developing a stronger bond to that guy. If she was close to spawning, this would feel different.

- So, I’m like... her favorite food, or something?

- This is also incorrect. As I’ve said, it was similar to breastfeeding. You give her something she likes, you feed her, and she gets drawn to you and interested in you. That’s it. The moment the two of you spawn a small slimegirl, *that* is sex. So, even if you let her feed on you, she won’t actually think you’re committing to a relationship with her until the two of you make a baby and you recognize it as such. At the same time, she likes you, believes she can make you enjoy yourself, and is already into you enough to try to focus her feeding efforts *exclusively* on you.

- A b..baby?

- Come on, it’s different for slimes and you know it.

- F... fine. But I still don’t see why I should bother with it.

- As I’ve said, you’re not committing to anything just by doing it. Wasn’t it pleasant when she fed on you before?

- She raped me!

- You didn’t resist.

- I lost a battle! I couldn’t resist!
- It felt good for you and you didn’t resist. Moreover, you accepted her following you when she helped you, rather than killing her on the spot. This isn’t a rapist-raped relationship at all no matter how I look at it.

- You’re overcomplicating things!

- And you’re simplifying morality and applying it with your human way of thinking. As I’ve said, she’s a developing person who has a mindset completely different from yours. Since she helped you and is clearly attracted to you, maybe you should at least try to understand her.

- Alessa, I’ve barely had any human relationships. I’m definitely not ready nor wanting of an interracial one.

- Didn’t I just mention feeding not being any kind of commitment until at least one child is spawned?

- But, it still feels... wrong emotionally.

- Still, you don’t want her going crazy, starving herself, going off to feed on other innocents or getting killed by Keita, right?

- But... what am I even supposed to do in situations like that?

- Throw her a bone. Tell her you will feed her when she does well, or when she demonstrates patience, then stick to acts that don’t “feel bad emotionally”. Ask her if feeding on your other bodily fluids is okay for now - slimes can also absorb sweat and saliva. Masturbate into containers and present her with them when she goes hungry for too long as if giving her food rations... you do masturbate, right?

- How is that any of your business?

- Okay, touchy subject... Anyway, there are many ways out of that situation, point being... You can’t just say “no”. It’ll end badly. At least explain to her how you feel on this. Simply saying “no” is harmful, unfair and bound to lead to more issues. As I’ve said, please try to understand her just a little bit. What’s embarassing and taboo for you is natural, pleasant and neccessary for her.

- You monsterpeople are clearly weird in these kinds of matters.

- What’s if it’s you humans who are weird?

- It’s not me who crawled into a person’s sleeping bag at night!

- Well, that’s only because I was cold, and you wouldn’t really have much choice in the matter unless you’re okay with sleeping with a male, an echidna or a goo girl. I’m certain that if there was a girl you’re *really* attracted to and your body was *really* cold, you’d at the very least dream about such a situation.

- Perverted woman!

- Says the cherry boy with “reflexive” looks at slime and echidna breasts.

- I did not look!

- Soooo, how does a slime-pussy actually feel? You probably weren’t a virgin before, how does it compare to a human one?

- Are you trying to annoy me!? Irritate me? You want a fight, monster?
- I just wonder how many more years will you need before you realize having pleasure from intimate contacts and having sexual desires do *not* make one perverted, rather, they are healthy. Surely when you had contact with human females, your thoughts weren’t all of lifelong friendships and white, childless marriages?

- All right, so when it comes to words, you win, but how would you fare if I challenged you right away?

Alessa grinned at him.

- I kept the golems and slimes that gave you all that troubles as my servants, and you’ve seen me fight while *conserving* my energy and trying my best not to overuse my powers, AFTER a sleepless night, not to mention I’m using said powers now to make it harder for the werebeasts to detect us here. And you want to try yourself against me in combat?

Conall suddenly felt completely powerless in face of the Echidna.

- But, no matter what you say... I can’t just... with a slime...

- I’ve already presented you with alternate possibilities. Consider them, and while you do, ask Glaw to wait *after* explaining to her why you can’t feed on her. She’s childish, stubborn and self-indulging, but if you manage to make a point that forcefully feeding on you is *bad*, she will understand.

- F...fine. I’ll try to set this right with her.

- Thank you. Any positive relations between humans and monsters are a big step forward.

When both of them left the room and returned to the one Deryn and Keita were in, there was a short pause. Eventually, Conall started to speak.

- Glaw, listen... feeding you the way you fed on me before is no good right now, but keeping you hungry would be even worse, so maybe we should discuss how to solve this issue after we’re done with the werebeasts...

- B... But I really am hungry! Ca I not have just a bit of semen? Shooting out white stuff is pleasant, right?

Keita seemed pretty tired of all this. Deryn barely stopped himself from laughing. Conall sighed.

- As I’ve said, it’s not okay. We’ll have to discuss how to keep you fed seriously later.

Suddenly, Glaw moved. She seemed to search for the right words, and finally spoke out.
- T... Then I will serve as a bath for you so I can at least feed some.

Conall’s jaw dropped. Deryn half-smiled. Keita simply tried to stare a hole through the slimegirl. Alessa chuckled lightly.

- I... I fail to see how’s that any better...
- I... I promise I will not make you come... unless you want me to. No trying to squeeze any of your semen out of you, so let me do this at least and get some sweat and saliva to sate my hunger a bit.
- U...Ummm...
- Conall, isn’t this a pretty fair deal for now? - Alessa said with a smile.

Deryn saw it fit to speak now:

- It’s such a good idea that it’s a wonder if she came up with it herself.

The Echidna chuckled at the clear suggestion before waiting for Conall’s reply.

- Fine, then, after we’re done with the werebeasts and stuff... we’ll do that. But you’ll have to promise to listen to what I have to say it and don’t do anything out of order.
- All right. I... I promise.

- G..Good. Now that this has been solved, let’s enjoy the boar and the boiled eggs.
- Finally! - Alessa shouted, beaming a smile to both Deryn and then Keita, sitting between the two.

Glaw rolled onto her side and clearly started to rest seriously, and Conall sat opposite the other three.

They ate in peace and waited until a bit before dawn.

Alessa removed some of the stone root cover to look at the slightly gray night sky outside.

- Come to think of it, Alessa, how were you so sure this is the place?

- It’s where my “sleeper agent” stopped for an extended period of time. When we came around here, I could tell there’s a steady supply of magic here, and the werebeast transformation is probably the source of it. Also, I could *theoretically* relocate my previous spell to other similar
creatures when the original carrier arrived here, so at the very least, this is *her* base of operations. However, if she has any people in control of her, I ensured that she’d come here to inform them of my offer.

- And that was?

- Obviously, laying the city out for them like a sacrifice.

- It’s scary how you’re suddenly plotting and lying so much, Alessa-s.... Alessa.

The echidna pouted when Keita stopped himself from adding the honorific and called her a liar.

- I lived amongst humans for a while, having to hide myself. The lying comes from that time, the plotting... maybe it’s natural, true. It’s not like I enjoy it all that much, but when it’s necessary, I simply do it.

- No wonder she’s single.

- Says a seventeen years old with a brother for a lifepartner. Don’t be such a smartass, Deryn, you were starting to get on my good side.

- One might ask whether there is a good side.

- Oh, you wound me so. I believe we’re ready to move out. Glaw, you’re ready?

- Yes, I will be easily able to fight in my current condition.

- Excellent, but don’t overdo it. Red slimes aren’t that high up the food chain.

- And snakes are?

- Add a snake, a moth, a sorceress, and generations of quite selective breeding, and only then you get Alessa. Let’s start the party, shall we?

It seemed like a werebeast base, all right.

A bunch of monstrous half-human half-animal figures arriving from different locations, gathering at a weird open-air... chapel of sorts, complete with an altar and something that seemed like a cult object. Nearby the altar, there was a man, clearly past his youth, but not an old one, either.

- Hmm... so that’s the reason.

- Alessa?

- We may have to take him down. This man is a mage. I wouldn’t be surprised if he was capable of controlling the werebeast’s transformation, or at the very least giving them darkness to transform with. That would be a problem.
- So, distraction and kusarigama, or...

- I could go for a slightly overkill start, if all of you move yourself to favorable positions for the attack.

- What would be the sign to strike?

- Well, we’d have to attack before I actually do the “overkill”, since it takes a bit to charge up, aim, and in the meantime can be a bit visible... flashy, even. That's why we’d need you guys to attack them first, so there’s little between the “target” and the “overkill”. The attack is already way beyond my “conserve energy” routine, so I’d rather not repeat it.

- Then, again, what’ll use as the signal to attack?

- That would depend on how far your girlfriend-to-be here can stretch, Conall.

They were set in position, each one with Glaw’s pseudopod on an arm. A double slap on the shoulder was the signal to attack.

Glaw herself was right behind Alessa, waiting for her instruction. The slimegirl did feel somewhat irritated, left with just the Echidna and separated from Conall.

- You seem quite trustful... naive, even, to remain here just with me, your back right in front of me. Not scared at all?

- You’d never make the first move, Glaw. We’re travelling companions, at least for a time. We need at least a modicum of trust between us to function properly.

- Trust? You would trust someone who enslaved you?

- Depends on the method. Today, we should let bygones be bygones. If you want to fight it out one day, maybe we will.

- You have this energy conservation policy. Has to do with magic versus what you get from males. If so, why did you put yourself in a closed dungeon for years and kept us there, only to crawl out of there to follow Conall and these people and now almost getting rid of said energy conservation policy?

- I didn’t follow Conall. I followed Keita’s mission, like Conall and Deryn did.

- Does not answer the question, really. I hate to say it, but you probably don’t look half bad to any man that would even consider having sex with a monster. You could go out there, get yourself a guy or two and have as much energy as you probably needed.

- That kind of strategy rarely works out. As for closing in a dungeon away from the world and not trying to actively get males... At first, it was mostly because I figured maybe the traditional way for my people is the good way. But, later, when people did manage to pass the dungeon test at times... And before I set up the dungeon... It’s not like I didn’t mate pointlessly in the past. It’s not like loveless sex was an experience that made me cringe and hate the thought of it afterwards. It’s just that I came to a conclusion many monsters come to, sooner or later, one that you yourself may be
starting to realize.

- That being?

- Prepare yourself to inform them. I've focused enough energy...

There was an odd move in the earth. Glaw tensed up.

- About the conclusion...

- Yes?

- It’s just that... when you finally taste, experience the way it *could* be, the way maybe it’s *supposed* to be... The other things feel just like they really are. A shade.

- Wait, you mean that you...

Another sudden shift in the earth.

- Inform them.

- Right away. You were saying...

- Our little talk is over, Glaw. Next time, please give hints about your own motives and thoughts, all right?

- Alessa...

- Intense Earth Spell : Spear of the Earth.

A large chunk of ground suddenly was lifted upwards, absorbing nearby sand, drawing it into itself, and taking shape of a giant polearm made entirely out of earth.

Keita, Deryn and Conall got the “attack” message all right, with the two former ones quietly killing their first werebeast from behind before ambushing another one (two in Deryn’s case). Conall got straight out to the “ambush” part, first of the werebeasts falling after a jab through its neck and as the another approached, he dodged and planted the partisan’s end in its back.

Keita grabbed his sword two-handed and decided to check exactly how effective it would be against a wererat that just stood in his way.

Well, he didn’t exactly expect to simply cut him clean into two pieces with a single swing, but he wasn’t going to complain about it; he’d also bet that the wererats were not amongst the toughest werebeasts out there.
An approaching werewolf was treated to the same kindness, although this time, Keita had to actually work for his kill, if only a little.

He was already seeing Alessa’s spell - a large chunk of ground absorbing additional sand and forming a spear-like shape out of it. Before long, it seemed almost ready; at that time, glowing green markings started to appear on the “spear”, further permeating it with magic - apparently the spell’s forte wasn’t just the mass of the ground it accumulated or even attempts at “sharpening” it. Instead, the magical effect would be further complicated and advanced...

If that was true, then he probably underestimated Alessa when they first met. However, she did note the spell was already a step outside her energy saving policy... although if this was just one step outside, a person had to wonder how much power was she exactly capable of using if the situation forced her to.

One glance at Deryn and Conall had shown that the duo also recognized and respected the show of power, and the middle-aged man at the altar apparently was casting a spell of his own... probably to defend himself.

Keita and Deryn got through their own opponents somewhat quickly, although to be fair, for some reason most of the werebeasts picked on Conall; the plan seemed to go nearly flawlessly so far, and the only things that could stop Alessa from finishing the mage off, whoever he was, were a scarce group of werebeasts between her spell and him and the wizard’s spell itself.

Glaw made the way clear for the attack, sending multiple pseudopodia at full strength to “punch” the other werebeasts out of the way, making it clear for Alessa’s Spear.

And said spear was already complete, made of chunks of rock, earth and sand, pressured together so much by magic that they started to imitate a real spear, covered with magical runes to increase the speed, damage and penetrate some of the magical shields that the opponent could create.

The spell should only fail if faced with an appropriate barrier, some of which included certain other elemental spells, including Earth spells of higher or similar level.

Much to Alessa’s dismay, she immediately recognized their opponent’s spell when she fired her own at where it would predictably appear.
[“He uses it outside of a cave? That man either has a lot confidence in his own energy supply or thinks that this is as far as mine goes and he’ll be safe afterwards... Using it under a clear sky like that is way too tiring...”]

A giant mineral and stone structure suddenly erupted from the earth, reminiscent of a stalagmite but reshaping itself quickly to curve and rearrange most of its mass onto the spear’s trajectory.

Chances were, even if she managed to break through his spell, he himself would be able to relocate or even survive a direct hit of whatever remained.

Alessa decided the bet wasn’t worth it the moment the spear’s tip touched the earthy shield that protected her opponent.

The variation on the Spear of Earth she learned after a while of practicing was something most mages didn’t use. It was actually formulated as a theory back in the day to make more traditional polearms more effective against vampires, based on the assumption that piercing a vampire’s heart with wood kills or paralyzes them.

And then, since there was a spell like the Spear of The Earth, a variant of it also was created.

- Spear of the Earth : Splinters!

The high-pressured ground-formed polearm suddenly shattered into many smaller, apparently sharp pieces of earth that went flying chaotically in multiple directions, though noticeably thanks to their position and the shield made by the mage the three warriors were safe from the “onslaught”. The werebeasts, however, were not and many suffered some visible damage.

Seeing as their initial plan failed, Keita and Conall started to approach the druid on their own while Deryn shortened the distance between himself and the two monstergirls.

The wereboar Alessa quickly recognized suddenly appeared on the scene, pretty pissed.

- You lied to me... And you followed me here, somehow?
The Mage also approached a bit closer, apparently ready to back the werebeasts up with magic.

- It would appear this little snake here specializes in divination magic or in spells that allow her to follow people with her senses... So she was able to follow you back here. I was pretty surprised when she managed to use an Intense level earth spell, but I figured it was an ace in the hole of sorts, probably a plan to take me down first. But, the foolish woman didn’t even predict I could defend with an Earth spell as well! Now, I think I might’ve actually overdone it, but it was worth it since this lamia-kindred’s spell power is probably depleted now.

- Did you somehow fail to notice how I wounded a bunch of your comrades? Why would a human like you need a small army of werebeasts, anyway?

- Human? Foolish woman, us Druids, whom serve the King of Fangs have long since merged with nature and allowed the Beast to surface inside of us! We’ve transcended humanity! Thanks to our King’s reacquisition of an artifact long lost, we’ll now soon be able to use it’s power to form another of the Master’s Chosen, Geodeva, and once there are more of them, face any opponent our Master deems a bother openly and with pure, raw, brute force! This is why our kind needs to gather, to allow for the artifact’s power to be used!

- So, you need a bunch of werebeasts to realize that plan anyway? Excellent. I am sorry to inform you that thinking a monster in service to our beloved Demon Lady would ever allow for a mass slaughter of humans in order to acquire “slaves” for herself is absurd... a show of idiocy incomparable to much else in this world. Also, even your deduction is wrong, mister Druid or whatever...

- Hmmm?

- I am not a “sneaky type” or a Diviner or someone specializing in following and watching others from away. I don’t dig my way into people’s minds or follow them with magical eyes or create artifacts that allow me to witness what they’re doing. No, I’ve got nothing to do with games like those. Mister, my sorcery is almost purely *battle-oriented*. The spell I’ve cast on your follower here is merely an application of a potentially *lethal* effect. In fact, I can make it damage her severely at will by now, and if we wasted more time coming here, she’d probably feel its effects without my say so.

- Nice bluff, miss. This is a clear lie. There is no spell that would allow for these results you speak of.

- And you say that because... what? Your service to the King of Fangs has granted you omniscience? You think you’re superhuman or something? Allow me to show you firsthand... The larva went into your lungs before further developing, miss, so you may have some trouble breathing after that.

- Huh?

- Negative Spell : Spectral Moth Cocoon stage, Detonate!

A faint light shone from within the Wereboar’s chest, and suddenly, a small, bursting sound came from withing. She immediately spat out a large amount of blood and started coughing and attempting to breathe, to little success.

- My, my, it sure was well-fed.

- What the...
- It does not surprise me that you wouldn’t be aware of this kind of magic... Unless the co-creator taught it to someone else, there should be only two people in the world capable of using this type of magic. Unless the Demon Lady learned it by her connection to monsters, of course, in which case there’d be three plus anyone else we could pass it on to. To sum it up, it mostly bases on negative energy, and a spell to create a single Spectral Moth was deemed approximately Normal Level by the two of us. Said moth can be created at different levels of development and have different effects accordingly, or can reach higher levels of development by draining the spiritual energy and life force of enemies. In case of cocoons... I can make them explode, as I just demonstrated.

[“ I was begging to think she only adopted the name Black Moth because of the tattoos, but it appears this was the actual reason... “] Conall thought as he run his partisan’s blade through a werewolf’s neck.

The druid seemed pretty frustrated and was about to respond with a spell of his own, but Glaw suddenly bounced and then fired most of her mass right at him, knocking him off the high ground.

She was being surrounded by other werebeasts, but Deryn was immediately by her side after pummeling a wererat against the ground and defending from a werewolf strike.

Keita and Conall were still separated from the rest of the group, but the half-Zipangu swordsman was rapidly closing in on the druid himself, courtesy of his enchanted silver sword.

The druid rose from the ground, clearly aware of Keita approaching him and at a dangerous pace at that.

The druid’s body suddenly twisted and twitched violently, as muscles bulged out and joints and bones rearranged themselves, the combination of those shredding the druid’s clothing into pieces. For a moment, it looked kind of like the werewolf transformation but in a few moments it was clear that the druid was changing into something else entirely.

- Keita! This is not a werebeast! The silver sword won’t work as well!
- It’s still killable! I have yet to meet a thing that is not!

Whatever the druid changed into would resemble a hyena, if not for the odd bone structure, the occasional naked piece of discolored or wart-covered skin and uncharacteristically large muscles.

Keita could tell that while resembling an animal, the particular creature this druid changed into wasn’t one.
Said druid suddenly pushed over one of the slender pillars around the altar, shooting into the air with nothing to support, grabbed it and was apparently intending to use it as a weapon, which was a good if not shocking show of strength.

He started charging at Keita, but Conall was first, stabbing the big hyena-like humanoid beast with his polearm. The druid screeched and smacked Conall away, which understandably caused Glaw to shake with rage, erupting forth most of her mass as a set of very thin, tentacle-like pseudopods which she used to smack the gnoll and two nearby werebeasts, leaving painful welts at their bodies. Then, she used said “tentacles” to propell herself forwards, gathering up all of her mass along the way and preparing to smash it straight into the druid.

But he was ready, bludgeoning her mid-air with his make-do pillar-mace, sending her against the ground, cohesion lost and approaching rapidly with it prepared for another strike.

- Normal Earth Spell: Rock Barrage!

A set of stone missiles flew towards the hyena-like creature, with it being forced to swing his pillar against them to block and duck against the remaining ones, only for Keita to slash at the druid’s back in the middle of it all with a jumping cut from above.

The druid turned trying to kick the swordsman, but his reflex and speed were enough to back away and dodge the strike, before cutting at the druid’s other leg, causing him to struggle to keep his footing.

- Normal Earth Spell: Shredding Dust!

The King’s believer’s back was once again exposed and attacked, leaving numerous cuts at it, causing him to screech again. Keita didn’t waste a moment of the druid expressing his pain and anger, assaulting his front with a flurry of blows. Deryn was busy fighting the remaining werebeasts, but Conall was already up on his feet.

- He’s tough, and no matter how you look at it they have an advantage in numbers!

- Give me just, a moment here, Conall-san!

The older Amberwing brother engaged the creature with his polearm again, fighting defensively as Keita prepared to swing his kusarigama at one of the hyena-like beast’s arms. He succeeded, the chain wrapping around the creature’s arm as the sickle buried itself in muscle, but it only caused the druid to sharply grab the chain and pull, sending Keita airborne.
But that was also part of the attack, the swordsman flying at the gnoll with sword in hand, jumping in addition to pulling sending him higher and faster than the druid could react, his blade stabbed into his side before being pulled out in a screwing motion, leaving a nasty wound behind.

- Normal Earth Spell: Shredding Dust!

Alessa attacking with the same spell again gave the duo of swordsmen enough of a pain-pause to jump back from the beast, with Glaw regaining cohesion to force a wereboar creeping behind them into place to be quickly run through by Keita’s sword.

- Keita, Conall, the sun is raising!

All the werebeasts and the druid indeed turned towards the east as the glimmers of the sunrise were now clearly visible and hitting the small clearing with its rays.

Alessa chuckled at the momentary distraction.

- Normal Venom Spell: Poison Stream! And...

As a sudden green flesh appeared in the air, followed by a stream of viscous liquid nearly pumping itself into the wound left by Keita’s sword, Alessa continued the onslaught.

- Normal Earth and Negative Water Spell : Salty Torture!

The remaining cuts on the druids body were immediately covered with a crystalline substance, causing him to growl and roar in pain as Keita and Conall followed, striking at his exposed body. With fury, the druid swung his weapon... no, practically threw it as the duo of fighters flew away from the impact.

The druid’s form suddenly grew smaller, as he regained his human form and voiced a spell of his own.

- Intense Positive Spell : Vigorous Recovery!

The scratches and wounds on his body appeared to slowly close right on Alessa’s eyes, but she didn’t worry.

- Worry not, brothers! I will shield us in our King’s protective darkness, so we may deal with these pests!
She smiled as she gathered the highest amount of energy she used in the fight since her Spear of the Earth didn’t work. Sure, she shouldn’t be casting that many spells, but all in all, anyone would be pissed if they’ve seen a fellow monster and two human companions struck with a pillar.

- Intense Negative Spell : Sha...

- Intense Earth Spell : Crushing Barrow!

Suddenly, two large chunks of earth erupted from ground and smashed themselves into the Druid, immobilizing him, just as a large amount of dust rose from the ground, practically forming an earthy fog around the druid.

The chunks pulsed as the dust rapidly encircled the druid, crushing into his body and piling up, completing a barrow as the spells name suggested. Said barrow suddenly contracted, almost collapsing upon itself as a loud breaking sound was heard, along with the druid’s whimper of pain. Alessa assumed that if the pain and bone as well as internal damage didn’t kill him, the lack of air soon would.

- You may have nice spells and your body may be strong when transformed, but you clearly neglected your natural strength and made a stupid move reverting to human form... Well, I’m nearly out of magic now, so you did push me further than I expected...

However, the problem was far from over, with werebeasts approaching from both sides. She had to defend herself physically, something that she wasn’t as skilled with as in magic, even if her body strength and natural reflexes left little to be desired.

Punching one of the werebeasts and sending its tail crashing against the other, a large wereboar, she had hoped it’ll be enough but said wereboar grabbed it and stopped it mid-swing, temporarily immobilizing her as the other creature, a werewolf, jumped at her with fang and claw. She grabbed its arms and pulled violently, causing it to lose balance before biting its neck, pushing it away, raising on the remaining part of her tail and sending a quick punch to the face of the wereboar, but he kept his hold, and the werewolf was also still in the game...

Until Deryn caved its jaw in, causing it to fall on its back, and then stabbed him through the heart.

Glaw suddenly wrapped herself around the wereboar’s head, causing it to let go of Alessa, whom freed her tail and coiled it onto whatever was visible of the creature’s neck. Glaw escaped the bind as Alessa constricted, cutting the air off and then grabbing the wereboar’s head, twisting both her hands and its tail violently, ending its life.
- We are even.

- Just at the moment, slimegirl. Just at the moment.

The reversion process was going smoothly without the druid to stop it, and many of the werebeasts started assuming more humanoid or almost completely human forms.

Those that were not have dwindled significantly due to Keita no longer being occupied by fighting the druid.

As much pleasure as it was watching him cut things up at a tremendous pace thanks to a sword enchanted with her blood, Alessa decided to sacrifice the show in favor of actually helping, wrapping up a rare werecat so Deryn could smash its skull before squeezing a wererat to death while trading punches with a slowly re-humanizing werewolf.

Some of the werebeast-turned-humans started attempting to escape, but Glaw and Keita’s kusarigama reached even then, aided by the occasional rock thrown with Alessa’s remaining magic supply; she used only the Faint version of the spell, though, and even then conservatively.

In a short while, the area surrounding the altar looked like a proper battlefield, littered with human and werebeasts corpses, none of which belonged to a man named Deryn Amberwing, and devoid of men bearing the names of Conall or Keita in life.

The group fell onto the ground, surrounding the altar, using it to support their backs. Glaw instead crawled onto the altar and gently wrapped her arms around Conall’s neck. He was too beaten and tired to protest.

- Ffﬁne, so now, we gotta get back, get that reward, and then rest. A llloonng time.

- Deryn, isn’t it said that evil never rests? I’m sure Keita-k... can already think of a new thing to do once we’ve gotten our just reward for this!

- Actually, I don’t think I can. The last three quests were pretty random. I’d like to finally turn our efforts against the Umbro Star’s spawn, but I’m unsure if we can somehow do it here and taking you all to Zipangu right now is probably beyond both our funds and time. We have to ﬁgure something out.

- Oh, your sense of righteousness and desire to smash evil has lowered to such disappointing levels, mister Haneo!

- Must have something to do with him being exhausted by ﬁghting so many opponents after a certain echidna, the corrupt inﬂuence of whom affected us all, failed to pull out the “overkill” she promised... But my bet would go it has more to do with said corrupt inﬂuence...
It appeared even the most light-hearted and silly member of their group didn’t completely miss the tone of Deryn’s remark, and promptly stated:

- I think I will be able to get along with your brother, Conall. That’s important, right?
- Now, you just need to introduce her to our parents - Deryn exclaimed. - I’m sure they’ll be thrilled!

Alessa, pouting before, has now allowed herself a small laugh, but noticed Keita being deep in thought.

- Keita? What is it?
- This druid suggested that your specialization in magic might be divination. I never really believed in stuff like that, but... Can magic really do such a thing? Witness things, spy on others, look into the future, the past or search for things we want?

Alessa smiled.

- Yes, Keita, there are those types of magic, too. A diviner is rare and its a study that usually takes years. There are also those born with a natural talent to perform feats of supernatural senses similar to or even greater than divination magic, called “seers” or “oracles”, but they’re *exceedingly* rare. To best of my knowledge, being one might require a supernatural bloodline and since monster blood was often superior to human blood, and now, such “crosbreeding” always results in monsters, there aren’t any seers that would carry monster blood in their veins and thus directly be allied with the Demon Lady... at least, none that I know of.

- That’s too bad. If these diviners or seers are indeed as exceptional and good as you say, maybe we could as one of them for a way we can use to deal maximum damage to the Umbro Star, King of Fangs, or both... the former being my personal target, of course.

Conall suddenly interrupted at that.

- Being once a trainee of the Order... it’s a long story, don’t ask, suffice to say I ain’t knighted or anything... I did manage to learn that there are certain...documents kept at cathedral-class church temples concerning wizards outside of the Order’s jurisdiction, as well as important monsters and similar stuff. So, if we visited a nearby cathedral and convinced the priesthood or... stole these documents, we’d probably be able to learn more about the seers and diviners on this part of the Western Continent.

Glaw squeezed him closer.

- Conall is so smart and well-informed!

Alessa didn’t share the enthusiasm.

- A... a cath...cathedral?
- Relax, Alessa, no one’s going to be marrying you.

- And what’s that supposed to mean!? I’m not sure if you knew, but taking a monstergirl to a freakin’ cathedral may be a bad idea!

- However, they may have the information we require there. We could work something out. Maybe exchange you for these information and then bail you out? Or tell them about the dangerous alliance we’ve just dealt with in these mountains so they send out their forces for nothing while giving us the information we need in gratitude?

- Look, Conall, now he’s all fired up. You’ll be stealing from priesthood and I will have to watch my skin. Glaw, too.

- Well, first things first, Keita. We need a short reprieve and our monetary reward. Alessa, since you annoyed Keita in the morning *and* messed up your big promised plan, you’ll be in charge of collecting today’s bodyparts for proof.

- You’re really milking that, ain’t you?

- Well, it’s better than having all of us do it or drawing, right?

- Very well, but if you attempt to address anything using any of these two events as leverage, you’ll be sorry you did.

Keita smiled and Deryn gave a small laugh.

- Sorry, it’s just that they’re badly beaten, I’m lazy as hell and I can’t imagine Glaw efficiently cutting anything.

Alessa nodded. Glaw suddenly livened and leveled her face with Conall’s, which looked weird since she was twisted unnaturally.

- So... about that bath, Conall...
The group has to go back to the city they've saved, and find a new goal for their travels as they finally seem to start meshing together. But just as they're done doing that, an even greater test of their unity and understanding looms on the horizon.

Chapter Notes

Nothing excessive as far as warnings go for the chapter. It contains the finish to the "Fangs of the Night" werewolf story arc, and the intermission between and start of the next point in the story.

The remaining three people sat outside the cottage, now with open windows and the light of the early afternoon clearly falling inside.

That was simply to give the man and monstergirl inside a little bit of privacy.

However, in the two men, especially the one actually related to the person inside, the need for privacy itself caused nervousness.

- If it wasn’t my brother, I’d probably suggest taking bets on whether or not she’ll keep her promise.
- Deryn-kun, she’s a monster. Obviously she’s going to try and attempt sexual intercourse, it’s in her nature.
- Hey, many of us actually *do* have self-control, you know! Don’t look down on monsters so much!
- Well, I don’t know of any that do, Alessa...
- You’re being mean! I didn’t try and force you into anything when you visited my dungeon, right? And it’d be keeping a tradition if I did, so I’ve shown remarkable self-control! Monsters do have it! It’s more like it’s pointless to exert it if you can do something pleasurable in the meantime.
- You’ve shown remarkable self control? So, you’d be fine with anyone as long as they managed to get that deep into your dungeon? Even if you have self control, your standards are odd. I’d say low, but I’d hate to inadvertedly call names here.
- It’s a lot more complicated than that! You look at it from that angle because of cultural differences!
- And because of cultural differences Conall-san is bound to have his underwear taken away as that slimegirl attempts to get her food.

Completely unsure if it was half-friendly bickering or a serious difference of opinion, Deryn decided to interrupt this exchange.

- Please, Keita, don’t make me more nervous! I’m already worried whether or not he’ll get hurt, scream or whimper when she goes over his bruises, whether she’ll know that he can drown or something...

- Wasn’t the bath originally your idea, Deryn? I’ve figured out it was by the way both you and Glaw acted while she was suggesting it. - Alessa asked.

- It was just one thing! Actually having her do this is another! And she was vehemently opposed to it at the beginning! “I can’t squeeze the white stuff out? What a moronic idea yada yada yada!”

- Well, compared to a human woman most monsters under the current demon lady bear a lot more affection for the male... extract. This is probably especially true for those that actually use it rather than spirit energy as a source of food, and that group includes slimegirls, so...

- *Please*, do you really have to tell me about it? I seriously figured you were a bit more modest than that!

- I figured that since we’re talking about this anyway... Human culture really has a lot of taboos and topics regarded as too embarrassing. You people would’ve been happier if you got rid of some of these inhibitions.

- My brother is about to bathe in *another living being* that is after his semen after having raped him to repeated ejaculations a few feet to my side while I could’ve done nothing while being treated similarly by her kinsman. Excuse me for having inhibitions.

- He’s got a point.

- Indeed he does. But if your religion didn’t strain our relationship so much despite the Demon Lady’s best intentions, there might never have been such a problem in the first place.

- There would’ve been other problems instead.

- Indeed. It’s not like monsters hold all the answers... But, essentially, it’s your chief deity that’s the biggest problem.

- Conall probably wouldn’t agree with you. He’d probably say that overly hungry slimes are the biggest problem.

- Maybe if the two sides formed a civilized society those monsters would be able to buy stored semen at shops... It’d certainly be a welcome development for them...

- You’re thinking in weird patterns again, Alessa.

- But, anyway, Deryn, stop worrying. I’m sure Glaw is stubborn enough to do this simply to prove that she can.
I certainly hope so.

If Deryn was nervous about Conall being “bathed” by Glaw, then his brother was almost petrified.

[“How did I agree to this again?”]

Glaw didn’t share the anxiety; if she did, hers was of different kind. She was jiggling and bouncing joyfully if restlessly and in impatience, waiting for Conall to strip. Her eyes were glued onto him the entire time, so any idea of this being less embarrassing was removed from his head.

Nervously, he dropped his armor to the side and started to remove the inner clothing.

Glaw was bending forward, cupping her head in her arms in a surprisingly human manner as her lower body sunk, removing her legs and making her an amorphous blob from the waist down. She suddenly stretched her back for a moment and just as suddenly the slime imitating a woman’s hair was broadened.

Blushing heavily, he got rid of the remaining top clothes, leaving his chest exposed, covered in several bruises, blue-and-black spots from blunt strikes, and a lot of sweat. Seeing him like this made Glaw visibly shiver in anticipation, which in turn made Conall shiver with something else entirely.

[“This is a bad idea. I’ve had this girl on top of me just over a dozen days ago, and she wanted to go “one more time” when I was dead tired. This is a very bad idea.”]

With a cough and a motion characteristic more to the well-endowed females, the so-called “eyes up here”, Conall nervously wondered how much clothing he wanted between his lower body and the slimegirl.

Well, frankly, he wanted his armour back.

But that was against the idea of bathing itself.
Slowly, he grabbed his bottom piece and took it off, leaving him with just the underwear - a plain grey braies that hung almost to his knees, giving him the last bit of modesty.

Glaw then did something that made him hesitate a moment about keeping it on - as he originally intended, that is, and then made him hesitate about going through with the idea.

Glaw’s lower excess slime, containing what was once her legs, suddenly lessened, while her hips and breasts somewhat increased. Then, there was another small influx of slime-mass into her breasts, increasing the size of her love-pillows while retaining their nearly oval shape.

- Uhhhh... how did you do that? And why?

- For more cushion of course! And how... hmmm, how to explain this... Us slimes have a certain mass allocation that feels “right” for each of us and allows us perfect control and balance. This spread of mass naturally slightly changes when we eat more and get closer to... mating stage, but most of the excess mass goes into excess substance. A slime can almost freely change her form, but that will break the perfect balance and make moving harder. I will not be doing much fighting here, so I figured you may like more cushion... - Glaw’s explanation sounded surprisingly mature and thorough for her usual light-heartedness. Conall was reminded that only parts of her attitude and mentality were apparently childish.

- More cushion... more cushion, you say... this isn’t fair...

- Okay, so get out of this thing and come here, all right? I will keep my promise, so just relax and let me clean you up.

- No no no no, this stays on.

- But, it will get in the way! And I am sure to get it wet!

- It stays on!

- Spoilsport! Killjoy!
- You're being greedy.

- Sorry! Sorry! Just come here however you like, okay?

Conall slowly walked over to the slimegirl, sprawled over the floor, her arms open wide, and wondered how the hell is this going to happen.

It’ll probably end up being somewhat erotic regardless of what he’d want it to end up as.

He wondered how to even sit in the “slime-bath”. Momentarily, he decided that sitting face to face would be out of the question - the slimegirl’s now-engorged chest growths would be offensively stuck right in front of him, or against his own naked chest.

On the other hand, they’d probably stick to his back if he sat the other way...

The slimegirl cocked her head while waiting for him. He decided to just get it all started and be over with it.

Turning his back to the slimegirl, he slowly started to sit.

Very slowly.

So slowly that the slime under him shifted and jigged impatiently. He felt a hand at his shoulder, gently pulling.

Then, a wetness at his back. He started to slowly sink into the slime, her hands wrapping around him as he did. He shivered - although the red slimegirl was warm compared to the blue ones, at that point she still seemed somewhat cool to the touch.

Something a bit warmer and oddly soft touched his back.
Glaw just held him like that, breasts to his back, arms around his waist and a puddle of formless slime under his butt starting at her hips.

She wasn’t moving for a while, so he started to lose patience somewhat.

- You know, that ain’t washing.

- I was just trying to get you to relax, okay? How do you feel? I am not too cold or uncomfortable or anything, right?

- Depends on what you mean by uncomfortable...

- You know, it will be a bit harder to move but I could shift to have more cushion somewhere...

- Nonono, th... that’s fine.

She ran her hands over his body and felt the excess slime envelop his calves and knees, sliding across them. Something throbbed in her breasts and he felt a weird, somewhat pleasant tingling feeling in his back.

- I will start to eat your... sweat... now, all right?

- You make it sound weird...

The tingling feeling from her breasts intensified, and he could also feel it at the bottom of his calves, as her slime shifted downwards.

- Ahh...
- Your body is fun to touch, Conall! Your sweat seems pretty tasty, too.

- Stop saying weird things! Ah... ahahahahahaha!

- What’s so funny?

Her slime started to shift over his feet, tickling him so much he couldn’t stop laughing.

- S... stop that!

- But it is a somewhat dirty and sweaty place too? What is so funny?

- It... hahahaha, it tickles!

- Tickles? Is it bad? Am I harming you?

- N...no, I just can’t stop laughing! Hahahahaha!

- Your laugh sounds pretty, so I will just keep doing it for a few moments.

Glaw’s breasts shifted along his back as she drew her body higher, stopping her stimulation of Conall’s feet and causing him to sink deeper into her excess mass, which soon started to suck along his back gently, removing the sweat. He looked up to see Glaw smiling at him and stretching her upper body until he was looking at her face through the soft orbs of her breasts. Her slime was slowly moving upwards as well, the pleasant massage and tingling feelings spreading over his body; Glaw was also gradually getting warmer, which provided another unique experience.

- H...hey, Conall, open your mouth.

- W...wait, what?
- Come on, I want to get some of your saliva, too. I'm really hungry!

- Glaw, this is going a bit too far. I'm certainly not kissing you or letting you move around in my mouth!

- Come on, I promise it'll be okay and nothing weird!

- This is already pretty weird! Just get on with the bat...

Suddenly, her body twisted unnaturally and he found himself with a mouthful of gooey breast, and a slimy hand stroking his head.

- There, there. I have seen other monsters do it outside and during fun time, so I guess it is okay to do it if we are not squeezing the white stuff out, anyway. The guys seemed to enjoy that, too.

Conall almost choked on her breast as he felt a familiar stirring in his loins. It didn’t help that Glaw’s slime was currently massaging his inner thighs.

The slimegirl was jiggling happily as she shifted her slime over his body, looking at him with a wide smile on her face while stroking his head and absorbing his sweat. The breast gave a weird, slightly foaming feeling in his mouth as he felt it somewhat dry up, or rather change consistency of his drool into something else. Bits of her slime were probably stuck inside his mouth making them rather moist anyway.

His underwear was wet and sticking to him. Glaw was massaging his legs even under it, and her hands were stroking and absorbing sweat off his belly. He was rock hard and she noticed all too early, though it has taken her a while.

He could swear he saw her eyes sparkle.

- Hahaha, it got big, it got big! It is a sign it wants to shoot off the white stuff, right? No worries...

Suddenly, a slimy appendage rose from the mass, snaking around his member from the outside as many small, gooey tendrils also crawled up his thighs. He could feel lukewarm slime crawling over
and engulfing his testicles as the slimy appendage outside his clothes pushed and rolled against his erection. He’d shout at her to stop but his head felt light. He hadn’t noticed it’s been a bit harder to breathe with a mouth full of slime-boob.

- Glaw will squeeze out as much as you want! I am really useful in moments like those! As long as there’s too much semen inside Conall I can help, so relax and let me ref...

Then, perhaps for one of the first times in her life, Glaw begun to think without speaking.

[“Wait, wait, Glaw, this is just what Deryn warned you about! You should not, can not! Conall has his mouth full so he cannot answer if he wants this or not! You are just doing what you want, you are breaking your promise and he might get mad! You need to ask him properly, he said he needs to wait with this, he said no semen for Glaw! Bad red girl, bad!”]

Conall felt a torturous halt in the slime’s progression over his manhood, stopped at about inch and a half, nearly but not exactly one fifth of his erect length. His balls were still held prisoner but were no longer rolled gently and the barely noticeable pulsing motion around them was also stopped. The strange feeling of his drool seeping into Glaw’s slimy boob stopped abruptly as she drew it out of his mouth.

- I am so very sorry! I... I do not know how it works, but you got hard back at the dungeon and it was rape, so... you getting hard does *not* mean I can start squeezing your semen out, right?

- It... doesn’t. It just means my body is ready...

- I apologize! I got caught up in the moment, but I did not forget about that promise!

Her slime... withdrew. Conall was left with a raging erection and a feeling of slightly loaded up balls. A large part of him, mostly located in his lower body, claimed it’d be *better* to be fed from without consent like this than left the way he was currently.

- And I got your small clothes wet... buuu... I did not mean to do anything bad, you know! It was bathing! I did not think it can get hard while you are bathing! Human men are so interesting!

- You... you know, Glaw, what we’re doing isn’t exactly me bathing in you... it feels weird, and you thrusting your... breast into my... my mouth... was going a bit too far.
- I just wanted to get some saliva and you said no kissing!

- This is even more intimate than a kiss, you know?

- I... I did not know that. Sorry. Sorry. You do not want me to squeeze out your semen, so I will leave it be. You are almost clean anyway.

Conall’s mouth opened before he could think. - A... actually...

He could still feel the residual slime over his balls, the wet feeling of his underwear sticking to his crotch making his boner even harder, precum leaking into the pants from the tip of his sizeable erection.

[“Don’t let your cock do the thinking!”]

He blushed heavily.

[“It’s a... misunderstanding. I suppose a human girl would be angry, flattered or thought you’re feeling amorous as well.”]

- N... nevermind.

- You are not mad at me, are you?

- No, it’s alright. You’ve never... done this before, right?

- You mean, feeding without absorbing any semen? No, I do not think I did. Human semen is really delicious and important in our diet, so we squeeze it out when we can... I never knew it was such an important thing to keep it for later when interacting... I am very sorry for being so forceful about feeding before, I just acted on impulse and you looked so cute and delicious and were so strong, I wanted a bit of you in me...

Conall blushed further and his erection twitched.
[“Almost had an accident there.”]

- Umm, Glaw?

- Yes?

- Can you please... *not* talk so much about what happened back there or why do you, supposedly, like me?

- Why?

- It’s considered bad manners and a bit embarrassing.

- I see. But, it is not like we will be together amongst humans any time soon. Humans do not like me.

- True, but... I like girls that can behave, and... well, mostly, I don’t want to be embarrassed too much, even in private. It makes me feel less of a man.

- I see... Hey, Conall, do you dislike me? You were a bit violent from the start with me, and you do not let me eat your semen, so you must not like me very much...

- I’m... confused, mostly. You know, humans interact with our girls... a lot differently. It’s just cultural differences. Don’t get depressed or worried over it.

- I see. If you tell me not to worry, I will not worry as much. I like you, so I don’t want you to get mad at me...

Her body shifted and loomed over his, making sure not to dip the tip of his dick inside anything. She leaned in and started running her hands over his chest and under his arms, and pretty soon also moved her head and started licking his body...
- Hey, you’re doing too much again!

- There is just a bit of sweat left, and I will get it quicker like this...

- At least... do it with your hands only, okay?

- Sure...

With a pout, and a quiet mumble that claimed he was something like ‘stingy’, she removed her lips from his body. His erection was twitching rapidly, and the fact that her breasts were hanging so, filling his field of vision whenever he looked downwards, wasn’t helping.

[“I’m getting horny over a piece of animated goo... how low...”]

Looking down and seeing his twitching erection, Glaw smiled. - I am glad you are so lively. It means when you let me feed on you, if you do at all some time, I will be getting lots of food. I knew you were a great guy. You seem so... noble and passionate and healthy.

[“So, they assume a guy is good in bed... errr, can give them good food over how the guy *acts*? That’s surely different...”]

- It is rather big...

- Glaw, damnit, stop talking about it! And stop looking at it! Just finish that bath, okay?

- Yes, sorry.

[“She’s a piece of goo piece of goo slimy piece of goo slimy bobbing jiggling jello piece of goo with nice breasts piece of goo with nice breasts and personality she’s the nicest piece of goo that I ever met and she wants my semen more than other people’s and her boobs can go pop and grow and she likes me and Alessa said...”]

Glaw nuzzled her head against his chest, this time not licking.
- You are so warm... and this thing in your chest pounds so strongly... Karia always told me, Folha and Redder that it is a good thing when a guy has a strong thing in his chest...

- I don’t know these people, you know.

- Ah, right. Redder was a slime, like me. She had no name, and Folha had trouble remembering our names at the start, so Karia said she should call us red and redder. Because, you know, the other slime was redder than me. Karia was a small flying green human-like thingy, and Folha was a shy strange small girl with a big flower on her head. I’ve hanged around with them until the bad humans came and locked us up. Karia escaped. They were taking me somewhere in a small jar, it was so damn small I tell you, it hurt. But they passed where Alessa’s cemetery was, and apparently Alessa was pissed over how they were clothed or something and beat them up badly. But she kept me in that damn jar until she got me locked up in her dungeon, and released me only then! She was almost as bad as these humans!

- They were probably serving the Order and they took you so they could find out more about slimes or sell you or something. Come to think of it, how old are you?

- Old? Old is that thing when you’ve seen more sunsets, right? I could not count since I spend a lot of time with Alessa in her dungeon, and I got bored counting sunsets very early after I started when I was with Karia and the others. Sorry for boring you.

- No problem. It’s good that Alessa wasn’t the one who originally captured you, it’d make her a bad person.

- She is bad! She wants you for herself even though I have seen you first!

- I don’t think she does.

- She has to, that is why she follows you guys! I mean, you are better than your brother or the scary guy, so she has to be after you!

- You know, Glaw, there are two important things you need to learn. First of all, Alessa may have a different reason for following us. Second of all... There is such a thing called “taste in men” or “taste in women”. It’s a bit difficult to explain, but just because you like someone does not mean other people will. It’s the reason why Deryn doesn’t like, um... Legless girls, for example.
Glaw’s expression suddenly turned inspective, then brightened.

- So, that means I will not have to fight every other woman we meet because they also like you?

- N...no, in fact, I don’t think you’ll have many rivals at all. Girls quickly stopped liking me when I decided duty, common good or family is more important than gold, looks, having fun all the time or being well-known.

- Family? Family is important to you?

- I only realized that because of Deryn. In a way, for a long time, I ignored them far too much. It was the circumstances in which I and Deryn met after a long time that made me realize how much I treasure my family. It caused me to break contact with the last two girls that got along with me.

- So, if I and Deryn get along... you and I can stay longer together and you will like me more?

- Well, it would help, yes.

She gave him a smile so radiant it made his heart beat faster.

- I will treasure things important to Conall, so I will get along with your brother. I have to thank him, anyway.

- All right. Are we... done?

- Yes, I think we are done.

[“Alessa was right. She is different, but this is not a pile of goo. This is a person. I have no idea what she sees in me, but she seems so determined... She goes wrongly about it, but so did Deryn...”]

- It’s... a good thing we had this talk, awkward as the start may have been. But, let me dry up, the
others are probably getting impatient.

- Okay. I’ll wait outside.

Conall nodded as he reached for a few dries pieces of cloth to remove the residual slime with.

He was probably going to get blue balls over this “bath”.

*******************************

Seeing Glaw move out of the house alone made Deryn shiver and twitch nervously.

- Hey, slime... he’s... he’s still alive, right?

- Of course! We just bathed him, that is all. He needs to dry off and change his underwear, though.

- Ha, ha... change his underwear, of course... mind telling me what THE HELL DID YOU DO THAT FORCES HIM TO CHANGE HIS UNDERWEAR?!

- My slime stuck to it. It got all wet and sticky, so he needs to change underwear. But, Deryn, I managed to resist! We did not squeeze any semen out. It was so incredibly frustrating, and my stomach would be grumbling if I had one, but I did it! Are you proud of me?

- What... do you need my approval for? You didn’t accomplish anything yet, anyway. And I told you, I still don’t approve of you being in any sort of relationship with my brother.

Alessa smiled. - Isn’t it more customary for parents or older siblings to say these kinds of things about younger siblings, though?

- That’s true. Although, Conall-san does have a say in the matter, personally I won’t approve of Deryn-kun’s relationship with anyone, much less a monster. He’s still too young.
- I am seventeen already! And how did this conversation turn to MY relationships all of a sudden?

- You need to wait till you're eighteen at least. Otherwise, you may grow up to be a weird person.

- I'm already an adult, okay? And again, how is it about my relationships?!

- We’re merely worried, Deryn. You’re a growing man, almost an adult already, yet you’re more interested in your brother’s love life than your own! Clinging so much to a sibling of the *opposite* gender would be considered odd and improper, and to make it worse, you’re both men!

- W...What the hell are you suggesting, snake-woman!

- See, how defensive you’re getting? Maybe it’s because your mother didn’t cuddle you up to her breasts enough as a baby. Or she was underendowed.

- My mother’s endowments has nothing to do with it, fine? I like women just fine, I’m merely worried about my brother dating a monstergirl rapist!

- I’m just messing with you. In fact, by slimegirl standards, it’d seem you were the only one getting raped in that dungeon. Conall was just “fed upon”.

- It’s the same freakin thing if they use his cock to do weird stuff that causes orgasms, right?

- Weird stuff? Deryn, there’s nothing weird about putting your penis inside a woman! Why would you say it’s weird!?

Keita apparently had enough of this. - Just shut up, both of you. We simply need to wait for Conall-san to get out of there and move. Deryn-kun’s preferences and inhibitions about sex and Alessa’s lack of these are not important at the moment.

- So mean...

- Yeah, right, let’s just wait for Conall and get out of here.
Conall finally came out of the cottage, walking slightly weirdly but appearing to be in good health and condition. His armour was on and he seemed clean, in a way, refreshed, but also stressed somehow.

-Brother! She didn’t do anything weird or bad, did she?

-N...no, not really.

-Thank goodness!

Keita rose, grabbed his weapons, attached them to his belt and started to walk.

-Well, we’re all together, so let’s just get out of here. I must confess your decision to accept that slime’s offer has lowered my opinion of you a little bit, Conall-san.

-I’ve only done so because she required to be fed, okay?

-That’s why I’ve only said “a little bit”. Let’s move out.

He went forward, with Glaw clearly pouting at his words, but following in Deryn’s wake as he also followed the swordsman, after giving his brother another worried look, as if checking if everything was alright.

-Keita has certain... issues with sexuality and monsters as well. I’m sure he misunderstood this as you holding thoughts about giving in ever since Glaw raped you in my dungeon. Forgive his attitude for now, you’ve done a good thing. Thank you. -Alessa consoled Conall.

-What exactly happened to him?
- Well, he didn’t tell you himself, so it’s not my place to tell. Suffice to say, he got a bit... broken. To be perfectly honest, one of my reasons for traveling with him is checking whether that can be repaired.

- So selfless, but why are you telling me this? - Conall looked at her askew.

- Well, we’re companions now, right? You’ve listened to my advice on slimegirls, and it looks like Glaw giving you a “bath” while withholding from getting your semen was actually Deryn’s idea.

Conall’s jaw dropped. - His idea? But he seemed so worried and opposed to it!

- Well, he is your brother. He probably tried to make everything work out, simply, but was worried it won’t and that Glaw would end up overdoing things. You two may be silent about this, but you make a pretty good family...

- Well, it’s a change from a few years back. I do think I should scold him about thinking such thoughts... Let’s go. Glaw is giving me chilling stares.

- I believe these are meant for me. - Alessa sighed.

- You two seem to be awful companions for each other, yet you looked out for her, and now you tell me about Keita. I didn’t know there were selfless monsters like this.

- Oh, I have plenty of selfishness in me, trust me. It’s just that nobody can feel good or happy about their lives unless they balance altruism and egoism well. Or at least, I think so.

With that, they both went silent, and travelled in the wake of their other companions.

The travel back also required a few days’ worth.

On the last day, they had nearly nothing left to eat except one piece of dried meat each (Glaw was hanging even closer to Conall, glomping him whenever he started to get sweaty, which annoyed Deryn and Keita greatly, but amused Alessa).
Finally, they reached the walls of the city, with it being Keita’s and Deryn’s turn to carry the chopped off pieces of werebeasts around - they had a sizeable collection that they decided to split into two.

Glaw was waiting a bit further by a small stream, sad to be separated from Conall again. She forced them to promise that they’ll be getting back on track tomorrow at the latest.

Suffice to say, the City Guard higher-ups desired to see them, now assured that there was a “hella lot” werebeasts killed by the four travellers. They listened to the story - a cultist of some creepy, shady “deity” was gathering the werebeasts along these lands and apparently managed to control their movements, thus increasing their level of dangerousness considerably. They also revealed the location where they battled the werebeasts, so that the city guard could check for themselves, and asked for quarters for the night as well as a permission to leave as quickly as possible, explaining themselves that they “heard about a well-paid mercenary job that they’d like to discuss and sign up for as quickly as possible”. The captain of the guard listened to their requests, but told them he might be forced to put bounties on them for fraud if the story turned out to be untrue. The four just nodded in unison.

The ceremony of rewarding them was supposed to be held tomorrow at noon. Supposedly, it involved even higher badges of honour, so Alessa asked for a modified badge so that she could use it as a clasp for her cloak instead of looking for new clothing they could put the badge on before they even got the monetary award.

The Echidna surprised everyone by asking to be allowed to share one room with Keita for the night. She insisted her motivations were pure and that she merely needed to discuss something with the half-Zipangu swordsman, and given Keita’s recent attitude towards her, Conall and Deryn were convinced nothing sexual would take place that night.

Alessa had no such plans. Instead, a serious conversation was about to take place.

- There... there are two things we have to discuss, Keita-k... Anyway, I doubt this would be the case, but I’m not stupid. You had previous ties to the Order, so I really have to ask you something.

- That being? - Keita asked.

- Keita, you... you do not intend to exchange me and Glaw for information, right? I'm sure that you've built up some rapport with the Order, so if you gave them two monstergirls at once they'd
probably allow you access to even the most hidden intelligence. Given that you had your life saved by the Order, it wouldn’t be surprising if you felt you owed them such an exchange and immediately sided with them, deciding to sell us to...

- Would a man who shares the Order’s ideology accept travelling with not one, but two monsters? - Keita cut her off, a sarcastic note in his voice.

- I never said you share their ideology, but you did work for them due to a debt. If you still feel sympathetic with them, if they offer such a deal or if you still felt that debt wasn’t fully paid, then... - Alessa trailed off, her nervousness clear.

Keita sighed deeply. - I might’ve ended up growing stronger due to their healing after the heavy damage that... instance dealt to my body, while “normal” healing might’ve left me unable to become a warrior or even anything truly physically active, but make no mistake, what they gave me was no “miraculous cure”. I’m addicted to the drug they used to help me. The withdrawal symptoms leave me a wreck, anyway. If you really read a lot into it, you might think they’ve done the therapy that way precisely because they hoped I’d become their tool to fight with the monsters for the remainder of my life. There’s no question about it - my debt to them was paid in full, and I feel obligated to help them no more. My life is my own and not theirs. The Order is too restrictive and uniform in their actions. They’re simply a bunch of xenophobes who cannot accept races that aren’t human, be they friendly or unfriendly... Thought I here they’re trying to recruit elves and half-elves now, too. Many monsters are a threat based on their instincts alone, but equally many may be a threat simply because the Order alienated them. There are werebeasts on this very continent and the Umbro Star’s spawn runs rampant in the east, yet they’re so caught up in fighting against the monsters and any potential monster-human friendly relations that by the time they’ll win, they’ll be too weak to resist the real threats.

- Well, that sure sounds comforting, but...

- We’re companions. You didn’t sell us out or fight on the side of the enemy when we went against these goblins in the mountains, and you gave it a lot of effort to help us track down and defeat these werebeasts. I definitely trust you more than a bunch of Order goons, so just calm down, Alessa, even if we had our... differences. Surely you don’t think I’m a man who’d betray his companion and repay her aid in such a way?

- N... no. I guess I... overreacted. - It was Alessa’s turn to sigh. - I... don’t have fond memories of the Order as you can imagine, so going to a cathedral... is troublesome. You also must know that I probably won’t be able to walk on the inside without them detecting me; experienced priests and “holy” knights can easily detect a presence that has demonic energy in them unless said presence is extremely skilled or simply a natural at masking itself. In fact... - She looked at him with a troubled gaze. - Even you might be in danger, given the...stain on you.
- It’ll be fine. At worst, you’ll remain outside of the cathedral. We could leave you, Glaw and someone else behind for safety and then attempt to get the informations we need.

- I guess we’ll figure out how to find a way to work around this once we get there. However, there is another issue, just as important.

- That being?

- You’re going to continue making that... drug of yours, right? We should probably start having me learn the process. As quickly as possible, just in case.

- Are you sure you even want to learn this? I mean, this is private stuff. To you, it’s essentially useless knowledge and there’s no way to tell if you’re even going to be any good at it, so during “tests” we could be wasting resources and...

- Keita, if you get hurt or are unable to procure the drug yourself, the withdrawal symptoms will be a real bother, right?

- Depending on my state, they could even be… dangerous. - Keita reluctantly admitted after a few moments of clearly troubled thought.

- Precisely. That’s why you should get some help with this... “private stuff”. Also, if you’re injured, having another person give you a slightly lowered dosage will probably help with lowering your addiction, so it’s another advantage.

- Aren’t you just being a control freak or something?

- I simply want to help.

- Are you sure? What about...

- Relax. I want to learn about this. I want to be of use. And no worries. I’m actually no slack at
Alchemy nor cooking, so this should land somewhere I can deal with expertise-wise.

- I hope you aren’t just bragging. - Keita answered, which made Alessa smirked in return.

- We shall see. Now, let’s get to work, I have things to learn.

After a while, Alessa started to actually grasp how to properly prepare the drug and the dosage for the variety for drinking, but they decided to go to sleep and put it off for later.

The beds were separate, obviously. As she slithered onto hers, Alessa chuckled. - It seems a bit cool.

- As in, not warm?

- Mhmmm. Chilly.

- Hrmrmn... Aahhhlessa-san, is this a warning?

[“Tired much, boy? You’re adding honorifics now.”]

- No-pe. Can’t promise I won’t start crawling to other people’s beds this time, but my conduct will otherwise be flawless. That I swear.

He gave a small laugh at that.

- No, seriously. Once again, I’m sorry.

- No need to apologise so much. You’ve made yourself useful and it seems that you genuinely want to help, we both reacted too rashly in our own ways, so leave it at that. - was Keita’s response. - You didn’t… lash out at me constantly making a big deal out of it, either. So, I should apologize for my behavior… but I’d rather just leave it at that when it seems we’re even. You’ve proved your honesty after all.
- So, we should let bygones be bygones?

- Yup.

- You're really open minded. You'll have to watch your back, most of monsterkind will interpret this as an “attack” sign. And I don’t mean you'll have any broken bones. Well, you could, if you get my drift.

- So, I should be less open-minded?

- Not at all. You'll just have to live with being popular if you show it left and right.

- Scary.

- That depends on the point of view. Thank you for allowing this ripened Echidna a bit of frivolousness without stuff blowing up.

- Maybe it’s just because I want to sleep already.

- Right, right. Sorry.

- Goodnight, Alessa.

- Goodnight, Keita-kun.

He let it slip this time. Or maybe he didn’t hear, care, or grasp the meaning.

Alessa woke up early as she felt her body hit the floor.
The sound itself must have woken Keita up, because he turned suddenly to the Echidna.

Her upper body sticking out of her bed as if she attempted to crawl out of it might or might not have been read as another “reflexive” attempt to crawl to the nearest human source of warmth, or maybe it was just her moving around in the a bit too small bed. - *Ummm, good morning. Did I wake you up?*

- I’m not sure. It doesn’t seem like I was about to sleep much longer, so even if you did it’s not unfortunate.

- Young men need their sleep.

- And you don’t?

- I’m used to staying up through a night.

- Likewise. Well, let’s gather our things and prepare for this award ceremony or whatever.

They both went silent for a moment as they went about re-clothing, Alessa putting on her cloak and Keita his armour.

- It feels... weird, you know. I never thought I was going to be rewarded by humans twice in such a short period of time.

- If they knew you were a monster, the only “reward” you’d have would either be a slightly better treatment as a prisoner or banishment instead of sending you to the Order or killing you outright for just being what you are.

- You’re probably right... there aren’t many settlements outside of Demon Lands where humans and monsters live together peacefully. This is still the territory of the Twin Kingdoms, so there’s likely none here.

- Well, your kind sometimes reacts badly to human women, but... in Zipangu, almost all settlements are like that. Not counting the “monstrosities”, some demons, and whoever’s too aggressive or not intelligent enough to live socially, monsters are almost all accepted.
- Sounds like a good place.

- It was. Until Umbro Star. Which is why I’m trying to do what I’m trying to do.

- And I’ll help you as much as I can.

- I’ve recently started wondering if we’d need more people to accomplish anything of note. I mean, I’d never be able to take down that group of werebeasts alone, so maybe it was wrong from the beginning to go on my own for so long.

- Maybe it was. But, adding humans to the mix requires that they’d be tolerant to monstergirls. Adding monsters would require them to honour your, Conall’s and Deryn’s wishes in terms of sexual relations or lack of those. Adding anything else to the group seems unlikely. For now, we’ll just have to work with that quintet, it’d seem.

- Yes. Maybe it’ll improve teamwork and such. Removing the werebeasts from the area is already a step forward, if not against the enemy I hoped it would be... Anyway, let’s go.

The award ceremony wasn’t much to speak of, although it’d be certainly enjoyable to someone that craved fame.

Which meant Conall’s ego was stroked a little, Keita held no expression again, Alessa was worried about someone with magical talents sensing she was a monster and Deryn actually attempting to be as non-visible as possible, since around these lands there apparently were people who knew about the previous bounty on his head. Since Sela wasn’t in the crowd this time, or at least, not visible - a lot more people came when they learned their lands were pretty much free of the werebeasts problem - he enjoyed himself even less than before.

Anyway, they were recognized as the “heroes” of the city and a sculptor even asked if they wanted to stay so he could make a statue or at least bust sculptures before they left. They refused, intent on leaving as soon as possible, though Conall was seemingly flattered by the idea.

Their names would probably be known for a while, though, which is why they only introduced themselves with their first names to the people of town as they were given their well-earned recognition. Alessa was reluctant to do even this.
Deryn asked one of the citizens to hand a small thank you parting letter along with a few coins from their award to Sela and soon, they were gathering their things up, preparing to leave. Glaw wouldn’t want to be kept waiting. Before long, the group was already back on their way, getting their red slimegirl companion as they moved out, the sounds of the patrols that were supposed to check whether or not the werebeast threat was as reduced as they claimed left behind. Deryn paused to watch them disappear into the forest, towards where their group had fought the werenes.

[“I sure hope we’ve got them good. Otherwise, I’ll be having yet another bounty on my head.”]

He sighed.

[“This is crazy. I’m traveling with two monsters. If word gets out, I’ll have more trouble than a bounty on my head, and more girls will get into the area where the nicest thing they do to me is warn me where I could be caught and put to “justice”.]

Another sigh.

[“Good thing Conall and the rest do not know about that possibility... though he probably suspects we’re still not safe *everywhere*. Or maybe he forgot.”]

The stop for rest was only taken very late into the night, as they had a long travel towards the cathedral to overcome.

Finally, they settled down and went to sleep. Alessa was lying on her back, eyes wide open, occasionally tossing glances towards the camp fire and the way it’s light was reflecting off Glaw’s surface, making her gleam and glisten in the overall darkness of the camp.

The change in her was small, in fact, quite close to inconceivable, but for someone who’s seen the numerous ends of the spectrum of a monstergirl’s demonic energy saturation and levels, she was capable of recognizing it.

[“I’m... slipping. Might have something to do with the presence of three sources of spirit energy, two practically untouched, or it just might be because I’m using so much offensive magic, or both, but... I worry I might slip.”]
She rose from the bedding. She only got a modicum of sleep and just some proper rest, but it’d have to do. After all, they weren’t about to let her fight humans, neither were they going to do it themselves.

[“They wouldn’t allow me to force myself on one of the Order no matter how bad I got. I’m not sure I’d be able to. And here... taken, too young and confused, and too... too...”]

- Ehhh, fuck it.

- The snake woman is swearing. And here I thought you always attempted to act ladylike and all.

The echidna just smirked at the red slime.

- We are monsters. There’s a limit to how ladylike we can act. There’s always a limit to everything we do, in fact... Get some rest, Glaw. I need to have a talk with the person who organized this entire little trip.

- I really hope you mean the scary guy and not my Conall.

- Oh, no. A true lady also knows when to give up, and there wasn’t much to give up on, anyway. I never... never considered any of these three potential partners, to be perfectly honest. At this point, they’re all too unapproachable and too... different from what I’ve found before. Anyway, let me talk with Keita in private. You can just rest.

- All right. Your choice.

She slithered and waited a moment over the body of the swordsman whose vendetta - or maybe it was desire for justice and protection of others in contrast to how he wasn’t protected until it was too late - started that journey.

[“Come to think of it... I’ve never gotten a good look at that left hand of his. He keeps it covered at practically all times, except for maybe bathing and when he sleeps alone. Rarely seen either case happening... no, I’ve never seen him bathe.”]

She just realized how few baths any of the group had during their journey, and suddenly had to acknowledge that she simply got used to the smell.

[“... This... will have to be remedied. That aside... Was it that badly wounded? What kind of renegades can the Zipangu monsters degrade into when their lust overtakes them...”]
She sighed.

[“No, what kind of horrors can monsters degrade into when lusts overcomes us... Our hand might be being forced, occasionally, but does “reeducating” humans really gives us the right to forcefully sate our own lust while slowly increasing theirs?”]

She wrapped her tail at one of his feet and shook him out of the sleep gently.

- Get up, Keita. We need to talk.

- I remember you telling me not a long time ago that I could use more sleep...

- You’ll get your sleep just fine the next night. I’ll make sure of that. But, there are a few things we need to discuss.

Keita ceased to complain and rose from his bed. He cringed the moment he put some weight on his left arm, but it was barely noticeable; Alessa *did* notice, but since it appeared minor and they weren’t that close, she did not want to suffocate him with care.

- We need to make you a fresh supply of that … ointment, potion, essence, however you want to call and are going to use that “drug”. I still need to learn a bit in case you need my help.

- Why care so much? It’s not like a situation where I’m lying down on the bed in need of medical attention that only you can provide since you somehow came out unscathed is... likely.

- You never know. We’re going up against a large number and many kinds of opponents. If you’re suddenly fighting monsters, I may be unable or unwilling to help... and again, if you fight against those tentacle beasts and get too enthusiastic, it may turn out that you’ll be the one getting the worst of the damage.

- And you care about such instances because?

- I wouldn’t set to travel with you if I considered you so expendable, or didn’t care. If you worry my motivation for such care is unclear, impure, or non-existent, well... You’re one of the few men that recognized the threat of tentacle horrors to humankind, one of the only who knows werebeasts and monsters are separate issues, one of the only willing to travel with a monster despite your previous bad experiences no less, not to mention... you’re strong. Not many humans can stand up to different kinds of monsters and werebeasts and come out so clearly on top. If we remove the personal factor... at the very least, you’re an incredibly invaluable resource to us, monsters.

- I’d rather you didn’t say that.

- Sorry. Let’s get to it, we should be done before Glaw decides she had enough rest.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, as he prepared the ingredients, before Alessa spoke.
- I’d like to ask you a personal question, but I worry about offending you or bringing back painful memories.

- Go ahead and ask. It’s not like I wasn’t offended by you before, or like I’m the only one with painful memories.

- Deryn.

- Yes, Deryn-kun. He also lost his purity from a monster’s rape, and he carries some sort of... burden from before. It’s either really light or he makes it very hard to notice, though.

- Agreed... Ummm, Keita. Before... before the Umbro Star appeared, have you ever been involved with someone? Romantically, or... more than as friends, I mean?

He raised an eyebrow, and, after a short break answered, softly and without much conviction, but clearly hoping that’d be the end of it.

- I fail to see why that’d be an information necessary or of any interest to you.

- And yet, if it wasn’t at least one of the two, I wouldn’t have asked.

- Didn’t I mention I was a virgin before that night?

- Virginity is one thing. Feelings and relationships are another.

- You’re a... bit different than what I’d expect for a member of a species supposed to wait inside dungeons until someone suitable lives up to their expectations just so they can have sex with them. With an ideology of survival and reproduction of the fittest, one would expect someone less interested in stuff like love or less acknowledging of damage to a person.

Alessa smiled, a bit shyly.

- W...well, not all monsters are uniformly the same. For example, amongst echidnas, there are those that have what... Some vampires and succubi call it a “hero” sense.

- ... You’ll have to explain?

- Some Echidnas are capable of quite accurately sensing or predicting a human’s physical, spiritual, or, in rare cases, overall growth rate. Thus, they’re able to judge who’d make a good mage or a fighter or such. Some of these echidnas actually do... what we’re doing, traveling together, only that they hide themselves until they have trained a human sufficiently to meet their expectations and then, they seduce him. Word is some human heroes have been lost to the history that way...

- Is that why you’re traveling with us? Because you think...

- Oh, nonono. I... don’t think I’ve ever had that special sense. If I did, I lost it due to an unfortunate accident some time ago. My belief in your skill has the very same basis a human’s or any other monsters’ would. But, well, even amongst the echidnas...

- There are those that differ from the rest.

- Yes. Now... Excessive lust, lasciviousness, maybe even promiscuity are virtues amongst the
monsters of the West, so... so my self-control was frequently being looked down upon. I’ve been practicing it for a long time now, because there’s been an event in my life that made my standards... much, much higher, but... I still slip occasionally. By monster standards and echidna standards alike, I’m an oddball. While our desire for powerful mates wasn’t lessened by our Lady taking the throne of monster-lordship, since there weren’t going to be weird breeding or mutation experiments going on anymore, Echidnas became the only potential source of new monsters... so our sex drive received a boost. Normally, when an Echidna meets a worthy male, it has to end in sex... not to mention if she had a steady consort.

- But you... didn’t even touch me, until recently, that is.

- I got... comfortable, my control got weak. It’s easy to avoid something when you’re never presented with the opportunity to get it. I think that with three males around and me resisting my natural instincts for so long... my control... slipped. It’s why I got so oppressive from a natural reaction from your body. I didn’t mean anything wrong back then... That’s why I keep apologizing... anyway. You still haven’t answered my question.

- Your concern is noted and again, apology accepted... As for the question... It’s as much as a simple no. I didn’t have many friends, not to mention female ones... To be honest, when I started my adventuring days, I figured that girls my age were too immature and unprepared for... stuff like this, so that part of my life could wait. I didn’t have a strong need to connect to anyone... and I don’t remember any type of sex drive already. So, I just let them be, waited for a different time. Suffice to say, I’m not at all interested by now.

- Not at all? Aren’t you lonely? Or maybe you don’t think of this even practically? Humans could probably find it useful if your bloodline continued, with you being strong as you are...

- There are others. Stronger, more used to this... and less obsessed. So, that “practical” approach means little. Much of my strength came from that addictive treatment anyway...

- That treatment was only so effective because your body could survive those attacks before and grow stronger from enduring them. If there’s a gift hidden behind the pain... it’s very often a gift of strength.

- Gift? I fail to see a gift in that. There’s a price to pay and a responsibility for what I’ve gained, and any other life purposes were washed away, so...

- Unfortunately, such things happen. Suffering is a fact of life. People learn to deal with it... or they lose it, and fall. You’ve been wounded and scarred deeply, but you didn’t fall. You didn’t keep wounding other people just because you’ve been hurt, neither you tried to simply stay in your own little world and avoid the issue. More so, you didn’t fail to see people in the kin of those that hurt you, even though you’re a different species... You moved and decided to do something about it... this torment you’ve been through reforged you into what you are now. I can’t judge the torment itself. I can’t imagine what you were before. I can only look at what you are now, and there’s little wrong with the picture. If you feel regret for what happened, that’s where love and friendship comes in, helping you find new meanings and joys, so you should probably reconsider.

- Well, if wisdom comes with age, since monsters often live a lot longer than humans... I guess there’s bound to be a few like you.

- Haha, come on! I’m neither that old nor “wise”. I’m just trying to get it past your defenses that what you’ve been through wasn’t for nothing, and that you’re allowed to seek help and refuge in other people. Human, monster, or anything.
- Sure, here I go making a tentacle horror friend.

She stuck out her tongue before responding.

- We don’t know if they are intelligent. If they are... they lack a conscience, or have an incredibly alien mind. You can’t befriend such creatures if they don’t take first steps.

He chuckled.

- Funny. I guess both humans and monsters often think that about one another.

- Maybe. But, anyway... At the very least, once your big quest is done, you should seek help of sorts. Living alone for the rest of your life when you’d have so much to offer is just too sad.

[“That is, unless I somehow manage to help you get out of your shell during said quest.”]

- You make me sound like some sicko.

- That’s because not wanting contact with other people is, in and of itself, an illness of sorts.

- I’ll... consider it. And thank you for trying to cheer me up and boost my ego at once.

- No problem. As long as you keep doing like until now, you can count on more.

- You make me sound like someone craving attention now.

- Oh, relax, women crave it all the time, even with guys like you who deserve getting it. But, women are creatures you should take some pleasure, relaxation and delight from... and by interacting with them. You should enjoy spending quality time with a real woman that cares about you... at least once. Now, let’s get to that drug, shall we?

During the stops on the travel to the cathedral, Keita occassionally requested some privacy, apparently to administer the drug. As Alessa expected, he preferred to use it as an ointment rather than a drink; drinking it would probably create problems with getting the dosage just right so he wouldn’t overdose, and that might require less time, but more privacy.

She made sure he got his sleep after that night, always insisting that they gather up their things first before waking him up when possible; Deryn even started giving her funny looks from the sudden flood of care over the half-Zipangu swordsman. Alessa didn’t mind much what they *thought* her and Keita’s relation was based on - if Keita ever revealed to them what exactly was the reason for his vendetta, they’d understand. If he didn’t want in-camp rumours, all he had to do was being honest about his asexuality - or more like being sexually frigid, something that Alessa half-hoped, half-
suspected his condition really was.

It took them a few days to visit a tavern, “Under the Holy Tower”, which apparently was welcoming people travelling to and from the cathedral... and barely serving anything a “normal” tavern would at all. There was a limit on alcohol per person per week, they offered traditional religious dishes rather than normal ones...

But all this wasn’t what interested the group. They had their food now. What they needed was information.

And outside of the tavern, they met a curious person... thankfully with Glaw already hiding and Alessa already almost finished assuming her human form, so no harm was done.

Said person was an adult woman with a hawk seated on her arm, apparently doing some training. When greeted, she introduced herself as Dianna, and her hawk as Sinal. Asked, she openly proceeded to explain her presence here.

- Well, you see, me and Sinal are one of the more trusted astringers... ahh, an Astringer is someone who trains hawks or eagles, as opposed to falcons... around here. Hunting parties, message delivery, whatever it is, my little Sinal here was trained to handle most of it, and fast. The two of us have been hired by a group of knights that passed nearby, heading for the cathedral. You see, apparently, there’s been some problems out there. You see, apparently many of the priests and nuns requested a transfer out of the cathedral into more rural areas recently, the latest report from the cathedral was “extremely chaotic” and came soon after the transfer requests, and after the recent religious mass, there were some disappearances of both priests and the praying alike. This has caused the Church and the Order to worry, naturally, and they send a group of knights to deal with it. Theories include a ghost attempting to possess the priests and a disease, both of which would cause some panic and, if kept a secret, prompt the priest and nuns transferring earlier.

- Sounds like a serious deal.

- Yup, pretty much. There’s even been a priest and a Golden Shield member with the group, though it seems one of the two White Scythe templars is in charge of the mission.

Alessa crooked an eyebrow.

- Golden Shield? White Scythe?

That prompted an eyebrow directed right back at her. Keita intervened quickly.

- Pardon us. Me and my sister here spend most of our lives in the land of our grandfathers, Zipangu, and she isn’t accustomed to much of the culture here, including your knight orders.
Dianna nodded.

- Indeed, but she may want to learn. I hear people from Zipangu are frequently heretics and some of the Templars may be at their wits end if they hear her speak in any way favorable towards the monsterrkind, so watch out.

- Of course.

- Well, that being said, I’m here to make sure any messages they give is quickly delivered by Sinal to their headquarters. Be it asking for backup, describing the situation... or, if they don’t come back here within five days, I’m supposed to deliver the message that they’re missing in action.

- I see... that’s unfortunate. It probably means my sister won’t be able to study western religious writings like she wanted to and all...But, Sir Conall, I assume you’d like to aid your knight colleagues in finding out what happened?

Conall smiled at being given a title.

- Yes... yes indeed. If you could lend us your help, friend, I’d be really grateful.

- Onee-san, just in case this is dangerous, I think you should go back and tell our cart driver that we’ll probably either be going back or staying here for a while.

- Fine, Keita. I’ll go back and tell Glow-san just that. You be careful out there.

- Sure thing.

Deryn almost chuckled at one lie being piled atop of the other, but managed to control himself until “Glow-san”, at which point he hid the chuckle with a cough.

Alessa went back to get Glaw and lead her through a less-used path to the cathedral, which was nearby, though the sun was already setting.

The trio of men moved alone for now, and faster than the slimegirl and the echidna, too, due to being able to simply take the short route.

- You’ll have to explain us some things about these knight orders once we’re reunited, Conall-san. It might help us realizing what we’re to expect.

- Sure... if it’ll be neccessary. Are you sure bringing Glaw and Alessa here is a good idea, though?

- We’re not sure what’s happening here. If it is indeed a magical disease or ghost infestation, Alessa will be the person to ask. Of course, if we intend to help the knights, the two of them will have to be left outside.
- That’s obvious. They should catch up soon... I think I can see a tower from the cathedral already. Let’s slow down a bit.

They did walk more slowly for a while... until they heard an odd sound travelling through the empty air, with the sun already almost completely set.

It sounded like a loud feminine groan of sorts. Deryn and Keita looked around quickly, but Conall was almost stunned.

[“It it me, or did it sound a little... erotic?”]

Keita didn’t waste any time upon the second shout, identifying its source and rushing in, expecting a damsel in distress, a wounded female knight, or whatever. Deryn followed behind more cautiously, looking around for any possible dangers.

Conall was still considering what to do.

[“Isn’t a cathedral’s vicinity kind of a bad place to have sex?”]

Finally, Keita jumped into the clearing where the sound came from, ready to take on whatever threatened the woman or to help the woman herself.

He expected a monster, a bandit, a wild animal, or anything.

What he was faced with was his nightmare incarnate.

A quite sizeable, slime-covered tentacle lashed out onto him, smacking him in the chest, leaving a painful, wet welt and throwing him off balance only for two other tentacles to also slither through the air at astounding speed, grabbing his leg and his arm, immobilizing him and pulling him into the center of the tentacles with a tugging motion.

Something was different from back in his past; it wasn’t identical to his previous experience, but his body reacted nevertheless, freezing with instinctive fear, than thrashing and bursting with fiery rage and violent impulses.
Keita’s body bucked sharply as he attempted to struggle out of the tentacles’ grasp, but they were strong, insistent, and more attempted to join the assault even when he freed his leg successfully.

Deryn was right behind him, thankfully. With a quick lunge, he severed the tentacle that bound Keita. The Zipangu swordsman’s mismatched eyes were clearly able to discern in the rapidly-darkening twilight how the central body of the tentacle creature moved, and the violent impulse took complete control of his reflexes. Seeing part of it being connected to the ground, he immediately threw his dagger in attempt to bind it to one place, and grabbed his sword tightly before repeating Deryn’s motion, lunging straight at the main body, hacking furiously but with deadly aim.

It was surprisingly easy to find out the weak spots, somehow. He could sense it’s pain and hear it’s rumbling sounds of suffering from his flurry of hacks, slashes and thrusts, rapidly piercing its body, leaving its red blood to flow through the air and...

[“Red blood?”]

… splash over his armor, the surprisingly familiar, yet not the way he expected figure starting to twitch and spasm.

[“They don’t react to pain like that. Almost like...”]

Suddenly, a much thicker, stronger, and non-slimy tentacle wrapped around his back as he heard someone call his name, a sharp motion drawin him away from his furious striking of the silhouette that attacked him in that loathed way.

With a sharp twist of his body, he turned around and attempted to strike whatever was attacking him from behind. He noticed Deryn lying on the ground, apparently pushed aside, which must’ve meant another of the creature’s flock or whatever bunches of them were called attempted to aid it’s “friend”.

But what was behind him wasn’t a tentacle monster; no, it reminded him of something he knew even more than the horror he just faced.

A somewhat small and delicate limb shot up to grab the swung blade early and with far greater strength than one would expect of such build, though a few droplets of blood started to run down the sword. A familiar voice shouted right to his face.

- Keita, snap out of it! Snap the hell out of it! She’s not one of them, okay?
Slowly, his breath got more even. Turning back around, he saw the creature lying on the ground... a clearly human woman equipped with a whole bunch of tentacles. Back to the creature he swung his sword at...

- A...Alessa?

- Yes! Look, Keita, I don’t know what sort of tentacle-slaughtering reflexes you have, but it takes just one look to notice that you could talk to that thing! It’s a roper, okay? A type of monstergirl. It may have wanted to start mating, but for all of our sake’s, don’t just go out lunging at everything just because it has tentacles, okay? She might not survive!

He snarled.

- It’s a mutant! A monstrosity! How do you know these freaky things aren’t in league with them, huh? Who knows, they may be the very thing that summoned Umbro S...

- Calm down, okay? You’re pointing your sword in the wrong direction! At me, even! Ropers are intelligent thanks to their bond to what the human part originally was - a true human female! I have no idea if there’s any connection to tentacle beasts in any of their specimens, but rather than murder something so close to the cathedral, maybe you should interrogate it! Weren’t you curious about why she looks like a human in the least?

A drop of the Echidna’s blood fell down from where her hand and his sword were connected. He almost let go of the blade as he watched it fall, and relaxed in Alessa’s serpentine embrace. She also loosened her coils.

- So, you’re sure she’s... one of your own?

- Pretty much. As I’ve said. I don’t know that much about tentacle horrors, but if they can make ropers, it’s unlikely that one is born of them. Many ropers were peacefully living in the demon lands for years, acting like any proper monstergirl, so they’re considered one of us. They are created and grow differently, but have a connection to the Demon Lady as well, and many act loyal to her, so why would we consider them enemies? Relax. We won’t be getting information out of this one, given what you’ve done to her, but they can recover very quickly. If we treat her wounds and get her to a safe place, the parasite will be able to repair the humanoid body, unless they’re already dead.

- F... fine. I’m... sorry I’ve attacked you. It was... on reflex.

- It’s fine. It’s just a cut. I’ll heal soon. Just... control yourself a bit more, okay? There’s always ropers, slimes, plant monsters, and scyllas, and stuff, and I can’t allow you to just lash out hurting them all, you understand?

She let him go completely. He hid his weapon and walked over to the wounded body of the creature, pulling out his dagger. Glaw bound the monstergirls body close with the cloth and pieces of her slime, watching to not do any unwanted mixing before the creature’s own slimy secretions and her red slime. Alessa picked the roper up, tentacles lax and twitching, all of them noticing that the monster’s body was covered with a nun’s habit.
Alessa spoke.

- It seems to be neither the ghost nor any real epidemic. There’s way too much residual demonic energy here. It’s like there was a powerful monster here not long ago, spreading her aura and casting powerful demonic magic, or like a strong demonic entity was being slain or is somehow sealed here. All in all, either of these scenarios could explain a nun transforming into a monster, even if it’s a monster of a rare kind like the roper.

- How “powerful” are we talking here? - Conall asked.

- It’s inconceivable that such an event could have happened at the cathedral. Given both the level of the residual magic given that some time passed and the fact that we have a monster girl *nun* right here in our hands... I’d say it would have to be an incredibly strong succubus family monster, a powerful demonic mage or witch, an almost entire set of dark elementals or even a Lilim.

- Lilim? - Deryn spoke questioningly.

- One of the Demon Lady’s daughters. You see, human *women* are a great flaw in the Demon Lady’s plan, one of several. Many monsters are unsure what to do with them. Some believe in recreating them as equal monsters, some want them as a form of livestock with potential for being treated as equals, hence, creation of figures such as the weresheep. Some would most likely banish them or even slaughter them, the last group being held back somewhat by the fact that human men hold their female family members dear. So, there are a few ways to change a woman into a monster, but not many. They either have to absorb demon energy from their surroundings and transform spontaneously once their own energy is corrupted entirely and depleted, be changed by a specific type of monster into their own lesser kind, or otherwise magically “blessed” with transformation. But not all monsters can transform others, and even then, it’s not always easy. Archimps can create imps. Baphomets can create witches. Dark slimes and succubi-types can create dark slime cores and lesser succubi. An Echidna’s breast milk consumed in greater amount by a human woman can change her into an imp or succubus, depending on age, and even more likely into a Lamia. They can be made into weresheep by a spell or into a roper by a roper seedling. There’s probably just a couple more that I can’t think of right now, and there’s also the last resort of necromancy... That might seem like many options, but they all require quite specific measures unavailable to many monsters. Thus, a woman can’t be changed into any type of monster unless it’s by strong outside demon energy, like spending a lot of time in a demon-controlled land... or by the demon lady herself. Lilims share that ability of our Lady, being able to essentially change a human woman into almost any kind of monster at all.

- So, would that woman here being a roper suggest that wasn’t a Lilim?

- Not necessarily. It might’ve been a mass change and it’d be certainly easier to just slam all the monsters into base, lesser, already easy-to-transform types. After all, this is the middle of Order’s territory. But, yes. Lilim intervention is unlikely. Most of them just... have sex with men they like. Most of the time. Like their mother wants.

Alessa started slithering towards the cathedral, motioning for the others to follow.

- Anyway, it’s likely we’ve just run into an Order-Monsters conflict. With, ironically, monsters being ex-nuns, priestesses, and stuff.
Conall stopped in his tracks.

- *In that case... we’ll have to break through the monsters and... and take the documents. Or help the knights and hope they’ll hand them out.*

- *Let’s not make hasty assumptions here, Conall-san. This might still be a different situation happening here. The knights may have already been captured, too.*

- *Anyway, Conall, let’s tell them about there knight orders.*

- *Go right ahead, brother.*

- *Very well. Ekhem, ekhem.*

Deryn started to describe how knighthood, especially Order-anointed knights, worked in the western kingdoms.

“There are a total of sixteen knight orders in the lands other than Zipangu; one of them covers the Cryolands and Mistlands to the far north, and very little is known of the order except for its existence. Two of them were formed in the desert, eight of them are regular knight orders in the main lands, influence spread between the Twin Kingdoms, Danaan, and Avoriomont, and five of them are special orders formed by the Church and the Order themselves.

Said five orders are split into templar-inquisitors, templar-protectors, and Paladins, or Royal Guard, called the Azure Wing. The Paladins consist almost solely of ex-paladin squires, most famous regular knight order members and people drawn from the templar-protector orders.

The templar-protector orders mostly help with banditry, mutinies by minor lords or wars against smaller, pagan countries and, first and foremost, against the Demon Lands. The two Orders are the Golden Shield and the Silver Gauntlet.

The Templar-inquisitors have different functions, mostly rooting out bad influences on land, and contain far more fanatics and extremists in their rank. The White Scythe specializes in battling ghosts, the Undead, and necromancers, while the Crimson Cross battles against any form of corruption inland, rooting out monster sympathizers, incubi, monsters, and villages touched by the demonic corruption alike. “

Suddenly, Alessa stopped in her tracks and shuddered, though whether it was at the name of the Crimson Cross order, or the sound of wind being nearly cut that followed the moment Deryn ended his sentence.

The younger of Amberwing brother’s reacted immediately, grabbing his mace and pummeling the
object about to fall on top of him with it, causing it to bounce away, and fall onto the ground. Conall was immediately upon it, threatening with his partisan, ready to impale it at the slightest movement. Keita followed the spectacle with his eyes, but not his body, mindful of just having hurt Alessa needlessly.

The creature on the ground was somewhat familiar. Large, bat-like wings. An unnaturally built tail. Horns on top of the head. A gray complexion, covered with magical markings. Dark eyes and nippleless, but quite prominent breasts.

A gargoyle.

- Alessa. I presume that a gargoyle is more likely to be an effect of the cathedral’s state, rather than the cause?

- Well, unless the gargoyle’s source of demonic soul was originally an extremely powerful monster, they wouldn’t be able to cause other creatures to turn into monsters, nor to produce such powerful demonic, magical aura. If such a soul was bound to this gargoyle, frankly Deryn wouldn’t be able to resist her attack.

- You... you help our enemies? You’ve been enslaved by the ones we’re supposed to capture and take prisoner? Or are the two of you traitors?- the gargoyle spoke, directing its words at both Alessa and Glaw.

- Neither. They’re not enemies of monsterkind. We’re traveling companions, weird as that may be. We could waste some time trying to explain our situation, but frankly, we’re more interested in learning yours.

- Why... is she hurt?

- She attacked one of us. The extent of the damage... was unintended. Now, speak. My companions here are fine with us, but may have problems with other monsters clearly attempting to attack them from above without a warning.

- You’ll let me take the... tentacle-girl back to the rest of us if I tell you what you want to know?

The group looked amongst one another at the sound of “the rest of them”.

- Yes. I don’t want to see her die, but we cannot help her here. In fact, that’s preferable.

- Very well. I’ve... been a statue. This was a human... place of faith. A priestess of our own managed to slip in here, bringing a demonic spirit, but... it wasn’t mine. Together, they summoned... the Princess here. The Princess couldn’t stay long; she would be detected. She released her own demonic energy, tied it to women, and left me here as one of the guardians. Then, Princess came back.

- The... the fourth.

Alessa spoke a name. She said it with something that sounded like a level of reverence, spiced up by something more similar to fear or great concern.

- Deruella.

- Yes...

- What happened to the knights?

- Some knights... just came as well. Started exploring the place. Taking prisoners, killing. They called... many peasants and squires as well. We’re in... danger. That’s why I ... attacked.

- So, they’re alive, and we really have a conflict here. Very well. Take your friend here and have her healed. We’ll have to... determine our next course of action. Sorry for the wounds on both of you.

- You trust... these humans? You want me to leave you alone with them? They’re still... pure. Most of them.

- Do not mind it. At the very least, they won’t turn on me just because there’s a bunch of knights around. Now take her and go!

The gargoyle did as instructed, glaring at Deryn and Conall, but surprisingly not at Keita, before taking her unconscious companion and flying away, somewhat clumsily, as if she still felt the strike and the weight of said companion. Alessa broke the silence.

- A dozen or so years back, before I shut myself permanently in my dungeon, I’ve heard rumours. Our Lady’s fourth daughter, Deruella, gathering servants and attempting to actively further the corruption and control of human lands, infecting monsters with both her passion for making a human-monster only couples world a reality and with her extremism. It appears said extremism has only increased since... A normal Lilim would, much of the time, just enjoy her husband, and slowly work towards a greater understanding and cooperation with humans... but apparently, not her. I wonder if she even has one... anyway, we’re faced with a bit of a situation here. The lilim is not at this place, which probably means the monsters will be at a disadvantage with a priest and three templars already here.

- Deryn-kun, Conall-san, I believe it doesn’t need to be explained that Glaw and Alessa both will not only refuse to turn against their own kind, they’ll likely actively try to help them.

- Yes.

Conall turned to Glaw, looking at her expectedly.

- S... sorry, Conall. They’re not... nice like you. They’ll kill them. Even if I have to work only with the snake woman here... I’d like to help. I won’t hurt them or anything, but...
Conall silenced her.

- Well, for me, it’s obvious. If we help the knights, we gain access to the information we seek, clear a cathedral, and make this a pure, safe place for humans again. That’s what Keita wants, right? That’s what we’re aiming for, right, Deryn?

- Yes, brother.

- You speak the truth, Conall-san...

Alessa decided to intervene.

- It’d seem to me that this would be a little too hasty of a way to make a decision here, wouldn’t it?

- Maybe. What do you propose?

- The reverse, of course! There will be less mortal victims that way, and it’ll be easier and more… fair, too!

Conall raised an eyebrow.

- What do you mean by that?

This time, the two other humans were considering things from Alessa’s point of view, evidently. Deryn was the one to start.

- Well, brother, the now-monsters are the ones who originally held the knowledge we seek. Finding it without them will be harder. As for fairness...

This time, Keita and Alessa spoke at once.

- The knights are killing their previous priests and comrades like it was nothing.

Alessa followed their words with a nod.

- That’s right. They’re killing human women and probably seduced men as well, even though they’re their former comrades, friends; and maybe bound by blood to some of the very knights that await word from the cathedral. It’s the humans that are in the wrong here, this time.

- You’re just saying this because you’re a monster, and you want to...

- I didn’t oppose you attacking the goblins, did I, Conall? That’s because what they were doing was wrong and harmful. This time... how would you feel if your sister, cousin, or aunt was a nun or a priestess here? Would you allow her to be killed because she was turned into a monster? Because
that’s what these knights are going do here.

- You don’t know that. If we tell them that the monsters are...

- Conall-san. They already know that. They know these monsters were humans once. They just do not care.

The elder Amberwing started to biting his nail.

- You have too low of an opinion on knights. They may just... capture them or something.

- They’re not led by knights, brother. They’re lead by templars. “Kill all with a touch of monster and don’t look back.” It’s likely they’re even angrier because these things dare to take bodies of former nuns and corrupt their holy cathedral.

- And yet - Keita intervened - Conall-san might be right. Not to mention, the monsters would have to deal with that woman left behind to send messages as well, and... well... frankly, we might get “wanted” status if any of the knights escape or if they win. This isn’t an easy choice, much less if you try to be rational about it. The equally important question is... what do the rest of you intend to do if we join one of the sides.

Alessa sighed.

- Keita, Conall, Deryn, please, hear me out. These humans... little to no harm would come to them if they were captured or forced to escape. The monsters will have to leave these lands sooner or later, and all these women probably want now is a warm body to fall asleep next to and wake up next to. They’ll avoid damaging these humans to the best of their abilities... and that’s why they’ll lose. Their knowledge about our issue might be greater and definitely easier to find than what we’d be able to seek out ourselves, and, well... It’s humans that are in the wrong this time. Really. They should just banish the ex-human monsters, but they’ll kill them, torture them, or experiment on them ruthlessly instead... please. This time, let’s fight side by side and... against... your kind, rather than mine.

- And what would you do if we joined the knights?

- I wouldn’t fight against you, but perhaps we’d have to go our separate ways. If the knights pursued me after that, I’d take it as a betrayal from you as well, and then... we’d have a reason to fight, not having any to be companions anymore.

- Glaw?

- I... will not fight against Conall. But, if he does not want to help us... I cannot fight by his side, this time either. Sorry, you are a great guy, but these knights... are not. I need to help other monsters if I am to have a chance to survive and... be with you normally... in the future.

- Conall-san?

- I won’t fight against humans. That’s it. If you’re trying democracy here, that’s sick. I’ll do my best to help if it’s against the monsters and will use minimal force, but...
Deryn interrupted his older brother there.

- *Brother, if we want to avoid casualties... Helping the monsters might be the best course of action. Unless Alessa was lying all this time, they’ll do what they can to capture rather than kill, so any deaths resulting will be dealt by one of us five, or the knights. It’s the best way to avoid bloodshed. Of course, if you want to back up the knights, I’ll understand it. If everyone does it, I’ll follow. But... making a better world by slaying someone’s family... that’s something not even you were able to do when the one concerned was...*

- *Enough. Don’t use that as leverage. As I’ve said, I won’t hinder you if you want to help monsters... but I won’t help you, either, unless Deryn’s life is in danger.*

- *Th...then, Keita, will you join us? It’ll leave the fate of the investigation team and the bird-training woman hanging, rather than forcing anybody to kill someone. The monsters here... they can be persuaded to relocate, they’re newly born, and don’t know how to oppress anyone yet. They’re not the kind of enemy you’re trying to fight against... even if one or two of them have tentacles. Please... try and understand our point of view this time.*

Keita stood up, and looked around. Glaw was casting uncertain glances at Conall, whose gaze was nervous and angry. Deryn seemed to be the only one calm out of the group... content with any outcome. Alessa was gazing at him pleadingly, clearly asking him to put the weird tentacle attack on the side now and attempt to understand a newly reborn monster’s feelings, and how unnatural it’d be to sever these nuns’, priests’ and other faithful peoples’ ties just because they were remade into monsterkind.

Her hand was still trickling with blood from the wound he inflicted.

Wounding non-humans definitely came easier than opposing his own kind. It didn’t mean it was the right course of action, though.

- *I’ve made... my decision.*
Arc IV : The Cathedral - Ways to "Peace"

Chapter Summary

A choice is made, but not everyone in the group can agree to it easily, nor can they push off the regret of not agreeing. In a place of faith like this, secrets of the world can be learned, but sometimes, those who are supposed to protect them do not care about said secrets at all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The entire situation was complete chaos. Some of the knights were absolutely stunned to find nuns and priests engaging in such debauchery inside of their holy place, deemed to be of such importance to so many. The priest, Edgar, seemed particularly shocked, not to mention his reaction time left much to be desired in the first place.

The three templars, as opposed to the other knights, had no trouble intervening immediately; because the priests weren’t priests anymore and the nuns lacked humanity altogether. Sharp senses of a knight would understand. They gave up their humanity to become whatever they were now.

The harpy immediately flew up in the air, her legs grabbing a much younger ministrant, but Lysander was on the prowl, immediately throwing one of his knives at the beastie, causing it to fall down just to ram it with his more dangerous weapon - the flail. Matteo heard the breaking bones coming from the young man’s body, but knew that to argue with Lysander on methods would be folly. He instead turned to the weird, brown-haired woman with fox ears and a tail. Blocking a strike with his shield, he immediately countered with his sword, but the fox-like woman jumped back. Two of the knights moved to attack her as well, but the vixen’s movements were confident, and she immediately clawed her way through one of the knight’s lamellar armor.

The other one jumped away from her attack in time... demonstrating reflex but no grace, ramming himself into Matteo and causing him to fall over, had weird, slimy limbs not held him and his comrade before they hit the ground... binding them effectively and drawing them to an oddly moaning woman in nun’s clothes.

- It needs seed to grow... semen, please... it’s like this thing is clawing on the inside of my head... it needs to eat your precious essence, so just shed your armor and...

- Normal Wind Spell : Baselard Stare.

Suddenly, the ropes, or tentacles, were cut off the woman, causing her to shriek, letting the two knights back again into the chaos.
Matteo Hierro’s second cousin, Elnathan Nussen-Hierro, the man who cast the spell, once explained to him how he’d seen the ways of controlling and bringing peace to where was chaos.

First one was with leadership, diplomacy and example, a staple of nobles, great knights, generals, leaders or kings. He saw himself as no leader despite his high stance with the Templars.

Second one was with money - pouring enough money into a purpose always seemed to work in what Elnathan called a “rotten world”.

The monsters would usually respond to neither and definitely didn’t want money, which is why he employed the final measure. Literally final.

“Death always brings silence, peace. On it, order can be built, or freedom can be given, whatever morality one possesses, whatever they deem important. But first, everything must be calmed down, and to create that lack of struggle, conflict, chaos, death is the best and final measure.”

Lysander seemed to read that part of Elnathan’s simple action well, jumping at the tentacleless side of the roper monster and ramming his flail again, crushing her bones, insides, and repeating the strike, bending her at an impossible angle as she shrieked with pain again.

Elnathan’s eyes simply took in the battlefield. It was as if their victory was assured, or as if he didn’t care if they lost. Moments after, Matteo saw a half-horse woman run into the chamber through a large door, and a half-snake woman sneak up on Edgar Chios, their priest.

- Normal Earth Spell: Stone Roots.

Elnathan wasn’t capable of doing much more than throwing a single rock with his earth spells just back on their previous mission together, which wasn’t THAT long ago, so that was surprising. The lamia’s tail was kept in a single place, allowing Edgar to finally see her presence and escape from it.

Elnathan finally put his hands on the handles of his blades as he passed Matteo and the other knight lying on the floor.

- Matteo, you take the lamia. I’ll take care of whatever the fox is... and the horse woman, if you two aren’t quick about it.

- Yes, sir!
Immediately, he was up on his feet, charging at the snake-woman and preparing to ram her with his shield. The moment he saw these grim, curved, jagged blades leave his cousin’s scabbards, he knew he’d better hurry up and that the younger knights would probably want to look away if any of them had the passing thought of the fox-ears woman being “cute” or the upper woman body of the centaur “beautiful”.

The screams he heard confirmed that suspicion.

- Alessa and Deryn make sense here, not to mention Glaw and Alessa are our companions and are likely to be attacked by these knights as well if they’re found out. Therefore, we will attempt to stop the knights from slaughtering all the monsters that nuns and priests might’ve changed into.

- All we need to do is withdraw for a short while, hide Alessa and Glaw, and return as if we were some kind of monster hunters or an official backup! Keita, surely you understand that battling against the knights will put us on the wrong side of the law, and it isn’t something a righteous person would...

- Conall-san, if you want to start building a better world from scratch, then stopping people from turning on their previous allies just because of xenophobia... Not antagonizing freshly born, still relatively innocent monsters that may end up becoming one of the more dangerous type, and cutting the conflict short while we can, is definitely a better way than what the Knights have been attempting until now.

- Well, you’ll have to do it without me this time. Sorry, but I won’t participate in this.

- I respect your decision, but I’d urge you to reconsider... Deryn, Glaw, can I count on you participating in that case?

- Yes. I don’t want monsters getting hurt.

- Sorry, brother, but this’ll be faster... and if we’re teaching anyone a lesson, it’ll have to be the knights. By beating said lesson into them. They’re too close-minded to treat non-humans like sentients otherwise.

Alessa couldn’t help but note how easily, compared to his brother, Deryn accepted the notion of monsters being simply ‘non-human sentients’, rather than neccessary ‘the enemy’. There was also an odd feeling coming from Conall at his brother going into a fight he refused to participate in, but she couldn’t quite pinpoint that yet.

- Do as you wish.
- Alessa, do you think we may be able to... contact... the monsters already in the cathedral and set up a plan or at least have them acknowledge us as allies?

- Well, human-monster transformation still isn’t a well-known case. Some women exhibit a heightened desire for spiritual energy or sex soon after the transformation compared to the usual monster, and some have a weaker drive. However, if you already travel with monsters, you should be able to appeal to their thinking and rational sides, so we should be able to talk with their leaders or whatever and establish an alliance. In a crisis situation like this, no intelligent monster will attack humans mindlessly, be it with violence or sexually... At least I’d like to hope so.

- Very well. Let’s move out.

- You’re really doing this, Keita? Even without my help?

- Yes. I believe our monster companions here are right in their stance and the knights are extremists that will not stop just because a monster was a human once. And I don’t intend to risk ruining our chances of obtaining the knowledge we seek entirely, because if anyone in the group is capable of divination or even simply sensing demonic energy, both Alessa and Glaw will be in danger even if we help them capture or slaughter every other monster... And I don’t intend to let them do the same to my traveling companions. Deryn-kun, Alessa, Glaw, let’s go.

Deryn and Glaw cast worried glances at Conall, but followed. Alessa nearly lead the way, but kept her distance to Keita short... possibly to signal to other monsters that he’s not available, at least that’s what it seemed to Conall.

The Echidna herself was smiling subtly and casting thankful glances at the half-Zipangu swordsman.

The elder Amberwing brother stayed behind, trying to cope with his own worries. He surely wasn’t used to staying behind while watching his brother’s back going off to fight like this.

After a while they were exploring the cathedral, separated with small distances so communication was easy and none would be left without aid or support in case of an attack - be it by the knights on the monstergirl half of the four-person squad, or be it by the monstergirls on the human half.

Suddenly, Alessa stopped all of them.

- There’s an odd... an odd quasi-magical effect going on nearby.

- What do you mean?

- There are... pulsations and emanations of both spiritual energy and demonic energy in varying amounts. This means there’s probably a human male and a female nearby, doing one of two possible actions that could cause such a result.
This time, Deryn was the one who asked.
- … What two actions, exactly?
- They’re either engaged in a magical battle or in... intimate adult relationship. Either way, there’s a monster and a human nearby.
- You’re pretty nonchalant when it comes to announcing that we have a monster and a human committing adultery and sacrilege somewhere in this cathedral. Deryn couldn’t help a bit of dry humor coming out of his mouth.
- Adultery? Sacrilege?
- Yes, yes, I know. From a monster’s point of view, it’s getting engaged and worship.
- My, you sure learn fast, Deryn!

Eventually, they came to a chamber with three exits, all of them seemingly leading to slightly different areas of the cathedral... And there was more than one sound of someone apparently being put under either torture or significant pleasure resounding from these paths.

Deryn asked the obvious question.
- So... do we spread out?
- That might be a bad idea. Some of these monsters are clearly going at it, and that means the others might be aroused as well. Not to mention what happens when we run into a group of humans, or something...
- If a human runs into a human or a monster runs into a monster, though, it will be all right, won’t it? - Keita reinforced the idea that this was the place where they could spread out.
- Temporarily... and the humans might ask you to follow them, or you may run into them already attacking one of the monsters, can’t you?

Keita considered for a moment.
- Regardless of the setup, both me and Alessa should be all right and good enough to at least escape if we get into an ambush.
- Unless we’re attacked from the back.
- If we let Deryn-kun and Glaw go together, they should be safe as well, right?
- I’d like to say that you’re certainly taking a risk here.
- If we run into a problem, don’t press on - we fall back here and follow one of the other paths. We have to explore this place as quickly as we can - otherwise it may be overrun by knights before we manage to unite with the monsters, and that’ll make things harder.
- Well... I can’t say I completely agree with it, but at least the setup sounds reasonable. Let’s split up like this. Deryn, Glaw, take the left route. I’ll take the right one, and Keita should take the middle one.

- See you three later.

- I get to spend time with Conall’s brother, yay! Tell me more about him, okay?

- Great, just great...

Conall was sitting on a stone, thinking hard.

[“One Golden Shield Templar-Protector. Two White Scythe Templar-Inquisitors. One priest. A squad of regular knights, of unknown size. Plus one or two squires per every Templar... the very high-ranking ones sometimes receive two squires, I’ve heard... so...so...”]

He furrowed his eyebrows. Something made him nervous about that calculation.

[“J... just a few years back... I’ve barely been admitted to become a squire of a templar-protector myself, if I succeeded at a bonus task. Just barely, by winning third place in a tournament, after hard, difficult fights. If that one mission before I was actually recognized as one went differently somehow, at least I’d have a better understanding, but what I do understand...”]

He rested his hand on his arms.

[“All of them are going to be skilled. Even the squires. I mean, heck, I couldn’t beat a person who was just supposed to *become* a squire back then. Sure, there’s Keita and maybe Alessa, but they’ll be busy with the two other templars. So... So...”]

All these thoughts were just making him more nervous.

Alessa was the first to run into what could be perceived as trouble.

A single nun was surrounded by a group of scouts, apparently cradling something in her arms.
- N...no, you don’t understand! Father here just helped me deal with my own new problem! He’s done nothing wrong! Punish me if you have to, but he has done nothing wrong!

- He’s corrupted just as you are! The monsters committed the ultimate sacrilege this time, letting demonic energies invade a cathedral of our Gods no less! And tempting the priests with their lewd flesh when you’re not even worthy of a peasant!? Such shamelessness! And in a nun’s habit, no less!

[“Not worthy... of a peasant? So, humans perceive themselves as that much superior to us when they become knights... us, who are ready and willing to sacrifice all our lives and ambitions, who are ready to devote our lives to pleasing them if they just agreed to it... A monster is not worthy of a peasant because a preach born of thousands years old conflict says that a monster is always a monster, regardless of shape, of feelings? What’s even wrong with mating with a peasant, anyway? Most monsters don’t mind. Only those highwired to seek mates with strength or potential or the rare one that cares for social status would be bothered by things like ‘being a peasant’.”]

So, Alessa spoke out against such words and treatment.

- You would be wrong, mister knight. It’s you who’s unworthy of watching these two devote to each other and be intimate with each other.

- Another monster! This one doesn’t even try to hide it’s nature! Hey, we’ll be praised if we catch two just on a single scouting mission!

- Scouts? Ohhh, so your superiors don’t know you’re here, precisely... right?

- What’s that to you, monster? It's not like snakes understand tactics or chain of command, ri...

A sudden slam of Alessa’s tail as she was upon him send him crashing against a pillar. The Echidna wasted no time, grabbin another knights arm just a he tried to reach for the sword on his back and slamming him against one of his companions.

[“Four of them. Just four.”]

The one slammed with his companion was already on the ground, so Alessa just tossed the other into the last remaining one. He dodged with surprising agility and drew on his sword. Alessa noticed that his armor was lighter, but apparently of better quality than the other two, and it even bore some insignia.

- Stupid monster, if you believe I’ll fall as easily as these t...

Her slamming her tail into the ground surprised him enough to stop his whining. Alessa’s incantation even caused him to shiver.
From underneath the cathedral’s floor, now slightly cracked, small streams of sand started to flow in spirals, focusing in front of Alessa... who seemingly materialized a small cloud of black and red fog with occasional glowing points in front of herself.

- Ohhh, it takes longer than I thought it would. You know, the floor and all that. Sorry. You can finish.

- Die, you arrogant beast!

The mass of sand in front of her took a decidedly dark coloration, a mix of dark gray and purple, as it seemingly absorbed the small cloud. Alessa wasted no time in firing the spell at the knight as he clearly attempted to charge her head on. The blast of sand only grazed him as he dodged, but the odd magic contained in it seemingly numbed his muscles and sapped a bit of his strength, making him stop in his tracks just enough for Alessa to go for a very simple follow-up.

- Faint Earth Spell : Stone Shot.

And straight for his head she went. The strike had almost no potential to be fatal, thanks to her being careful and him having a head protector of sorts, but it did come close to knocking him out cold.

- I... idiots! Get up, fight it!

- Ohhh, I protest! I protest wholeheartedly! I shall be referred to as a woman, not a “thing”! Do I really look like an “it”?

The knights rose to their feet, without saying anything.

- Oh, ho, playtime’s over, is it? You boys are serious now. Do I have to scream?

They all let out a small grunt or snarl of anger each, which clearly got across the message.

[“ “Take us seriously, bitch!” How come undignified men like that are knights these days? None of them could have passed my dungeon... heck, they’d be beaten just by entering the cemetery! It’s no wonder I had to wait that many years between each proper visit!”]

- Sorry to hurt your feelings, boys... Normal Earth Spell, Rock barrage!

She fired a couple of stones at each of the knights, causing them to back up closer to the wall. One of
them even fell on his back.

- None of you even comes close to being a match for my tail, not to mention when magic is involved. Either train hard or get an honest monster to take care of you! Normal Earth Spell, Stone Roots!

A mass of stone growths suddenly attached to and wrapped around their bodies, tying two of them to the wall, and two to the floor. Alessa wagged her finger at them while saying.

- Now, now. It might’ve seem like I was holding back while fighting you all, but don’t feel bad. In fact, I’ve been preparing another spell all this time! After all, we can’t have you conscious and screaming for help. Don’t worry, this won’t kill you... unless your immune system is really weak, that is... I’ve done my best to make sure this is non-lethal, so enjoy your sleep! Normal Venom Spell: Serpentine Thorns!

Thorny vines erupted from the walls and the floor, quickly grappling the knights, wrapping up their bodies, penetrating their armor and prickling their skin. It didn’t take long for the poisons to start and take effect; satisfied, Alessa turned to the nun kneeling in the midst of the scene.

She then noticed she wasn’t kneeling, it’s just that her body didn’t have humanoid legs anymore, her species further betrayed by two growths that forced her to keep the hood of her habit down - she was a slug monster.

- Th... thank you for your help, m’lady. Since our change... the father here has been patient and was willing to help me out and do everything at my own pace, so I started getting attached... to him... but I just got him hurt in the end...

She looked at the man she cradled in her arms. He was certainly past his prime, but not old yet. Alessa could feel a bit of demonic energy in him already, seemingly not all of it originating from the slime, but none of it except for hers really repulsive to a monster. If the “corruption”, as humans would call it, of this place was caused by a Lilim, that made sense - she’d use a spell or more rarely, unless she wasn’t married, some form of outercourse to inject a bit of demonic energy into the men to make their sexuality more active and allow for an easier seduction by the monsterfied nurses, priestesses and female faithful.

- No problem. We’re comrades, after all. I’m not one of the monsters that were born during “your change”, in case you couldn’t tell... Me and my companions learned that the cathedral was... visited by a powerful demon and changed only recently, and that you’re now under attack by knights. We’re trying to help, but we had to split so we could find your base of operations...

- Yes... yes of course... sorry, I am so slow... It’ll be just easier if I tell you the directions. You have to go back to the room next to the altar room, where there are three roads splitting from that room. If you turn your back against the altar room, you should be able to find the hideout most of us took if you take the left path...

- Left path, huh? So, the one Deryn took... This boy is still not marked by a female’s touch in any way, so it’s a good thing Glaw’s with him
- Oh, ummm, I'm sorry, but... Could you take Father here with you? He’s hurt and if I take him, it'll take too long for him to properly recover... I’m sure Matriarch Rutivexia will be able to help him!

- Matriarch?

- Yes... the Priestess. They say she was the one who called the Princess here, so she could change us... but I don’t know about these things, I was just a nun...

- Fine. I’ll take your father or whatever. But, I need to hurry. Glaw may need help reinforcing the idea that your friends are to not touch mine.

- Thank you again. Do not worry about me, I’ll follow at... my own pace, okay?

- Yes, sure.

Grabbing the body of the priest from the slug’s hands, Alessa immediately slithered away.

She hoped both Keita and Deryn were doing fine...

Conall, too, she guessed. There was always a chance another Gargoyle would try to attack from above.

Keita had to go a little deeper to run into his own version of “trouble”.

There was the distinct sound of occasional flopping and something jumping, as well as what he assumed with surprise was hooves, before he heard a female yell.

- Nooo-oo, Mister Knight, when I asked if you’d like to impale my mouth on your spear, I *didn’t mean a liiii-te-ral spe-ar*! Please stop! Please reconsider! I’ll behave properly! I’ll let myself be courted or hired into ser-vice before trying to seduce a gallant knight like you, mis-ter knight!

- Shuddup! Making fun of me! You’re a goner! I can’t get back without having caught you, anyway, so might as well end it!

- Nooo, mis-ter kni...ahh!!

Suddenly, a woman in a clearly ripped nun uniform jumped out of the nearby door, and nearly fell right onto Keita. She had a small tail and a pair of underdeveloped wings sticking out of her back... And was being followed by a man.

On a horse.
[“Who’s crazy enough to ride a horse inside a cathedral? Isn’t that also... improper, at the very least?”]

- A., ahh, another... mister swordsman. Pppllleasse don’t be mean to me like mister knight here. I was just, ummm... trying to have fun. And eat. Yes, eat. Please don’t be mean. This isn’t what a woman imagines when she thinks about being trapped between two men!

Keita simply shoved her aside as the knight on the horse approached. A quick grab of his kusarigama, a spin, a toss and the horse already fell down, its legs wounded and chained up. The knight fell down as well, his metal armor making a loud thud as he hit the ground.

- Ouch... damn, man, I need to capture her to be recognized by Sir Matteo! Wait, I don’t remember us hiring any mercena...

Just as he was getting up, a quick kick to the head had him down on the floor again.

Keita simply drew on his sword, preparing for the knight to also do the same. They were similar in age, the guy couldn’t be further than his very early twenties.

- I... get it... you’re a damn monster sympathizer! Maybe one of their... what do they call it... Incubi! You sure as hell deserve to get eaten by some monster bitch, kicking me like that... I’ll show you!

The young man rose to full height, his spear back in his hand and a smaller shield with an emblem - surely enough, a golden shield - ready for a battle.

- I’m Dren Clayhand, a squire of the great Sir Matteo Hierro of the Templar-Protectors of the Golden Shield! Reveal your name, knave!

- Haneo Keita...

Keita inspected the boy closely, carefully, almost not believing he could seem so defenseless after introducing himself produly like that as a squire of a templar. He decided to continue the introduction, just to make sure his analysis of the guy’s stance was correct.

- ... swordsman, born in Zipangu... Knight of nothing and squire of no one... I do not particularly sympathize with the monsters, but I require information and I don’t exactly hate all of them, either... that being said...

- Yes, there’s been enough words! Engage me!

- This stance is kind of... vulnerable, don’t you think?
A rapid swing of his enchanted blade simply cut the upper part of the squire’s spear clean off, leaving him with no other weapon than a shield and a shortened stick. The boy at least had some reflex, smashing his shield right into Keita, bashing him away a few steps before attempting to take some form of attack stance.

- You... you thug! We weren’t done with the introductions yet!

- Very well! I am Haneo Keita, a man who doesn’t bother with introductions on the field of battle where you can be killed at any point! Apparently, that makes me your nightmare and your nemesis!

Another rapid swing of the blade left a deep cut in one of his opponent’s mitten gloves, blood rushing from within. The boy has been left completely unable to properly attack other than bashing with his shield.

Which he did, predictably. Only this time, Keita was well-prepared.

Pirouetting away and cutting at the boy’s heel, cutting the tendon before kicking him onto the ground.

- And you have much to learn when it comes to fighting a human opponent.

- You, you...

A quick jump and kick to the back of the head knocked the kick out, without being too lethal. Keita was satisfied with the outcome - nobody died, and the guy’s heel would recover in time.

The problem was the apparently succubified nun. Yes, indeed, she was a serious problem.

- My he-ro!

The woman rammed herself into Keita just as he was half-reflexively sheathing his weapon after a won fight, pushing him down onto the ground.

- You’re such an incredibly brave gallant gentleman! You saved me from the mean bad angry knight! I mean he had no taste, and I even thought about letting him have some fun with me! But so stupid I was... all this time, I was waiting for someone like *you*... oh my great, gallant, personal knight! I think I should reward you by letting you spill the essence of your surely backed-up family jewels into my cleav-age! If you want to have sex, that’s fine, too... but, could you wait for a few days with that, at least? There’s this crazy thing at the back of my head telling me that I’m supposed to remain chaste, and I need to figure out why! Of course, I don’t intend to, but you know, at least I’d like to know why I wanted to remain chaste in the first place. But no worries, my beautiful sir! This woman is otherwise all yours! There’s nothing you can do or ask me to do that will make me doubt your chivalrly and courage good si...
- Shut up. You talk too much, and without much sense.

- Oh, uh, oh... I’m so-rry! I must have offended you with such a meager reward! I’m so incredibly sorry! We’ll have sex tonight, my dear sir, I’ll give all of my body for you! I’ll just ask the Priestess for a short description of why anybody would want to remain chaste! I’m sure it’s nothing, anyway, so we’ll be able to enjoy ourselves as much as we...

He suddenly pushed her off himself and rose to full height.

- Stop talking about this crap. I need to know where this “Priestess” of yours is.

- But, I fffound you first! Why do you want to meet up with Priestess! She’s older than me! I’m sure her pussy’s all used up! I’m a great bargain! You get to use my pure untouched flesh and spoil it with your own essence, smell and lust as much as you want!

- Look, I don’t have the time for this right now. I’m not here for sex. I need to find this priestess.

- All right, all right. I’ll lead you to the old hag. But, as a reward, you should spill ev-er-y-thing you have in your family jewels right in my cleavage, at least! You will, won’t you, dear Sir Knight?

- Fifteen seconds ago, that was my reward.

- Such composure! Such attention to detail and awareness! As expected of my personal Knight!

- Stop calling me that. Let’s go.

Deryn and Glaw had more luck, as far as not running into trouble was concerned.

Deryn was already tired of questions like “how often does Conall bathe”, “what does Conall like to eat” and “how many times had Conall shoot out his white stuff” (this one seriously annoyed him), so he’d actually welcome a small fight or something along these lines.

What they did ran into was something he certainly did *not* expect.

It was one of the larger chambers yet, but it was mostly empty, and so, they had an almost clear view of what was happening on the other side of the chamber. And even if it was hard to notice, the sounds, while somewhat muffled and sound, as well as a subtle smell, were making it pretty clear.
A pair, whose clothes were splayed all over the floor... and apparently at least one of them was an official of the Church of some sort, given that part of these clothes seemed like a habit. They appeared to be completely normal, with the woman being older, somewhere in her early thirties, while the guy was in early or mid twenties... From the looks of it, they were enjoying one another immensely, and while Glaw cocked her head and jiggled all around with interest, Deryn turned around to avoid watching the scene. Just as he did, he felt the distinct warmth of another person’s proximity, and an oddly seductive voice whispered from above in his ear.

- N-o, you have to *watch*. Get pointers for the future, and not turn the truth of what you’re seeing into a lie. Deep down, you know how beautiful such a picture can turn out to be, right?

He turned around, sharply, reflexively reaching for his weapons. However, as he did so, something that gave off an odd sensation wrapped around his hand, and he realized that it was the woman’s *tail*, with a heart or spade shaped end.

- Oh, my, relax, relax! I’m not going to be forceful with you! Sorry for creeping up on you like that, but you seemed so *cute* that I just had to watch you for a while before noticing you’re moving right here. What is a young boy like you doing in a place like this? Not to mention with a red slime that’s not interested in him for some reason?

- Y... you can tell?

- Of course! Red slimes are intelligent and emotional compared to many slimes, so if she’s following you without just feeding off you, she probably has affection for you, in which case she becomes very clingy. But here, she clearly follows you for a different reason, since she’s keeping her distance.

As she talked, he finally could take a good look at her. The woman in front of him was clearly a mature beauty, of looks suggesting that she might be a bit older than Alessa, but it was hard to determine this with monster’s and with Alessa’s less-than-human look. Her hair was a crazy mix of red with black and silver highlights, and it must’ve looked really amazing in bright light, but here, in the somewhat dark cathedral, it brought on thoughts of flames and fire. Her lips were fuller than he ever saw on a woman, and she had impressive breasts... that, along with an overly feminine and slightly unnatural, nearly perfect body, coupled with the tail, made him realize she probably was some sort of a succubus.

- Ummm, could you... let go of my hand?

- Ah, my, sorry, sorry. Of course. I missed a man’s touch, so I got ahead of myself. Here.

Her tail removed itself from his hand, but she gently grabbed his head and turned it towards the couple at the end of the chamber, too indulged in themselves to notice the three other people at the other side.

- Now, where were we... ah, yes. This woman. Originally started coming here to the cathedral to attempt to annul her marriage. A sad, sad thing. Apparently, her husband does his best to avoid any sort of intimacy between the two... doesn’t want to do anything that may lead to conception, and doesn’t even really satisfy her... but has already conceived a bastard with another woman! That’s so
bad of him... in our world, such people are either accepted by harem-lover monsters or straightened out by the really domineering ones, but they find love, anyway. It’s the young child of his that we should be worried about, but as for the wife... as soon as I planted the kitsune spirit I had follow me here inside her, she became true to her desires and even decided to join my cause! And now, she has gotten herself that guy over there to satisfy her. I worry if love will blossom straight away, but sooner or later I’m sure she’ll find someone more suited to her than that man before... maybe even more than the guy whose name she’s screaming right now! You see, boy, in the monster world, in the perfect utopia that is to be created by the Lady Lilith, everyone can either indulge themselves in lust or find love... Because Gods originally gave humanity these gifts, love, desire, lust, intimacy, closeness, the pleasures and climaxes of sex. Yet now, the most powerful being in the universe lost it’s way because it wanted control too much... and somehow, all these wonderful pleasures became a sin if they’re not between a human and a human... But, monsters can love even stronger and desire to please even more than humans do, so, why would such intimacy be a sin? How could what was originally a gift from the wisest and most powerful creatures in the universe only become a sin now? You don’t understand it either, do you? I’m calling upon Godan Hyperion himself to acknowledge his mistake of attempting to control everything that once belonged to his brothers and return to the way nature intended thinks to be...

Deryn didn’t want to even think how Conall would react to a monster calling the name of the chief’s god in his own cathedral after corrupting it.

Another voice resounded in the chamber, and this time, the duo on the ground managed to stop their activities from escalating further as someone entered. Deryn recognized Keita’s voice.

- Care to explain what you mean by that?

The tall woman turned towards the visitors, Alessa and Keita, both carrying a single human each and followed by something that looked like a winged and tailed woman - probably another succubus.

- Ah, ah, another handsome man has come visit the good old me and my new place of worship! With company, no less! I apologize, I got so caught up trying to teach your friend here a few things that I never got to exchange pleasantries... My name is Rutivexia... what’s yours and to what do I owe this pleasure?

- Alessa.

- Keita Haneo. And the man you were talking to is Deryn Amberwing, in case you forgot to even ask that, caught up in your sex talk. The slime girl is Glaw.

- Uh, oh, so stingy, so jaded! You’d think that a man traveling with a monster would be kinder and more open-minded!

- Keita-k... Keita is actually really open-minded, and he has his reasons for acting like that. I imagine he was pretty annoyed when your succubi friend here tried to jump him after he saved her.

- Ahhh, Lucy! You have to forgive her. Her transformation to a succubus hasn’t been complete and her human mind and willpower are utterly unable to cope with the influx of freaky desires. Maybe you should apologize properly, Lucy.
- I’ll apologize! I’ll agree to marry Mr Keita, so please forgive me for acting out of place!

- M...marry? - Alessa spouted out

- Yes! Sir Kei-ta saved me and he’s my knight!

- This is ridiculous! How dare you! Have you even asked him the reasons for doing that? Why would he save you with the intent of marrying you?

- That’s obvious. We’re joined by the string of fate.

- Keita, tell her you have no interest! She’s a succubus, this crazy attraction must be killed in the womb.

- I’ve already said that... honestly, I have no strength to explain anymore...

- In any case, haven’t you noticed? Keita-kun’s... Keita’s spirit energy is already like this! You should know when to back off!

- Uh, but that isn’t your mark, stingy snake! It’s old enough! I don’t mind!

- I’m her... I’m that arachne’s elder sister! I’m here to ensure nobody touches Keita, since...

- Ahhh, that’s how it is... but if that young man has mated with a monster already, why is *he* so stin...

Keita’s look could only be described as a glare that could kill at that point, and so was Alessa’s, at least until the swordsman’s eyes also rested on her in that state.

- That just now was a lie. I had a... very bad experience previously, so I’m simply not interested. At all. Now, if you could somehow ram that thought into your subordinate’s head, I’d be grateful...

Rutivexia now directed her gaze at Alessa, who was clearly anxious and lost in her own world.

[“Why did I make up such a lie? Keita’s free to interact with anyone, and he was clearly telling the girl off from the start, so why did I invent such a lie? It just angered him! And just when he agreed to help me and looked at me so apologetically after cutting my hand! Why did I...”]

The dark priestess smiled.

- Ahhh, so THAT’S how it is... Sorry, Lucy, but I doubt this gentleman will be interested in you. And since these people seem to want to help us, we wouldn’t want to anger *any* of them, right?

- I’ll try my best. I’ll make sure to not enforce my virginity being taken by Sir Keita until he is ready.

Alessa’s fury almost struck again, but she controlled herself this time.
“Let him deal with it. He just told half of the truth nonchalantly. He doesn’t mind at all. He turned both me and that Rhalia down immediately, so she won’t be getting any, too.”

- That being said, of course, we are here to help, but I was interested in what you just said to Derynkun.

- Ahhh, yes, sorry, sorry. My, my, where to start... this is rare knowledge, no longer taught to the common faithful, but how I shall say this... the pantheon wasn’t always as humble nor as small as it is now, you know?

Alessa interrupted her.

- One more thing. The one Keita’s carrying is a knight, but this person here is paired with one of the newborn monsters, it’d seem, so perhaps you should heal him.

She lay the father down on the ground and the priestess kept speaking, apparently preparing a healing spell in the meantime.

- Currently... what humans perceive as “divinities” is a group almost completely empty. Just Godan Hyperion, Queen Titania if they accept the Fairies and the Elves, King of Fangs if they’re aware of the Druids and Bres, who disappeared long ago. Hear how many ‘if’ there were? Okeanos was one of the last active and worshipped-by-humans deities, but got killed by the Dragon Sentinel of Zipangu, who took control of the waters, with help from our own Lady Lilith and her husband. Of course, that makes the Dragon Sentinel officialy recognized as a deity by all of Zipangu and some of the West, but not all. The Arch-Hero, Nemed, was also often seen as a deity by some, having killed the Demon Lord of two generations ago and completed many brave deeds... yet he fell in battle against his own nephew, the Demon Lady’s husband Lucion, also not long ago, the battle being the cause for Lord Lucion’s coma. If you’re objective about what constitutes godhood these days, you’ll have to add the Dragon Sentinel and Demon Lady themselves, who managed to quite thoroughly re-make the rules of human-monster interactions and the entire monster race nearly from scratch soon after ascending to the throne. And the last “deity”, the enigmatic and dangerous Umbro Star, who brought the tentacle horrors invading mostly Zipangu to our own world. That makes for six actually alive and known gods, many of them not accepted as such by humans, and one missing deity.

Alessa asked:

- Bres was the one who was holding the Cyclops race prisoner, right?

- Yes, that is correct. Now, both Bres and Okeanos were the grandchildren of one of the original trio of deities, who came into our world at the beggining of time and created most if not all living things.

Keita raised an eyebrow.

- Yes, that definitely seems to differ from what one can learn from the Order these days. However... only six deities? There seems to be a lot more sects and cults than that.
- Ahh, yes. Of course, powerful monsters, elemental spirits, or angels that decided to create their own doctrine, as well as divine-blooded heirs of other deities are worshipped in some parts of the world the same way Nemed was by some humans. I’d say these are part of the demigods group... Creatures so powerful that they’re definitely not mortals anymore, capable of miraculous feats of magic or action, but having not yet ascended to the level where they can really modify the shape of the universe itself. I’d say that, on our side, at least three monsters and the Demon Lady’s husband should be perceived as demigods, and I’d estimate the total number of such beings at around fifteen to twenty. Of course, my knowledge is limited, so there may be a lot more than that.

- So, worship does not necessarily constitute what you perceive as divinity.

- No, definitely not. Objectively speaking, Godan Hyperion is the most supreme being in our universe, and lesser deities worshipped by humans here or in Zipangu don’t match with him at all... Also, continuing from before, Hyperion is the last deity alive from the original three, having taken the name once the other two were well and truly dead. Originally, what is currently the human world was three domains - the Sky, the Land and the Water. Godan Hyperion was the god of the Sky, Land was ruled by Cernunnos, and Water was ruled by Enki. It is rumored Cernunnos was the one who originally created the Dwarves and was also responsible for the birth of the first Demon Lord, incarnation of the negative aspects and powers of the world, meant to control the more powerful races by limiting their numbers... thus, ending up in direct opposition to humans, dwarves and elves, who are rumored to be created from an union of powers between at least two gods. Many credit Godan for actually creating humans.

Alessa sighed. Indeed, it was a well-known fact amongst some high-ranking monsters these days - revealed by Lady Lilith - that many Monster Lords were directly manipulated by the Gods. They were meant to limit the humans’ power and unite most human races under one religion and one flag in face of such a dangerous and common enemy. This was one of the things Lilith abhorred and tried to change by shifting all of the monster’s aggressiveness into sexual aggressiveness and remaking their forms so humans would perceive them as exotic, alluring and even beautiful, rather than scary.

- So... - Deryn asked. - Since we’ve never heard of Cernunnos and Enki is only noted as having been the god of waters before Okeanos, what happened?

- Enki died a few generations back in unknown circumstances. Word is, the Demon Lady and Dragon Sentinel may know what happened. Cernunnos removed his divinity, or at least immortality, and spread it between many children of the Land, thus increasing the lifespans of monsters, elves, dwarves, and some say even humans, to a lesser extent, so that they could enjoy life more rather than just suit single purposes. There are monsters and spirits still revering the memory of Cernunnos, who gave them these gifts and even life. The first generation of Enki’s children were all daughters, forming the initial, small Nereid race, and ancestors to the Mermaids, Yuki-Onnas, and eastern dragons - Ryu. Many say sirens, merrows, and even the Charybdis or Scyllas are related to these children somehow by further propagation or the magic permeating the areas near seas and lagoons. The original children of Enki reproducing with others brought on a generation that was eventually recognized as gods, such as Okeanos and Bres, though there weren’t many of them. A few other deities came from different sources - many say Queen Titania was Cernunnos’ daughter with an elf and a wife to one of Enki’s grandchildren, others say it was the other way around... It is unknown if it’s the same Titania. Humans claim Titania is simply a title taken by every Faerie queen and that the original one is long gone.
- So, in short... - Keita attempted to surmise - there were originally three Original Gods, one of them created monsters as a natural foe so the races wouldn’t grow too powerful, but their purpose was corrupted to instead limit the numbers of, control and unite humans... Which is what the current Demon Lady tries to oppose.

- Yes.

Deryn continued.

- And said gods made it so sex was a pleasurable act, but when monsters took that as their own tactic, many laws against sexuality were placed and expressing sexuality with a monster is currently a sin.

- Precisely. It’s been so ever since the succubus race was born, and is even more so after partial succubization of all the monsters.

Keita seemed to suddenly realize something.

- So, if it’s Godan Hyperion who kills the Demon Lady, he’ll try to place a marionette Demon Lord in her place...

- … And everything will be back to the way it was, with humans being monster’s slaves, food, or mortal enemies. Even happy monster couples will probably split and many monsters will forget their feelings for human mates. Precisely. It’ll be a tragedy.

Both Rutivexia and Alessa were surprised at such sharpness from Keita. Both him and Deryn were still seemingly doubtful, so Alessa was quick to intervene.

- Of course, to not be unfair, the humanity’s fear of us assimilating them isn’t unfounded. At the current point, Lady Lilith’s power is unable to even the odds between the more powerful monster and demon blood and less powerful human blood, and there’s been no males at all born from monster and human pairings. Unless she’s able to remedy that...

- The original purpose given to monsters works out either way, only differently. - Both Deryn and Keita noted.

- Precisely. But, Godan Hyperion is still a superior being to all others in the universe, which is why us, the members of Deity’s Fall, advocate that he should be persuaded rather than fought against.

- Deity’s Fall?

Alessa proceeded to explain.

- Deity’s Fall is a subsect of the demon family. It’s leader is Belial, an angel that fell long ago and joined forces with Lady Lilith before she became the Demon Lady. It’s members, mostly Fallen Angels and Dark Priests, a type of succubi... precisely like the one before you, advocate that rather than defeating Godan Hyperion and remaking the universe’s laws forcefully, we should allow him to
rule as he is the most supreme creature in the universe and chances of defeating him directly are slight anyways, only that he should be shown the pleasure, joy and ecstasy Lady Lilith’s utopia will provide to gods, angels and mortals alike.

- Oh my, oh my, sister Echidna here is certainly knowledgeable. I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name...

- Keita introduced me, you were probably a bit too busy eyeing up him and Deryn to notice.

Rutivexia’s confident and alluring smile grew a little more nervous and silly.

- Sorry, sorry.

- Alessa. Some know me as the Black Moth.

- Ahhh, certainly. For a moment there, I thought you might be an undead Lamia rather than an Echidna. I know your race tends to have tattoo-like birthmarks shaped like snakes, but this is the first time I’m seeing one of your race with moth-like ones. And your bangs kind of hide the “third eye”.

Alessa moved the green bangs away from her forehead, revealing the last mark on her body, one that seemed like a small, dark violet gem outline with a point near the middle, or, indeed, a vertically placed eye.

- Happy now?

- Mhmmm. Pretty unique. Same as your companions, it’d seem. But, it’s not my place to pry. Anyway, mister Keita said that you are here to help?

- Yes. I’m pretty sure you already know the cathedral is under attack.

- Ah, yes, the templars. I was very worried about them, but I hear some of the new monsters refused to stay closed in safe spots and a few even actively tried to hunt down the knights for themselves...

- What do you know about them?

Suddenly, the person that was so far having sex in the back, a brown haired, apparently completely human woman in her thirties, her body now hidden by the garb of a woman of faith - though, as Deryn just learned, she wasn’t.

- I learned a bit about them before they were sent here, scouting in the tavern...

- Go ahead, tell them, Sela. They seem to be friendly.

Deryn was mildly surprised at the woman being named the same as the girl he met and who warned him about the bounty on his head still being honored in some cities, but it was definitely a completely different woman. This one had more of an animalistic pull about her.
- Well, apparently, they send out a “large squadron of knights with their squires, including three Templars and one priest. The group is lead by Elnathan Nussen-Hierro, a 29 years old templar-inquisitor of White Scythe, and he’s accompanied by one other White Scythe templar and a Templar-Protector of Golden Shield, who happens to be his older cousin, Matteo Hierro.

- If he’s a younger member of the Templars leading a group with older ones, that may mean this is a test or his skills have already been appraised and recognized. Deryn-kun, you don’t suppose you or your brother could’ve heard of them?

- No. Conall tried to get into the ranks of the Silver Gauntlet, and my own knowledge only covers a bit of the two groups other than these we have here. Underestimating them would probably be bad, though.

- Indeed, indeed, such a smart young man!

Rutivexia jabbed Sela in the abdomen with an elbow, causing her to laugh nervously.

- Ah, hahaha, sorry, sorry. Also, there’s a priest with them. A person apparently capable of magic going by the name Edgar Chios.

- So, three templars, one mage, a bunch of knights and squires...

- If it sounds too troublesome, we could always just stay here and enjo...

The looks from Sela, Rutivexia, Alessa, Keita and Deryn apparently quickly silenced Lucy. Glaw was still staring at Sela, a stare full of suspicions and confusion. However, it was Glaw that voiced the doubt.

- I am sorry, but... what exactly are you? You, Sela person. You look like a human.

- It’s okay, Glaw. I can feel her energy. She’s apparently some sort of demi-human, succubus or just hiding her true form.

- Ahhh, no, no. Sela here is a nearly full human in body. She’s been implanted with a Kitsune-Bi spirit by me personally, before lady Deruella came here and corrupted the rest of the cathedral.

Deryn and Keita shifted uncomfortably at the confirmation that the change was the result of a Lilim’s work.

- Say, is it... safe for us to be here, Alessa? We won’t end up becoming monsters or anything, right?

- Men don’t really become monsters these days, Deryn. Anyway... the cathedral doesn’t seem to have been changed into a true demon territory, the spell this Lilim used was one directed mostly at living creatures. If a woman were to run into a high concentration of such energy, the transformation might start if she was weak of will and spirit - and spots like this may be present, I warn you. If a man were to do so, though, they’d probably only become hornier temporarily or similar side-effect.

- That’s right. So at worst, Mister Deryn, you may find yourself wanting to bump uglies with one of
us. I assure you, we’re very gentle. I don’t even bite. - Sela explained, almost earning another elbow from Rutivexia.

- Sorry, as I’ve mentioned, she’s been starved. What’s wrong with you, Sela? Edwin isn’t satisfying you somehow?

- Oh, he’s fine. It’s working out... but something is missing. I don’t think he’s the one yet. Maybe if we put more energy into him, he’ll develop well, but... something’s still missing at that point.

- I see. Well, the first man doesn’t always end up being the chosen husband, as I’m sure the three elder of us monsters here know.


- I only had a few men before Conall. I hope he won’t mind. Since I’ve been there, though, only one guy has passed Alessa’s dungeon, I think. Other than Keita, of course.

Alessa felt that irrational surge of irritation again.

[“Why am I annoyed at them talking about previous men? It’s not like it’s anybody’s business. Obviously, I had someone in my life up until now, so why don’t I want these guys here to hear it? About that, or… my age!”]

- Anyway... - Alessa spoke through her teeth. - We have an issue to work out. The three of us are here to get some information...

- Wait, Alessa. After we’ve dealt with the templars, there’s another person that’s a danger to you monsters being here. They’ve hired a bird trainer by the name of Dianna. She’s supposed to send a message if they call for backup or don’t show up in five days. If you want to be safe, you’ll have to capture her or run away within five days.

Alessa looked back at Keita. it was apparent he wanted to show his goodwill and, even more apparent to her now, that he didn’t plan on switching sides at any point. She was honestly impressed by a human previously taken by a monster against his will being able to stick on the monsters’ side with so much determination.

- Yes, yes. That is correct. Back to discussing tactics... I think that given the fact the templar-inquisitors are probably more used to dealing with magic while the priest is the only one who won’t use weapons to fight, we should leave the two White Scythes to Keita and Deryn, if at all possible, while the more magic-oriented monsters should take care of the priest himself.

Keita interrupted that train of thought.

- It is likely that the priest and the leader of the group will stick closely to one another. Therefore, we
need something like an assassination squad carrying out a double-assassination mission. Of course, it won’t go as smoothly, but if we can limit the amount of humans engaging the people send to fight the leader of the knights and the priests, things should go relatively smoothly.

- So, we need to draw away as many knights as we can from their control point, and then strike using the monster’s greater knowledge of the cathedral. - Deryn summed it up.

- Yes. Soon, the our scouts should be able to find out where are they based and how they’re moving so... Oh... I guess they’re already here.

Two harpies, one regularly-feathered and one with black feathers, one gargoyle and one bee-like monstergirl flew into the chamber. The black harpy spoke first.

- Their base is in the second row of chambers from the east of the cathedral, with their forces split to cover the chambers near the two entrances to it. Those facing south-east are far weaker and easier to penetrate, there are more of them on the other side.

The bee-like monster also spoke, after casting a glance at the two men in the chamber.

- There’s a quite large squad going almost straight for us from the eating chambers’ side. A smaller squad was released and moves more slowly from the heavily - protected side mentioned just before.

Rutivexia nodded. Keita turned to the rest of the group.

- That means we have a few things to worry about. First is the attack squad. I’d say there’s a pretty good chance that it’s lead by one of the templars... So, that means we should probably send either Deryn-kun or me to deal with it. The other one would be a member of the assassination squad and try to take down their leader.

- And either me or Rutivexia here should probably be on the squad that deals with the priest.

- Well, I imagine the two of you must have developed some sort of teamwork until now, so maybe it’ll be better if we put miss Alessa on the squad that leads away the other knights, to be joined later by one of the two misters here, and I will take care of the priest.

- I might as well call that we could cooperate on the assassination squad...

- Not really. The idea here is to separate the leader of the templars and the priest and take them down according to our expertise.

- And given expertise is in order, I’d suggest me taking care of the offensive squad and Deryn-kun being on our assassination squad.

Alessa turned to Keita.

- Is this an honest plan where everyone’s assumed to win, or the one like with...

- No. Deryn-kun seems to be more specialized in fighting humans one on one or with a small group
for some reason. I had my experiences with superior numbers and human opponents that had a numerous advantage. Besides, in case he fails, one of the monsters may be able to take him to safety.

- Don’t you think you might fail, or need help? - Deryn asked, a bit annoyed at the suggestion that *he’d* be the one that fails.

- Deryn-kun... last time I checked, it was you who wasn’t able to complete our companion’s little dungeon here with the help of your brother, while I passed through it on my own. I’ll be fine. Especially with that new sword and whatnot.

- I’m with Deryn on this, Keita. You seem to be risking too much.

- Look, the plan is flawless. There’s a 50% chance I’ll run into the type of templar used to dealing with magic, and they’re stopped, anyway...

- Enough of this discussion. Samantha here will go with you, since she knows how the templars are moving, and will help you battle that group, mister Keita. Sending someone completely solo is too much of a risk. Miss Alessa will also have help with her mission to distract the remaining knights. Me and young Deryn will be on the assassination squad, along with miss Glaw here. I think we may have a bit of a use for her there.

- Excellent. So, we have a plan.

The plan’s overall execution didn’t start all that badly. Alessa’s small force was the first to strike, leading a great number of knights away from their main base, while the dark priestess Rutivexia, Deryn, Glaw, and their own force rapidly hammered through the much weaker other side of the knight’s defense. Deryn was rushing forward, attempting to knock out as many knights as he could with his mace. He was honestly very worried about the outcome of this battle - none of the match-ups seemed perfect, despite Keita insisting upon them being so. It had to be noted that the monsters were likely to rape their captives if male and kill, enslave or mutate them if female. He doubted previously human monstergirls would treat females badly, but any actions would still be taken against their will.

Nevertheless, he maintained the focus necessary to help in breaking through the enemy’s lines, with Glaw and Rutivexia at his sides, as he rushed into the next chamber, which would apparently hold the leading group of templars and the priest.

- Glaw, around the middle of the right wall, this room is next to a chamber with a *really* long set of stairs that’d seriously hurt if one was pushed and fell down them. Especially in heavy armor. Try to bind one of the knight-looking men next to the wall and let me deal with the rest, but prepare to tie yourself to something, okay?

- Yes. We will win. Maybe Conall will even praise me if we do not hurt them too much.
- _I wouldn’t count on it._ - Deryn shot down her hopes as they rushed into the “command” chamber.

There were only five people inside. Glaw noticed a man right along the right side of the chamber. Immediately propelling herself forward, she bound him tight just as he was to draw his weapon, and Rutivexia was immediately on it, focusing her magic powers as she prepared for a strike.

- _Intense Air Spell : Pulsing Greater Wind Strikes!_

Deryn could easily feel the wind flowing through the chamber, multiple times, as suddenly its force sprawled the knight, still bound with Glaw, against the wall. After a few strikes, said wall started to crack and by the end of the spell, it was literally ready to simply fall from the next stronger impact.

The other people in the chamber now turned against the group, a man in a white-and-silver battle wear with some purple and scarlet embroidery turning towards them and calling for the people in the chambers neighbouring to this one. Despite the sudden attack, he seemed calm, like the situation was under control, and Deryn easily pointed him out as the leader of the group. He was relatively tall, probably an inch, maybe an inch and a half taller than either Conall or Keita, with visible, but compact and wiry muscles and odd, half-mechanic, measured movements. Two curved scabbards at his sides suggested he favored a two-sword style. Behind him was quite a bit older blond man.

Rutivexia was already prepared for the final strike against the other, similarly clothed knight.

- _Intense Air Spell : Massive Wind Strike!_

Another flow of air, similar to the previous ones, but singular and a long stronger, pushed its way through the chamber, ramming against the wall and blowing it away, causing the man, who was slipped out of Glaw’s grasp moments before, to be thrown down the set of stairs the dark priestess referred to before. Glaw herself needed a moment to re-construct her body as the four remaining opponents turned against the monstergirl and the younger Amberwing brother.

Rutivexia suddenly moved more quickly than before, probably with usage of wind magic, and was close to the priest. The templar’s odd, violet eyes still kept up with her, though, as he mouthed a dispassionate order.

- _Take care of the man. Me and the priest... will deal with the harlot._

The two others were immediately on it, drawing a morningstar and a sword - ironically, a blunt and a bladed weapon, a set matching Deryn’s own - as they advanced upon him.

Glaw suddenly moved to the nearby door and spread herself over it, blocking a set of projectiles that
were apparently heading for Deryn’s back.

- Go ahead, my future brother! I willl take care of these obnoxious knighties here!
- Don’t call me a brother yet!

Sword and mace in his hands, Deryn charged against his own opponents, prepared to fight them. Apparently, they were the squires of the knights in the chamber - the female one of the duo cast worried glances at the set of stairs, and the young man did his best to emulate their leader’s dispassionate behavior, failing miserably.

The clash was imminent. Deryn’s specialization was one on one fighting, as Keita said, but in the first few blows exchanged against the pair of squires, one thing he was sure of.

The only advantage they had was their number.

Conall didn’t share Keita’s confidence that he can beat a number of knights, nor Deryn’s confidence that his brother is capable of battling a set of relatively high-ranked Templar squires at once, not to mention a commander from the White Scythe himself. The fact that, on the field of battle, many things and arrangements can happen and that if the group planned a “strike the head” mission against the templars, Deryn would be likely to take on the role of the hitman...

[“It’s impossible. They’ll lose.”]

Yes, that much he was almost sure of.

[“The opponents have the advantage of numbers and training. All I attempted was to become a squire of the Silver Gloves. The inquisitors from the White Scythe are probably more ruthless and less chivalrous and honorable in combat, given what they usually fight against. And a Golden Shield templar... they do enough fighting against humans. Keita might be able to match the templars one on one, but Deryn... He’s barely seventeen. He shouldn’t even be fighting such a battle in the first place! I just let him go and relieve the nightmare of battling against true knights! I was not… supposed to allow him to take all the burdens himself again! Damn it!”]
He panted. The sounds of battle already resounded within the cathedral. If his friends entered from one side, and the battle only happened now, that meant the templars were likely to be on the other side. That’s what he was going for.

[“I’ll explain. I’ll tell them Alessa or one of the monsters inside cast a charm on him and that they knocked me out... I’ll save him. Keita, Alessa and Glaw will be in trouble for this... maybe they’ll even die, but I’ll just go on another adventure with Deryn. It’s not like the tentacle horrors are that much of a threat to humanity here compared to monsters. We don’t have to follow Keita’s maniacal vision to save the world.”]

Something in his head and heart screamed against betraying his comrades.

[“I’m just trying to save my brother. I’m just sacrificing something to save my little brother again, okay?”]

To Keita, the battle felt more like a round of Shogi combined with dancing rather than a true fight.

The templar he run into was definitely not a member of the White Scythe, but more likely the one from the Golden Shield. As befitting of the name... most of the knights he commanded moved well as a group and were well-skilled defensively, if less so offensively, and as such it was a game of dodges, blocks, and placed strikes and feints.

Except, well, he had air support.

Right now, he was honestly grateful for having been assigned the insect-monstergirl as a companion. Him constantly dodging and parrying attacks with his sword was worthwhile due to her constantly oppressing the opponents with her maneuverability and speed, from above, the sides and even their back.

The golden templar, however, apparently recognized the danger the monstergirl posed when paired with a swordsman skilled enough at the defensive part of the art of battle.

However, rather than do something with it, the templar’s move had an unexpected target.
He simply charged against Keita. The swordsman took a step back and swung his blade, from the sword-wielding side of his opponent, which was apparently exactly what the Templar planned.

He turned with a half-jump, shielding himself from the strike, made another leap and suddenly had his leg right next to Keita’s chest. With frightening force, he propelled himself off the swordsman and onto the stunned bee-woman who didn’t expect such an outcome as she was about to attack the group by sweeping down on them again.

Keita didn’t remember ever meeting a man with such a strength in his legs, although if he were to point out when he fought something comparable, it’d be his battle against the two golems in Alessa’s dungeon - and that alone spoke volumes about how strong and well-trained the templar was. Once he grappled with the bee-woman in the air, his weight - increased by somewhat heavy armor - brought her down immediately and he quickly slammed against her, kicking, as his companions ganged up on the monstergirl, also attacking.

Keita knew that defensive combat and attempting to knock out opponents rather than kill them was over at this point.

Honestly, he couldn’t say he had much of a trouble with killing humans but neither would he do it with gusto. These ones didn’t seem willing to negotiate nor to budge on their horribly close-minded and unfair stance, so switching to full attack mode took him just a few seconds as he rushed forward to stop the knights from mauling the monster.

An arm was severed moments later. Somebody had his calf cut halfway through, another person had a bit of their guts spilling.

All in all, it didn’t take long for the knights to realize once again that the *human* was the real danger in this fight.

So, they turned on him.

Keita took a fighting stance as if to invite them, and it was indeed all the invitation they needed.

A sudden rush and he felt the metal slip *just barely* outside of his body with a subtle move to the right. A half-spin saved him from another lunging strike and allowed him to pose himself to cut the chest of one of the knights open. The blade’s magically-increased momentum allowed for an almost deadly strike with just the proper application of force, and Keita’s sharp senses and reflexes also told
him just when to bend his body and stab with the dagger by throwing his hand backwards.

Then, a few slashes reached him, only to have one of the warriors that threw it run through with his sword.

Another swing from the enemy finally let his blood flow out of him, and he recognized the templar’s strength. Parrying another blow of the golden-shielded fighter, he scoured by sweeping his leg to throw the opponent off-balance, which much to the strong-legged warrior’s surprise succeeded, and an equally rapid thrust penetrated the knight’s armor, his own blood spilling onto the floor as he fell down on it.

Another dodge caused Keita to position himself for an attack he did not want to use, yet did, instinctively.

A decapitation.

Seeing his subordinate die irrevocably, the templar struck yet again, only to be parried. A quick exchange of strikes had the sound of metal resounding in the room, but thanks to the superior numbers of his opponents, Keita ended up getting wounded more.

The bee-girl was back in the fight, attacking the templar and taking him out of the equation, but the strikes of the other fighters grew increasingly frantic, powerful, but no less accurate.


He couldn’t do much by now except to return strike for strike, as he bled profusely, before a powerful axe strike nearly swept him off his feet as blood shot out of the new wound, and another morningstar strike caused him to double over after hitting the wall.

[“I guess we bit a little more than we could swallow, huh...”]
Alessa’s arm hit the ground as a circle of light appeared around it. There were already a bunch of knights defeated, but another just as large group was still trying to fight. Despite avoiding melee against more than one opponent at once, she was already wounded... And extremely nervous, for some reason.

*Negative Spell : Spectral Moth Family, Caterpillars.*

Small shapes of light and shadow quickly creped out of the circle surrounding her arm, crawling towards the group of knights, and then onto them, sucking out their energy as they gorged on it and prepared to change into higher forms.

*Cocoons.*

As commanded, the little spectral moths immediately started to change into the stationary pupa forms, as she prepared to finish off the group of knights.

*Spectral Moth Family, Cocoons - Detonate!*

The small shapes exploded violently, causing the group of humans to fall onto the ground, some spasming and shouting with pain, others certainly losing consciousness. She regretted having to start using near-lethal force to win the battle, but the knights ferocity and her own nervousness forced her to.

The only question was...

[“Who is in trouble... Keita? Deryn? Or are the templars’ reinforcements coming? Or is it just that... the strongest of them had finally begun to fight?”]

Deryn’s strike finally caused the squire, slightly older than him, to fall onto the ground from the deafening and stunning impact of the mace, although he was unable to evade a well-placed strike from the female’s own sword.

But now, he had only one opponent to worry about, and he intended to make full use of that.

Shifting his fighting stance to complete offensive, his rapid flurry of blows caused the girl to back up against the wall more and more as he struck relentlessly and mercilessly. After a parry, he could just
swing his mace and ensure it struck. If she dodged the mace, she could only do so much to also defend from the sword’s blow.

He took another glancing blow, but had her just where he wanted. Her own blood also spilled in significant quantities after his next slash, and then, she just barely dodged the mace strike.

Another clash of their blades in the air had her parry awkwardly, and that was enough for him. A rapid mace strike to the hand disarmed her, and another sword slash had her almost completely backed up against a wall.

He prepared his mace strike as the knockout blow, getting ready to end the fight, but as he swung it, he suddenly met resistance, unable to even budge the mace.

The knight in the silver armor, the one with black hair and dispassionate violet eyes, was literally holding down his mace with his own bare hand. Well, covered with a glove, but unarmed hand nevertheless.

- Step down, girl. Lysander will put you through enough on his own, anyway, frustrated as he will be from getting knocked off the fight so easily, anyways. He should be back soon, so you’re better off still standing when he does.

- Ye... yessir! I apologize for my...

- There’s no need to apologize. If he wanted you dead, you would have died, and I wouldn’t have helped you. This young man here has more experience fighting human foes, or at least foes with *weapons*, than a squire like you does. Now, sorry, boy...

- Deryn. I don’t think I’ll be able to stop short of killing you, templar.

- Ahhh, such courtesy! Introducing yourself to the man you intend to murder! Such good manners... and you even hoped you could hold back while taking down the opposition’s leader! I’m not sure whether to praise you or tell you off for your folly. I am Elnathan Nussen-Hierro, the White Scythe and leader of this... investigation team. Unfortunately, I’ll be killing you quickly. There’s much interrogating to be done. If I cleanse a cathedral after such a “sacrilege”, I’m sure to finally “prove my faith like my cousin did”, and there won’t be any more doubt as to who should lead anytime we’re placed on a team. In short, it’s my shortcut to the so-called “blessed” status.

[“You have to be kidding me... you mean he’s not even enhanced by the priests yet? And he stopped my strike... with his HAND?”]
- All right, Deryn. Now, if you’ll do me the courtesy of... dying.

The younger Amberwing brother withdrew. He was prepared to block a strike, but he couldn’t really see his opponent all that well. All he knew was that this “Elnathan” was, somehow, now almost behind him.

Sharply turning around, he blocked the strike of a jagged scimitar that came down on him. He almost lost his balance and he felt a sharp pound of pain in his arm.

- Damn, it’d seem you’re actually a “warrior”, not an animal waiting to be butchered. I apologize...

The White Scythe templar drew upon his second sword.

- I shall treat you as such.

Templar-Protector Matteo Hierro was pretty sure they were done here. He personally struck the bee monster to the point of unconsciousness, and his men managed to somehow take care of the human that aided her. He had a striking suspicion that the man was too far gone to save - he didn’t even seem fully human, having such reflex, being able to take such strikes... not to mention these looks, differently-colored eyes, gray hair despite seeming so young in both voice, mannerisms, fighting style and even partially his looks.

[“He must’ve been one of those infamous incubi. That’s how he got all that ridiculous strength, speed and endurance. Having not gained Templar training, much less a deity’s blessing, it would be the only way he’d be capable to keep up with us. But, anyway, that’s... it?”]

With surprise, he turned around as he saw the man shift on the ground and groan as he slowly lifted himself from it.

[“Doesn’t matter. He’s done for,”]
- Arawn, kill him. Marcus, Severus, the two of you will carry the monster. She’d be valuable as a source of information... maybe. Since she’s still alive and we won here, it’d be a waste to kill her.

As he turned around and started to walk away, he simply heard sounds of two, and then a third, body hitting the ground.

A quick spin revealed the visage to his sight. Arawn split into two from bellybutton all the way to his neck, Severus lying on the ground with a dagger in the back of his head...

And that odd man simply standing on his own two feet, like all the blood from their cuts and damage to his skeleton and internal organs from blunt weapons meant little or nothing.

[“He’s a monster. He may look like a human, but he’s definitely not one anymore. Simply killing an armed Knight from a lying position after taking such a mauling, getting back on his own feet before we ever noticed... a monster, surely.”]

Suddenly, the man spoke.

- What do you people hope to accomplish by ganging up on someone stronger than yourself and then apparently thinking “we’ll probably kill him?” You may kill a human that way... but aren’t you supposed to beat Demon Lords or something?

- Bold words from someone about to drop dead from his wounds, shivering in fear at the thought of crossing swords with me again!

- Fear? Drop dead? Who taught you how to be a warrior?

- What do you mean? Who are you? Do you know who you’re talking to?

- Keita Haneo. Talking to a Golden Shield templar, I presume. Well, let me tell you, mister. Your “warriors” here seem to never have learned the important things for a warrior’s strength. They can’t cope with fear, and they don’t really understand the many different effects... of pain.

- What are you talking about, incubus! You’re just a tool of demons!

- Incubus? Do they tell you to fight other humans with the presumption that they’ve been corrupted to that level? No, old man. I’m just a human.

- Don’t listen to him. He’s just trying to erode our fighting spirit.

- Nooo, you’ve done that yourself. Tell me, mister knight... the monsters in this place... you’ll kill or torment and torture them, and the same will happen to all the humans that helped them, right? Without asking for origins, reason, or anything like that?

- We’re on a mission. We’re not here to judge who should be redeemed and who should not. The place was corrupted, sacrilege was committed. You’re all alike to demons, and allied with them.
The men breathed in deeply, stopping only for a moment of something that seemed like a sharp pain in his side, then spat out some blood.

- *Good. Good. Excellent, as a matter of fact.*

- *You have a deathwish? Good, maybe the gods will have...*

- *No, you misunderstood, dear templar. That merely means...*

The man calling himself Haneo Keita took a step forward and took a fighting stance of a style Matteo wasn’t exactly familiar with... but recognized from it that this person somehow ignored all the wounds dealt until now.

- *That means you’ll learn these important lessons *now*... and I get to be your teacher.*

Chapter End Notes

Arc IV has three chapters, but I believe all of them will be pretty long. It has the most human-on-human violence out of the arcs I've written so far. The situation Keita and Deryn are in show that Keita managed to already obtain a level of superhuman endurance thanks to his 'therapy', but there's still a serious possibility to reach a similar level of power even without divine intervention, as Elnathan seems kin on demonstrating.
Chapter Summary

Keita, Deryn, Alessa and Glaw continue to stand their ground against the Templars and are trying to save their temporary ex-human monster allies from being wiped out. Conall tries to steel himself and get the resolve to do something he doesn’t want to do, one way or another, but are the templars really just going to lay down and get beaten?

Chapter Notes

Similarly to Freak Love, this is a special and final update before the Christmas period, so there’ll be at least a couple of days without any. Regrettably, also in a similar manner, it happens to not be particularly christmas-y. There's a high level of on-human violence in this chapter, and some dark views expressed, but probably nothing as tragic as for me to recommend that you don't read it if you're used to such things from classical and/or dark fantasy stories.

As always, I'd welcome comments and constructive criticism both.

One way or another, I'd like to wish everyone a well-spent and warm time this Christmas. Whether you're a faithful and religious person celebrating something important, a spiritual person noticing that for many, this time is special, or just a regular human living from day to day thinking this is but tradition, I do hope you rest well and have a pleasant time with your families and friends. I also like to thank everyone for consistently reading my stories, especially the ones who left some sort of confirmation of enjoyment.

Deryn was in something of a small pinch, to be honest. The templar’s annoying voice was in fact welcome for once to give him a bit of a break.

- So, young “warrior”, is your woman the priest-mimicking demoness, or the slime? I honestly can’t tell. I’ve heard from a superior once that Sabbath witches and demonesses call their prey, toys, however you call it “big brothers”.

-Nobody here is involved with Sabbath.

- I see. I suspected as much. Well… unfortunately, if it is the demoness, you won’t be able to see her in hell immediately after I sent you there.

- Aren’t you overconfident.

- Overconfident? You are the one who’s overconfident by thinking you can take on someone allowed to lead operations that include other Templars and a group of both knights of different orders and their squires. You would’ve made the cut to be a Templar yourself with that level of skill, that’s for
sure. At your age, I’d even call it impressive. But who knows what price you had to pay for such skill and physical ability, being allied with the monsters and such.

- Ahhh, I get it. You still believe it’s all rituals, soul selling and whatnot.

- I’ve seen them. Men carrying the elements of the monsters, the demons, inside their own bodies and souls. Men transformed into something that is a human only on the outside, and even that not always completely. I’ve fought them and killed them, along with their hellish mates. You’re not there yet, I can tell. I don’t need to know how it works. I know I can kill you, your slimegirl friend, and probably everyone here in a one on one knight. And I have more knights than you have allies. All in all, you’ve already lost, monster-sympathizer. But, I’ll convince you of that physically before I take your head or stab you through the heart, no worries.

[“So, you’re going to “play” with me or some other bullcrap like that before going for the kill? Very well. Many idiots lost fights that way.”]

But, it wasn’t playing that Elnathan had in mind, apparently.

More like showing off his physical power - one that was somewhat odd for his stature.

After just two blocks, Deryn knew that actually *taking* the force behind these attacks on was pure folly, regardless of whether they hit or were parried. He didn’t think he ever met any fighter - at least, a human fighter - who could hit as hard as that, and he kept reminding himself that his opponent was fighting with a style that actually favored either speed and agility or precision and coordination over strength.

Intervening without a weapon after apparently helping the priest deal with Rutivexia was one of the shows of his speed before.

So, it was now or never. Having dodged a strike by his opponent, Deryn attempted to smash the bones of his opponent’s hand with a good swing of the mace. Elnathan, of course, was fast enough to avoid the strike, but also just *barely* fast enough to dodge the following slash incoming at his throat level.

- Dangerous, dange...

A sudden kick to the leg made him lose balance and even though he pushed his weight and body backwards with the other appendage, the White Scythe templar took some of the force of a mace slam into his body.
Deryn didn’t lose time, being already upon his opponent, who parried his initial series of aggressive strikes. Since Elnathan would definitely win in weapon clashes, Deryn switched his style to attempting thrusts with his blade. Two quick piercing attacks of this variety with his sword forced Elnathan to step aside. Deryn followed by performing a crushing sweep with his mace, barely blocked by the Templar and causing the latter to wince in pain for a moment. It was Deryn’s turn to be kicked away, but he also immediately dodged a strike with the scimitar-like weapon by ducking, and correctly predicted the following strike, managing to pirouette out of it’s way. Deryn ended the skillful move by countering and lightly cutting the templar on the hip.

The White Scythes’ member looked a bit more impressed now - but the damage dealt to him was minimal, and him being more impressed meant he was also going to get more serious.

And it was apparent when the jagged sword was suddenly swung to the side in a similar manner he just attacked with his mace. Deryn dodged and struck out on his own, only to find his attack blocked as Elnathan faced him again. A few quick swings and parries after, Deryn was almost pressed against the wall of the cathedral, so he had little other choice but to either make a successful counter or try to sneak out of the melee. He chose the second option, running full speed as soon as he moved to the side and past Elnathan, only to find the templar at his side just in a moment, finally dealing a strike that connected, Deryn feeling cold steel and then warm blood seeping through his clothes on his side.

Then, he came to a full frontal with the Templar, swinging his mace which Elnathan dodged easily, in turn bringing his foot up to kick Deryn in the head. Dizzy, The young fighter eventually felt a pain in his side as steel cut his body again, and turned is body and blades to that very same side, but the templar already wasn’t there. The younger man felt a kick in his back, sending him onto the floor, and he quickly rolled away to avoid having a limb separated from the rest of his body.

He got up. The templar was already charging at him.

There was little point in avoiding the confrontation now, so Deryn decided to risk it while he was still in relatively good physical condition.

Awaiting the strike, he simply jumped over the running templar forcing his body off of the ground with all his strength, and rammed the mace into the other’s shoulder as he practically made a salto in the air before landing on his feet and trying to run his blade through his opponent after landing on the other side. Elnathan had quick enough reflexes to take an immediate, shaky step forward, though, so the blade didn’t go very deep into his body.

Pushing himself off the sword, the templar immediately turned around and it looked like he was completely done “playing” or “showing off”. Lunging at the younger warrior, he immediately penetrated his defense, stabbing him as he had just been stabbed. The short clash in which they engaged afterwards looked more like a brawl than any exchange between two skilled swordsmen.
They both slashed each other through the chest, then Deryn attempted a strike with his mace, only for Elnathan to do one of the most insane things he’d ever see a warrior do - kick away a hand carrying - and trying to strike with - a blunt weapon just before the impact, with his very own leg, and do another slice along the length of Deryn’s entire body. Deryn then headbutted the templar, responded alike, doing a cut from the bottom side to the top side, hitting his opponent again, only for the templar to respond by cutting his leg quite deeply. Deryn’s own response was met with Elnathan parrying his mace strike and then grabbing him by the arm and tossing him across the chamber.

Deryn had a rough landing, but nothing that would stop him from fighting. However, the wounds were already at a stage where they would be affecting his performance. Elnathan, however, also seemed winded up from that exchange.

- Very well, Deryn. I’ll acknowledge you as someone worthwhile to kill. People at your age usually either end up putting all they can into their strength, unaware that their bodies aren’t fully developed yet and wasting their ability to grow in other areas, or neglect both strength and skill, thinking that as long as they move and strike fast enough, they can overwhelm their opponent. But you... you’re developed overall nicely, with almost no weak points but a definite strong point. In simple melee exchange, you’re not all that far behind me... which is why I’ll use all my skills to bring you down without leaving a shade of doubt as to who gets killed. Like I said in the beginning.

- Well, you talk a lot more than I thought you would. Shouldn’t I be dead by now or something?

- As you wish. Indeed, I’ve been postponing it for too long. Normal Wind Spell : Baselard Stare.

Suddenly, wind itself cut up Deryn’s body, the penetrating force of the sudden, sharp gust both slashing and stabbing at him, it’s seem, if only at a rather limited area.

The templar was already closing up on him as the spell took effect.

Matteo was honestly annoyed by the thought of someone a decade or so younger than him claiming he’d be giving him a lesson, so he decided to end it with a move that made him a force to be reckoned with both offensively and defensively, yet so simple in its structure. A charge with his shield was meant to reveal the gray-haired youth’s bluff.

However, he found the man suddenly fall onto the ground and slash at his calves before rolling away, his leg protectors just barely stopping the strike from truly wounding him; said protectors probably took some damage themselves, despite being high-quality armor, not to mention the strike forced Matteo to stop and regain his balance. The man called Keita was already on his feet. One of
Matteo’s knights charged at him, ready to do what his commander just failed to. Surprisingly, the previously tactically and technically fighting swordsman made a move more expected from a barbarian, jumping to deliver a two-handed lunging slash from above at one of his own men.

The knight did everything perfectly, seeing no way to dodge the strike, half-crouching, putting one of his knees onto the ground and holding his sword for a perfect parry. There was a scary sound as the two swords clashed against one another, followed by a small crunch and a shout of pain by the knight, sword falling out of his hand and flying by him, cutting its previous wearer as it fell onto the ground. Matteo could swear it seemed slightly bent from the force of the strike.

Either the swordsman had some crazy physical strength, or his weapon had some sort of enchantment he was finally deciding to use to full effect. Perhaps a bit of both.

And then, after one more rapid slash, the apparently lifeless body of one of his men fell onto the ground.

Matteo and two more of his warriors wasted no time, rushing the swordsman as they prepared to surround him. One of them had his timing just the slightest bit off, going faster than the other two, and, suddenly, he was send crashing down onto the ground by a rapid high kick by the fighter. Keita used him as a stepping stone, jumping slightly above the ground onto his body and then off it, dragging his blade through the airborne knight, leaving a something that seemed like a small trickle from a fountain of blood to trail his own movement as he half-pirouetted in the air and landed, crouching.

["A human can’t move with such agility, precision and grace after being wounded so much."]

Matteo shook such thinking away. Human or incubus, everything could be killed by delivering enough damage to it or wounding its weak spots. Wounded like that, it was too late for the swordsman even if he just became serious. He also remembered an old saying that the flame that burned twice as bright burned half as long - the man had to be pushing himself over and beyond his limit already.

Suddenly, as he and another three men rushed the swordsman, he noticed that the previously struck down knight’s blade was lying *way* too close to Keita. An accident? One way or another, it was grabbed and tossed at another one of his men, hitting almost flawlessly. This, another death, was what finally caused Matteo to realize the difference.

[“Killing intent. The difference is killing intent. Previously, he fought to incapacitate us, cripple us, or knock us out, probably to be used by the monsters later. Now, he’s very willing and ready to deal
Him and his other two men kept closing in on the swordsman. This time, he was the one who quickened his steps and rushed at the end, finishing with a sword strike that was parried. The swordsman made an incredibly brash move of grabbing the ridge of his shield and pulling it to the side sharply, with impressive force, again almost causing the templar to lose balance, but mostly revealing his body and removing the protection of the shield almost entirely from the equation.

And with speed the Golden Shield templar had only seen his cousin and a few other holy knights pull off, the man’s sword was already soaring in another murdering thrust, preparing to push into, no, through his body... And Matteo had a pretty good idea how close to his heart the strike would be if he managed to penetrate the armor.

Thankfully, one of his men shoulder-charged the swordsman just at this moment, throwing him off balance and causing his strike to only stab at a shallow level through his side... possibly saving his life.

But the swordsman was unfazed. Raising his left arm, he twisted his body and shifted the blade in his right, stabbing at the man who was raising his blade to strike at his behind, also at heart level.

Matteo suddenly realized he was running out of knights.

Alessa just received another accurate strike, feeling her blood flow out of her body.

It’s like she was fighting an infinite number of knights, and much of her squad was already down, from exhaustion, getting beaten, and she could *swear* at least one of them went down *on one of the knights*.

Yup. No self control. And *that* was deemed a virtue in the current monster world.

She was surrounded.

* Okay, people. I was trying to conserve my strength, especially in case I needed it for your higher
ups, but my patience has just about run out, so...

Suddenly, a somewhat blunt bolt flew past her and threw one of the knights on the ground, apparently shot by her ally. Two sets of tentacles also struck from their sides, continuing the attack, as she heard a person say from her left.

-Sorry for the delay... this looks serious. I'm worried to use my strongest spell right off the bat, but it seems you really want to move forward for some reason and have been fighting while holding back, so let me take over from here... Intense Fire and Earth Spell: Ignited Sulfur River!

She looked to her side, seeing the woman they’ve previously seen having sex in the cathedral right at her side, sending a stream of blue flames at the knights she fought previously... Sela was her name, she believed.

[“Ah, I see. A Kitsune-Tsuki. It’s just almost never visible she’s a monster... Makes sense according to what Rutivexia said about her. To use an Intense spell so quickly after becoming a monster... she’s pretty good... or had more sex than I thought. Still, this spell isn’t *that* impressive.”]

- Please go forth, Miss Alessa. I believe you’re eager to join your comrades, yes?

- That’s right. Thanks for the assist. I’ll leave this to you th... four. - Alessa said after making a proper headcount of her new reinforcements - Or five, counting you as two separate beings...

- Ahhh, no, no. I’m comfortable as one being now. Although, I’d had hoped I’ll be using less violent spells on these young men... such a waste.

- See you later then, miss Sela.

- Likewise.

Alessa rapidly slither-charged through the group of knights, quickly moving towards the main chambers.

She was still nervous. It’s like she didn’t have much time.

Conall might not have a woman’s intuition, but he was pretty sure now, using his fictional but very
much accurate “blood relation sense”, that Deryn was already in the fight and in grave danger. He needed to put a stop to this irrational fight... by any means necessary.

Keita noticed that the knights all moved differently now. Different patterns, tactics.

There was this nervousness. Not even cautiousness or respect, this seemed more like fear.

Well, he did do some pretty outrageous things out there, wounding their commander twice, bending and forcing a trained soldier to let go of a weapon that flew away with a single strike...

And now, cleaving an armored man in two.

It was their fault that they pushed him into “just kill them quickly to make the fight easier” mode. He was well aware he pushed himself into a situation where he was doing the thing he wanted to *avoid* doing, but also that he’d die if he tried to hold himself back from killing these people. Despite their clear skill, especially in defense, it was evident that they didn’t fight against someone who was ready *and able* to slaughter them all without batting an eyelash in a long time. Must’ve come with the fact that most monsters now were so heavily sexualized, countries were peaceful and necromancers were the White Scythe’s deal.

Most of the knights’ skills came from training and fighting with not so well-equipped or well-trained bandits. Some came from fighting monster girls, who probably wouldn’t try to kill them, and actual military experience might’ve been a bit scarce.

Keita wasn’t all that better in these terms, to be honest. Most of his opponents so far were tentacle beasts, monster girls, or mock fights as well. But, he wasn’t trained in a sheltered environment where’d he only be put against the bandits or other countries once the training was complete. And tentacle beasts as well as Zipangu monstrosities were sometimes more than ready and willing to kill him in the process if that’s what it took.

Not to mention, apparently his previous experiences simply left him with a lot less human instincts and a lot more killing intent than the knights here apparently had.

So he slaughtered them. One by one. Until only enough remained that he could count them with his remaining free hand’s fingers. But, one of them was that extraordinary templar in his early thirties, so
he remained wary.

And struck when the knight attempted to get into a swordplay contest with him so his men could attack him from the sides and the back.

It was such a simple move, pirouetting past the knight right after his swing while lightly tossing his sword, grabbing it with his left arm, and cutting the tendons and muscles’ around his opponent’s heel with a swing of his blade, limiting his mobility before kicking him in the back, causing him to fall onto the ground again...

Running away when two of his opponents took pursuit, allowing himself to be pushed against the wall, only to grab the closer one, smash his head against said wall, knock him out, and then grab his blade both-handed severing the sword-wielding arm of his opponent before slamming his leg into his knee, a bad sound that apparently marked the joint as damaged heard before he pushed the man onto the ground and quickly stabbed his other foot to make raising practically impossible.

Then, it was just him versus the last three remaining knights.

Their timing was near perfectly synchronized this time, so he was forced to dodge and block the first few strikes.

Seeing an opportunity, he simply went for it. Chopping off someone’s leg was, after all, part of fighting with a cutting weapon.

So, that left just two knights versus him. At that moment, he was smashed with the shield and subsequently received additional small wounds from the two remaining swords, but it’s not like he felt it mattered much in his current situation. His body was already definitely going on the reserves given to him only by the therapy from the Order, and he could feel his muscles and tendons quietly protesting against being pushed so far only to remember they didn’t quite count as those of a normal human anymore.

Another shield attack ended up with Keita simply pulling the other knight in the way of the shield strike, causing him to stagger, and running a sword through his back.

One on one now.
- You’re actually *more* effective alone and wounded than in a duo and perfectly healthy? Or are you some kind of monster?

- No such thing, templar. I told you, I’m going to teach you, right? Well, have you experienced before what it’s like to lose subordinates? To see them die in front of you? Or are the monsters not as keen on murder as you and I seem to be?

Another clash of their swords. Matteo found himself being pushed back, as if the younger swordsman had newfound strength after all. He had to block another strike with his shield. He answered with a cut of his own, but Keita just took it head-on only to stab the templar through the side. The following exchange of blows got quicker, but somehow, it was the shielded Templar that was getting more and heavier wounds.

- People you’re killing here are more important to their relatives than “subordinates”. You probably know it, right? The women you’re trying to capture and kill here were once human, and thus, have all the bonds to others, to *human people* a normal human can have... and you’re killing them because something happened that was outside of their power and capability to deal with.

- You’re a heretic! A liar!

- And you have a bunch of knights with no limbs or heads! Who’s better off?

He was suddenly pushed away, his body unprotected as he tried to regain his balance, and suddenly, he felt cold steel shoved into him, delivering a wound potentially graver than any of the cuts covering his torso. Keita spitted out a small amount of blood-reddened saliva onto the ground that seemed to be covered in the viscous red fluid.

- I have every reason imaginable to hate all of the monsters... were you ever even harmed by one? Or do you just blindly follow what is told to you, without taking even a moment to think about the consequences of your actions?

Matteo parried that strike and slammed Keita with his shield again. They were beyond a swordsman’s duel now, this was changing into a simple exchange of blows. The half-Zipangu swordsman grabbed his sword with both hands now.

- All you’re doing is severing bonds between living, thinking, feeling things. If you kill them all, that’s just genocide. If some survive, with these broken bonds, all you’re doing is creating a circle of sorrow, anger, grief and vengeance! How do you think young people of your country will react to you killing their sisters, aunts, uncles, brothers, cousins? You think that’s what’s making them safe and happy?

Matteo lunged forward, trying to stab the other fighter, only to find him turn sharply to his sword-bearing right side and, with his back turned to his side, again do the move with stabbing the person behind him. The blade was planted inside his body, sharply turned then brutally pulled out, leaving him grunting in pain as muscles and blood were torn out of him.
He was also approaching the level where his injuries could be lethal soon, despite his unusual strength, despite being a Blessed One.

And by now, he was sure of it.

It was neither the weapon nor the swordsman that made the man he fought so dangerous. It was a little bit of both, but somehow, the man’s tolerance for pain and injuries were even higher then his already quite freakish strength, speed, reflex and agility.

In short, if it was reduced to an endurance match, a battle of attrition as it was turning out to be now, then even with a handicap from his previous group mauling, and even with Matteo’s blessed status, Keita would probably win.

[“I have to wait out his assault. Block. Defend. Get back to defense. That’s what you’re good at. A Golden Shield templar-protector, right?”]

- This issue is too complex to be explained and discussed with a youth like you!

- If it’s so complex, why is someone as incompetent as you solving it in the names of someone as blinded as the Church?

That threw Matteo out of his newfound calm. He struck out, only for Keita to dodge and again, lunge at him with the sword-attack from above.

Blocking it with his shield almost caused him to lost his footing.

[“It’s bit by bit but... is he actually getting stronger from this?”]

- If it’s a complex issue, don’t solve it with dumb, straightforward methods! If you’re not smart and good enough to think of it yourself, at least think about what the consequences of your actions are before listening to the orders of other blind idiots! If it can’t be solved from the bottom due to consequences... strike at the heart of the problem, or not at all! If you’re too weak to do this, leave it to someone competent enough! But for all of our sakes...
Another strike against his shield. And another. Matteo finally was doing what he intended - blocking with his shield. But, somehow, it wasn’t going as well as he hoped.

- … If you kill people who were previously your allies, comrades… but never actually turned against you, who’s the fallen one here? How is it making things any better? Who here deserves to die, them, people changed into monsters due to a spell… or you, the bunch of idiots who slaughters them indiscriminately?

- Who are you to judge that?

- I know how lust for vengeance feels… so I’m taking vengeance for all the people who held these ex-humans you’ve slaughtered here dear, ideals nonwithstanding! Then, I’ll be on my way… and you’ll be at the mercy of these “things” you’ve shown no mercy to!

- I won’t lose!

- I don’t give a fuck what you think will or should happen!

Another strike. And another. Matteo was ready to wait for yet one more strike and then counter, sword tight in his hand, but the attack interval was longer than before.

Keita made an almost double spin and swing with the sword in his two hands, building up momentum before swinging it right into the templar’s shield, full force.

The top-quality faithful protection of Matteo Hierro took all the force of the swing… and withstood it.

More correctly, it withstood it after sharing the force of it with Matteo’s own shield arm… and after the metal simply dented under the force of the swing. Matteo was sure now that there was something about Keita’s swings that pushed them to have almost impossible hitting power and velocity at the point of impact, and while Keita was definitely far stronger than his body shape would suggest, it wasn’t physical strength alone. The difference in what happened between a longer and shorter swing was key - it was a little too drastic to be explained with anything other than some sort of enchantment on the sword. And the sword’s mass. This blade didn’t look like it, but it was *heavy*.

The templar whimpered in pain after thinking that, and right after a loud snapping noise was heard. A bone in his arm couldn’t withstand the pressure, and his shield-arm fell at his side for a moment, with him having no control over it.

That’s all the invitation Keita needed.
- You’ve directed your sword at the wrong enemy from the beginning, and that caused you to direct the same sword against anyone who’d even think to ally themselves with them... and finally, that lead you to me. Now, you’ll either learn your lesson... or you’ll learn pain similar to the one I’ve felt. Let’s see if they put a Templar-Protector under the same addictive treatment.

A sudden slam in his broken arm made him realize that Keita cut his muscles before unleashing a flurry of blows after just the single counter-attack he managed to pull off at the same time the second strike of the Zipangu swordsman, and the first one directed at his body, came.

As noted before, in an even exchange of blows, it was likely Keita would win.

This was not an even exchange, and the bloodied, but probably still alive body of the Templar-Protector fell onto the ground.

Keita wasted no time. Something told him they might need his help if all of the templars were at this level. He run towards the base of the knights, after making sure the bee-woman wasn’t in critical condition, and getting back his dagger, of course.

He mused to himself about using it as a *thrown* weapon too often. It felt like in a clash like this fighting two-weapon style might’ve been more prudent at several moments.

Deryn was stunned. He was fighting against a superior fighter and swordsman, and all the time he was trying to keep up, his opponent could’ve simply cast a spell. He blocked the first strike, barely in time, but Elnathan’s other sword already slammed itself into him. He felt it run through his flesh, the jagged edge of the blade causing him more pain. He pulled away from the melee, and they crossed their weapons again, with Deryn struggling to keep up with the Templar’s strength.

- Y... You can use magic, too?

- Oh, young man, that could hardly be called “magic”! I like that spell a lot, but I assure you, I can do a bit better... not to mention what would happen if I studied spells rather than swordplay.

Deryn was pushed away many more steps from that clash than Elnathan was, after they both tried to break their connection by pushing the other one.

- I also like that one... Normal Air Spell : Gust Lunge!
He heard a single step... maybe two, but he doubted it...

And Elnathan was already out of his sight. He felt that same jagged blade already cutting him in the back.

Determined as Deryn was, he didn’t have the endurance of his brother, nor did he wear armor as highly protective... Put together, it was much less than enough to keep taking these blows. He was just a human, not even an adult yet, even.

But, he grabbed his weapons strongly and turned around, trying to respond in kind to Elnathan.

Who was already a few steps away.

- Normal Air Spell...

Deryn shifted his mass to the right, clearly suggesting he was going to run there. Elnathan’s eyes made a quick fix in the position as he finished his spell.

- Baselard...

Deryn dodged by jumping to the left at just the right moment. It was taking all he had to combine perception and reflexes to the level where he’d be able to successfully maneuver against the templar.

- … Stare!

And then, forward, just as he felt the gust of sharp wind move the the next of him, almost hitting him, in fact. He managed to stab the knight, but Elnathan responded in kind, both of them having to continue the fight with a new wound.

- Excellent! You’ll improve a bit before you die! Maybe whatever so-called gods you worshipped in your life will recognize that!

Deryn had little strength left, but blocked the next strike. It almost caused him to fall over, though, and the next slash already reached him, warm blood again erupting from his ruptured skin and muscles.
As warm as the blood was, he was starting to feel cold.

He slammed his mace as hard as he could into the templar, who attempted a block but was pushed away a few steps before regaining his balance.

- Normal Air Spell: Gust Lunge!

Now, Deryn learned already how the templar fought and what might’ve been his overall tactic.

He was attempting to weaken his left side, the one wielding the mace, because he correctly reasoned that the sword strikes were easier to dodge or parry.

So, Deryn turned and slammed both his weapons into the so-far empty space behind him and to his left.

[“What the...”]

Elnathan thought, as he felt warm blood flow out of him at quite high pressure, and a sharp pain in his side... a broken rib?

[“He anticipated my attack correctly in that state? At that age? This boy is dangerous. He’ll be as good as me at my age... but not yet. No, he’ll never be as good as me... Because...”]

- An excellent move. May you find peace in death, Deryn. Because you’d never develop such skill if you ever had peace in your life.

A flash of magic. Two sudden stabs, with the jagged blades being turned inside of him and pulled out.

Third one. Fourth one. Fifth one. Pain made him lose count, but he wouldn’t be able to keep fighting after these serial thrusts, stabs, and slashes, finished with being kicked away.

Elnathan was the clear victor. It was a surprisingly hard to achieve and tiring victory, given how much apparent superiority he had over the kid, but two of the biggest threats seemed to already have
been eliminated.

- *Looks like I'll finally get my own “blessing” of the so-called “gods”. And then... how far into the world will I be able to take my *peace*, I wonder...*

He stood over the younger man's body. He was still breathing... maybe even conscious, but quickly slipping out of it. Good. He wouldn't feel the pain of the mercy blow.

- *Requiescat in pace*, Der...

- *NO!*

Suddenly, a strange, wet sensation enveloped his arm and pulled, just as he felt something slip under his feet and cause him to lose balance completely, falling ungracefully onto the ground. In front of him, between him and the fallen young fighter, an orange-red, jiggling, apparently naked and female figure could be seen.

- *No! Nonononono! Deryn is important! He is important to Conall! If Deryn is killed here... Conall will be sad!*

Elnathan barely held back a laugh.

- *Well, then... if I reunite Deryn, this “Conall”, and you in death, everything will be all right, surely? Because... you're not thinking of defeating *me*, are you? You, a slime?*

Sharply turning on the his feet, he slashed through the slimegirl, causing her to open her mouth in surprise as her body was cut in a manner far more painful than she was used to when taking a blade like that. The jagged edge of the probably slightly enhanced blade proved to be damaging to the slime, as was the strength of the strike.

Glawn as aware of how fast Deryn could move and attack, and she was well aware that this man was stronger, faster, better, more skilled, and generally deadlier than him.

Just a few strikes like that in quick succession, and her ability to regenerate would've been easily overpowered.

So, she fired a pseudopod with full force again, pushing the man away on the now slick ground, wrapped herself around Deryn, and tried to move out as quickly as she could.
It wasn’t very quickly with the additional weight, but the purchase of all the additional columns and walls for her pseudopods helped her move her mass more quickly and with more cover, instead of just sliding on the ground.

- Normal Air Spell...

[“He is going to finish him off from afar with magic! I must protect him! I cannot let Deryn get hurt anymore! I can feel his blood seeping into me... Hang in there, Deryn!”]

She concentrated all of her mass over Deryn’s back as the templar, slowly getting up from the ground, finished the incantation and she felt sharp wind cut her back. It being magical damage made it somewhat harder to regenerate from, but she could still take it. She moved away, away from the scary templar, but to no avail...

There was another one right in front of her. A bigger one, too. The one she pushed down the stairs.

- Finally decided to join the party, Lysander? Very well. Kill the boy, he’s a danger. The slime spoke of someone named “Conall”, maybe we should interrogate this person.

The man had a scary-looking weapon. A metal and wood stick with a chain... and on the end of a chain, a very cruel-looking ball with spikes.

He swung it down. She pulled Deryn away from the strike and covered him again. She only had to block part of the strike, but she knew that the man was strong. She could tell from his size, and the templar armor.

- Oh, come on. You don’t want me to write in my report that you spent half of the fight unconscious and then couldn’t defeat a single slime, do you?

He man got furious, kicking at Deryn, which she managed to block, and then swinging down that scary weapon again. It took all her strength and mass to block it without the younger Amberwing taking any further damage. She whimpered in pain - blunt and piercing strikes delivered with such power were truly damaging and hard to regenerate for her, and any slime, really.

- N...no... Do not kill...

Conall ran past a duo of knights that were lying on the ground, next to someone who bore the insignia of a Templar squire, which he recognized, and heard a weak, pain-filled voice from the next chamber.
- Do not kill... Deryn... Conall... I do not want Conall to be sad...

[“...Glaw? Is that Glaw?”]

He ran into the chamber. There was another person with the squire insignia, sitting in the corner, wounded, a somewhat wounded man in a modified, lighter White Scythe inquisitor armor, and the last one that apparently was also a templar, but was wearing something more suited for a barbarian that stole said armor and tried to modify and repair it. Said man, larger than the other, an auburn-haired, tall, rather muscled guy, was swinging a flail down onto a red slimegirl, causing her expression to switch to one of pain every time. It was evident she desperately tried to protect an all too familiar young man lying on the ground.

An extremely bloodied, shallowly breathing, heavily wounded young man with black hair.

Glaw couldn’t at once try to fight someone like this and protect Deryn fully from these cruel-looking blows, so she was trying to negotiate her way out of this one. It did appear she’s been trying to rearrange her pseudopods for some sort of a counter-attack, but every single strike was definitely highly damaging to her.

- Conall... will cry! He will never like me if I get Deryn killed like this! I... Deryn even said “don’t call me brother *yet*!?” He did not say something mean like “You are not ever allowed to call me that!” I... do not want to see Conall cry! He will... be lonely! I somehow know I cannot... cheer him up... if Deryn dies, so stop! Let him live!

Another hit made her silent, and her body was jiggling and twitching oddly, somewhat smaller than before; Deryn’s body beneath shook, and he could swear a bit more blood escaped his wounds.

[“This is... the girl I was ready to sell and abandon, so... So Deryn would be safe. And because I didn’t want to fight, she has to keep him safe herself... taking the pain that would be his if she wasn’t there... risking her life because...”]

The other man noticed Conall, but it was too late. He was already midway there, kicking the auburn-haired brute away as he swung his flail, taking the weakened strike onto his chest. Sharp pain erupted in his body, magnified when he felt something like sharp wind cut up his back when the other knight said something he couldn’t understand. His eyes slightly teared up, partially from the pain, but mostly because...
- Doing that because... I would be “sad”? That’s ridiculous! I didn’t even want to help you, so what the hell are you doing, Glaw? I should be protecting Deryn! The one protecting my brother should be *me*! Why can I never just... do that like I should from the start!?

- Such a touching scene, a man shouting about protecting duties at a dumb slime who shielded his already dying brother. Whatever. Lysander, I presume you’ll want to redeem yourself and finish the job? I believe this is the whole “Conall” guy. I don’t think we’ll have more problems once he’s taken down.

Lysander was ready to swing his weapon again. Conall didn’t have his partisan in hand, yet, not to mention was weakened by both the spell and the previous strike... and dodging meant Glaw and Deryn getting hit again, which in turn meant either could die.

Suddenly, he heard another familiar voice.

- Normal Negative Earth Spell : Shadowsand Blast!

Suddenly, a mass of odd, dark dust flew swiftly straight at the templar named Lysander, throwing him off balance and stopping his strike. Said spell was followed by a rapid slam to his back, delivered with a giant snake’s tail, one that caused him to stumble and fall out into next room.

- Conall... should’ve known you’d show up to the party as soon as your brother gets hurt. I didn’t think things looked that gravely here... Shouldn’t Keita be somewhere around already?

- Haven’t seen him. It’s... oddly good to see you, Alessa.

Alessa looked around.

There was a hole in the wall, leading to another chamber with a huge set of stairs leading downwards, and another chamber to the other side, one from which she believed she could feel magic power emanating, striking at a source of extremely weakened demonic energy.

[“They’re torturing Rutivexia. Someone took her down, maybe one of these two templars, and now they think she’s behind this and are trying to get information.”]

Glaw was apparently heading for the door in which they now stood, a place that was free of knights already and from which she came and Sela could approach if she won the fight against the knights there.

Wasting no time, she pulled Glaw through that open door, along with Deryn. Conall was standing
between her and the two knights, partisan already in hand.

Glaw’s head rose and she looked at the snake woman.

- Ale...ssa?

- Yes, but it was your ‘knight in shining armor’ that saved you. Seeing both you and Deryn hurt like that... Conall got pretty pissed, so you can leave it to the two of us now.

She heard footsteps coming from where Sela was... no, it was the other corridor leading to this one. Was it a foe?

She recognized the armor and the gray hair, rushing into the place. There was a disturbing amount of red fluids over the figure, but she couldn’t pay any mind to it now.

- Well, three. Keita, get into that chamber already! We need to seal it off! Glaw, as soon as you’re strong enough to move, try to pull Deryn away from here. The monster girls coming behind us should’ve already won, and the corridor Keita came through just now should be safe as well. Try to stop his bleeding, just don’t suck out the blood. Don’t push yourself, the two of you should be safe now.

- Y... yes. Will Deryn... be all right?

- I think so. You’ve done well, Glaw, so I’ll do my best to protect the two of you now.

Keita passed the two of them and walked into the chamber, standing at Conall’s side and kicking away the man called Lysander, who already engaged Conall. Alessa followed him.

- Damn, I hate using this spell, it’s so tiring... but oh well. I guess we need to protect them. Intense Positive Earth Spell : Gnome’s Garden Wall!

Suddenly, a wall of earth, along with something that looked like normal roots, “Stone Roots”, and green plants rose, blocking the door entirely.

Alessa turned. Keita was really badly wounded... but moved just fine. It was... impressive and scary to look at a man covered in blood move like he was a dangerous animal ready to strike.

- And... suddenly it’s three on two? Where’s your sense of honor? - the younger of the two men said, almost mockingly. Alessa was somehow... disturbed by him. It appeared he wasn’t fazed in the least by someone using an Intense spell right in his presence, he gave off a neutral, but strong aura that suggested he was capable of magic, and despite his wounds, seemed to be completely sure they already won.
- Keita, you’re wounded. I’ll take it from here, and you...

- No. Which one of you two hurt Deryn and Glaw so badly?

- Ohhh, it was a joint effort. The slimegirl intervened when I was trying to bring peace to young Mister Deryn, so I let Lysander relieve his frustration from being pushed down a set of stairs with her help by killing both her and the young warrior. Well, he clearly failed, so it’s his last shot at redemption right here.

- … “Peace”?

Conall and Keita both spoke at once.

- Well, young Deryn is skilled. Dangerously so. Clearly the fault of his family... exposing him to the dangers of this world at such a young age, letting him put his life on the line for faulty, immoral, useless causes. So, I sought to put an end to his unrest by putting an end to his life. It’s clearly a better fate, a more peaceful fate..

- What?

The two warriors fighting on the monster’s side again spoke at the same time.

- Who... who the hell even are you? - the Zipangu swordsman found his tongue earlier. - You’re more self-righteous and judgemental that that stupid Golden Shield templar! You intended to just ignore Deryn’s struggles to this point... all he had gained, all he achieved through sheer effort at this age, ignore the fact that he has decades of life to live yet... and kill him? I don’t know much about his life, but whether it was peaceful or not is none of your business! It was thanks to this very life that Deryn is who he is now!

Both Alessa and Conall noticed Keita wasn’t applying any honorifics to either the templar or Deryn’s name during his rant. And that despite Conall being absolutely livid at what the templar was talking about.

- Oh, I wasn’t ignoring it. But, his existence wouldn’t serve any purpose; he wouldn’t help bring peace or order or remove unrest through his strength or other’s fear at it... so what was his purpose in life and struggle? It just made his ability dangerous for others. So, I’ve decided to grant him peace... I see you’re opposed to that. Tell me... you defeated that “Golden Shield templar”?

- Yes. Broken arm, and he’s pretty... torn up. Haven’t dealt the finishing blow, though. Why? You want to avenge him? I’m up for it. To be honest... I want to kick your ass badly, and Conall-san probably feels the same, so you’ll have to pick one unless you want to be killed by two people.

- Oh, then, I’ll gladly pick you. Lysander here couldn’t deal with someone my cousin couldn’t defeat, anyway.

- Keita, I’d be wary if I were you... there’s something... different about that man compared to most humans I’ve seen. And your state... there’s something wrong with the state of your wounds and body, too. - Alessa warned Keita about Elnathan.
- It’ll be fine. Deryn-kun already tore him up good, so I’ll be able to beat him.

Conall threw him a glance.

- If he’s “torn up good”, how would you describe your condition?
- Painted in red. Just shut up. The auburn haired one was the one who almost killed both Deryn and Conall, so take care of him. If this man is the one who’s been in control of the operation, I want to challenge him.

- You’re both idiots. Deryn fought here and couldn’t handle them. But very well. I’ll go forward and try to take care of the priest and save Rutivexia. As soon as I’m done, I’ll try to come back and help you.

- We don’t want your help. Just go.

Alessa’s mind only held one thought. It was clear they were going to attempt ‘honorable duels’ and leave her with having to save Rutivexia.

[“Men.”]

Keita grabbed his sword and charged towards Elnathan. Conall resigned himself to fighting Lysander, especially since, doubly wounded as he was, he had his doubts about whether he’d be able to take on a person his younger brother couldn’t defeat.

He didn’t like to admit it out loud, but in one on one fighting, Deryn was probably at least as good as him despite being three years younger, against most human opponents at least.

Keita parried the two strikes from the templar quickly and relatively easily, before simply punching him in the face and slashing across his entire body, adding one more wound to what Deryn already caused. Elnathan responded by blocking both of his next two swings, stabbing him with his swords and then kicking him away, before quickly casting a spell.

- Normal Air Spell : Baselard Stare!

But Keita was already upon him, the sharp wind flying past him after two sharp turns, and their blades clashed again.

The swordsman was the templar’s match in strength and speed, it seemed... even wounded as he was.

- Ohhh, if Deryn’s life was what lead him to his level, yours must’ve been going through hell, my young enemy. It seems there’s another person in need of my... peace...
Keita felt simply a dull pulse of pain as his body moved above it’s natural limits, overpowering the templar with, thanks to the element of surprise, relative ease, shoving his blades aside before striking with a flurry of blows said templar struggled to keep up with in terms of blocking and dodging. He felt his new sword cut up the templar multiple times, as suddenly Elnathan jumped away with almost unnatural speed.

[“He... he forced me to cast Zephyr Sprint to get out of a clash based on... speed? And while wounded like that?”]

He looked up at the swordsman, then into his eyes. He felt an unfamiliar sensation as the two clashed again, this time, the templar gaining the upper hand in both strength and speed.

[“This stare... this emotion, what... what is it?”]

Another clash of their blades. Elnathan struggled to push the swordsman’s blade down, but his opponent suddenly dashed out of the clash, quickly drew out a dagger, and stabbed him.

[“I feel...”]

A sword strike followed. His feet still carried by Normal Air Spell : Zephyr Sprint, an alternative method of quickening to the Gust Lunge, that caused a smaller increase of speed over a moderate period of time rather than a large surge of it for a moment, Elnathan managed to dodge it.

[“I’m... shivering with anxiety for the first time since my childhood? This man can cause me to feel something like... respect, or even fear? We barely clashed! He’s so wounded he should be falling down any time now! He’s clearly pushing his body over its limit! So... what’s going on?”]

- Normal Air Spell : Baselard Stare!

Keita managed to dodge most of the wind’s strike immediately, sensing how the wind seemed to form something like a very long dagger blade to cut the opponent as a result of the spell, and Elnathan immediately followed up, clashing against his opponent as he prepared another attack.

- Normal Earth Spell : Shredding Dust!
Keita felt a lot of pain in his body at the numerous small slashes and cuts at his skin coming from the familiar spell; he couldn’t dodge this one without uncovering himself for another attack.

He suddenly managed to keep up more easily with the templar moments after that, responding with a lunging stab, hearing the knight’s whimper of pain as suddenly, another spell was fired.

[“Zephyr’s sprint is done, so...”]

- Normal Air Spell, Gust Lunge!

Keita didn’t even have to see what was happening to block the strike coming from behind, and then return the attack with a rapid, turning slash of his dagger. The templar’s scimitar was also already swinging at him, and the left one’s strike he managed to dodge, but at the end both Keita and Elnathan delivered a quick blow to one another.

[“Alessa was right. Compared to that “Matteo” knight, this man... is superior in fighting, and can use magic as a natural enhancement of his style...”]

[“It’s all right. All right. He’s afar too wounded. He might be close to my level, but he isn’t strong enough to keep up with these kinds of wounds. If I didn’t battle Deryn before, I’d be clearly winning this. I’m still superior. Now, I’ll only need to struggle a bit and... wait, what if this Conall defeats Lysander, and... that snake-woman... was somehow different from the Lamia I defeated earlier, too?”]

If he felt anxiety before, now it seemed that Elnathan was *actually worried* about losing the ‘war’, even if he won the ‘battle’ that was this fight.

- Sorry, this could be fun, but I’ll be finishing this. Please die. Normal Earth Spell: Stone Roots!

Another familiar spell that struck true, holding him down. Keita moved just a moment too late.

- Normal Air Spell, Zephyr Sprint!

With the sudden rush of speed, the Templar started to literally run circles around the half-Zipangu
swordsman, striking him repeatedly, giving him the sensation of being torn up from multiple sides.

Having his body stabbed and shredded repeatedly while he practically couldn’t move was a memory from that time, and it was enough to trigger the worst of his memories momentarily. It was only for a short time, just like in Alessa’s dungeon while fighting two golems at once, but the sudden burst of energy coming from within Keita’s body was clearly unnatural. The sharp increase in physical power was the ultimate result of something in his mind touching the spiritual scars left on him by that experience.

He broke out of the Stone Roots, and lunged at Elnathan, a flurry of blows damaging him far more than any move Deryn or Keita pulled off until now, before he delivered another wide, long, mighty slash that tossed the templar against the wall after it was evident his armor couldn’t dampen this kind of force.

Then, Keita felt tired, more like *drained* and sick, in fact. Pain shook his body from head to toe, reminding him that he didn’t have time to be remembering that day, cutting his unnatural surge of might even shorter than it usually was. If Alessa was there by his side observing him, maybe she could’ve told him of the side-effects less obvious than the sudden nausea of accessing that memory and the odd results - odd *power* - it seemed to bring.

And the lack of that strength, as suddenly as his advantage was given to him for just a moment, made him feel weak.

It was far too early into this fight for Keita to grow so weak. Elnathan slowly rose to full height again after falling onto the ground from hitting the wall. His magical prowess and perception was nowhere near Alessa’s own level, but he could analyze the basics.

[“During these surges of strength... his own spiritual pool is drained quickly, and he releases a significant amount of dark energy... is this a spell? Something taught to him by his monster and demon masters? No. Not… entirely. There was something else in this effect. But, in a way, it may be thought of as an instinctive enhancement spell.”]

Elnathan shook the dust off his body. He was completely prepared to finish the fight with all he had, before his opponent recovered enough spirit energy to deal another serious blow, assuming he could again access this sort of power surge.

- You’re already too close to dying for me to waste such an opportunity... So I’ll show it to you. The
height of my power... I’m the strongest of the templars here. Even Matteo, already having received
his Blessing, isn’t even comparable to me, so if you had troubles with him... you’re a goner.

And the two charged to finish this fight, both tired from the intensity, but already aware it was too
long a battle for at least one of them.

Alessa herself was in a small amount of trouble as well.

Specifically, the priest was indeed trying to torture information out of Rutivexia, using physical
violence and spells.

Alessa was well capable of judging that the succubus of the Dark Priest variant was no pushover, yet
she was actually *captured*, not even killed, by the group of templars.

That meant Keita and Conall were probably in a lot of trouble, even if Keita did manage to defeat
one of them earlier.

Her problem was that the mentioned man was throwing fireballs all over the place while preaching to
her non-existent need of giving up to the apparently morally superior faithful of Godan Hyperion.

It took a bit of dodging, taking cover and earth magic for her to limit the damage, but apparently, the
priest called Edgar Chios was slowly getting out of breath, especially after his previous fight and
torture session with Rutivexia.

- You... You will taste the wrath of the heavens!
- Mhm, I know. I’ve been warned of that before. Well...
- Be purified by the blue flame of justice! Intense Fire...
- Normal Earth Spell : ...
- ...and Earth Spell: Ignited Sulfur River!
- ... Stone Roots!
The roots shoot up and immobilized the priest as he fired off the blue flowing stream of flames into Alessa, who did not manage to dodge this time, her body damage by the flames as she tried to put them out by rolling on the ground. She couldn’t help laughing as she did so.

- What’s so funny, demon!?

- You... you called the spell...heh... “blue flames of justice”... the very same spell...hahahaha... my monster comrade from this cathedral called her “strongest”... it’s hilarious!

- Release me! Or you will taste *my* strongest spell!

- Well, bring it. I also intend to win with the next move or two.

- As you wish, demon!

- I’m actually a Lamia-kindred...

- Intense Fire and Earth Spell...

- Green flames of hope?

- ...Volcanic Projectile!

[“A Magma-based spell? Shit!”]

This time, Alessa didn’t waste a single moment, rapidly attempting to dodge the attack; indeed, it was based on a small amount of lava being fired as a projectile, melting the surface of the chapel’s floor as it finally hit it, barely missing Alessa, enough for her to feel the heat of the spell. She didn’t believe a spell of an Intense level should only produce this small of an effect, though. Either it was difficult to pull off for human wizards and as such classified as that, or her opponent was running on dry.

- … Damn... you’re dangerous, young man...

- Hah... hah... I’m actually... fourty years old... Don’t you dare look down on me! I can still use... a more effective strategy... Rapidly firing at you with weaker spells!

- … Well, not for long. Intense Venom Spell : Vitriolic Orb!

A small orb of green light appeared in Alessa’s hand, then raising over it and surrounding itself with a bigger sphere of what appeared to be a half-gaseous membrane. On the inside of it, drops of green liquid and small clouds of green gas formed, as she threw the orb at the priest.

It had a greater velocity than he anticipated as he tried to release himself from the Stone Roots spell, oot to mention seemed to be homing in on his movement, and soon, it was upon him, erupting in a fountain of poisonous gas and toxic, caustic acid that burned into his skin and lungs, seeping into the
burns and cuts delivered by Rutivexia in the short time he was battling her alone without Elnathan’s aid.

He yelled loudly but then switched to quiet whimpering, before noticing that Alessa was already upon him, wrapping her tail around his shoulders, neck, and mouth, starting to squeeze.

- It’s not like priests take that much longer to convert once their celibacy is broken... so I’ll let Rutivexia decide what to do with you... Personally, I’ll just squeeze the consciousness out of you, so hang in there.

She did as she said, squeezing strongly, attempting to make him short on breath. Shortly, he hung his head low, and she continued squeezing for a short while to make sure he’s unconscious and not acting. Then, she let go, and he hit the ground, his legs bent as his feet were still bound by her Stone Roots.

She slithered over to Rutivexia to check whether she was stable or maybe even conscious. It appeared she hasn’t been wounded all that much, but her condition wasn’t good, either. Unfortunately, Alessa was never any real good at healing magic... Except for a single spell she couldn’t use here, and she had other troubles to deal with.

Her intuition was tingling again, and she was getting nervous.

Keita quickly rose to his feet after another exchange of blows with Elnathan send him onto the ground.

Contrary to what he said before, he wasn’t “okay”.

It appeared that fighting Matteo and his men already pushed his body to the safe limit. Here, he fought someone who could definitely match him any day, at full condition, and probably win over half of the possible fights on such days...

And his body was failing.

He managed to get into this weird, memory-related trance for a moment and that gave him the
strength he needed to release himself from a trap and deal heavy damage to his opponent, but it left him completely drained and unable to keep up anymore with the Templar.

- Normal Air Spell : Gust Lunge!

Suddenly, Elnathan was to his side, and he felt his sword tearing at his body... He responded by swinging his own enchanted blade, severing the Templar’s already pitiful armor, skin, and muscle, but it was all far from enough damage to take his opponent down.

In the two years following his... incident, Haneo Keita rarely fought opponents clearly superior to him one on one.

Sure, there were a few, but he usually had backup. This time, it was a duel, and one he’d lose unless he was able to determine the outcome of the fight in the few next strikes...

Strikes that had to be fatal.

Elnathan withdrew, panting heavily, analyzing how else could he attack Keita and defeat him.

- Damn... it...those dumb priests... if only I already had been “Blessed”... this would’ve been easy...
- Well, if I was at fulls strength... you’d be...
- No, swordsman. It is you who will die. You’re worthy, worth killing... with my own, personal method. Even if you survive this attack... it spells your defeat. Normal Earth Spell, Stone Roots!

Keita again found himself practically immobile, but was quickly wringing out of the bind. That, however, was all the time Elnathan needed.

- No worries... I’ll interrogate your name out of them... and you’ll be the object of hate and fear by some of the new White Scythe squires, as a man who sold his “soul” for “power” to those “evil creatures.”
- You’re really a cynic, not even believing your own naming and words...
- Die, nameless swordsman... no, that woman called you... Keita... Well, this is the last time you’re hearing your name...

He managed to break the hold of the roots and move, but it was too late.
Keita felt that familiar gust of wind he already dodged twice... except it was much larger, sharper, and somehow more... sinister. It cut into his body, shredding and cleaving through it, as he felt that sinister power of it claw at his very life force, draining him, weakening him... He coughed up blood, and tried to summon the last remains of his strength into his legs.

But to no avail.

He realized that this spelled the end of his quest. Keita Haneo would die here, by the hand of a man who’s name he hadn’t catch, after a spell so cruelly named after the man’s own templar order.

He thought exactly that as he was falling to the ground while darkness took him...

[“I have not dealt... a single significant blow... against... The Um... agghhh...”]

He seemed to have lost consciousness soon after.

Elnathan Nussen-Hierro was slowly approaching his defeated opponent, reveling in the moment. If Matteo was alive, that meant he could describe the man’s significant might and skill, and so, he’d be recognized as the man who saved the cathedral from the machinations of said man and his monster masters. His stepping stone to “glory” neccessary for “power” which he would then use to spread his ultimate, silent, grim, but flawless “peace”.

- Your death... is my stepping stone... swordsman named Keita. I am impressed you survived my personally created spell, but... I’m... going... to kill you. Now.

Suddenly, he felt a strange, dark presence, and heard a voice.

- What did you just say again!?

He turned around only to see the snake woman from before standing there. Of course.

[“That stupid priest couldn’t succeed in defeating a single monster on his own. ‘Divine granted power’, my ass!”]
He turned towards Keita.

[“I need to kill him. Now. These people have to die as quickly as possible, or...”]

- **Intense Earth Spell...**

He turned towards the woman. Certainly, that sounded badly, *initiating* combat with an Intense spell might’ve mean she was a mage of significant power.

- **...Crushing Barrow!**

- **Normal Air Spell: Gust Lunge!**

In a moment, he was upon her, her spell closing its deadly grip over a spot he wasn’t in anymore - he had to move to avoid the potentially deadly attack - swinging his swords and cutting up both her apparently soft feminine upper body and strong snake half.

She hissed in pain, understandably, and tried to tie him up with the Stone Roots as he activated Zephyr Sprint, running down towards the set of stairs behind the blown-away wall. Down these stairs somewhere, Lysander was fighting that Conall guy, and he certainly hoped he’s been winning as he dashed towards them, not really intending to run down to his comrade, but mostly dodging her smaller spells... rocks, in particular. But, in a single sharp turn, he was already charging towards her...

- **Intense Ice and Earth Magic Weapon: Froststar!**

- **Normal Air Spell : Baselard Stare!**

Alessa manifested a magical weapon just as the man she fought was a warrior mostly depending on the additional magical enhancement went ahead and attacked her from a distance, before closing down and easily penetrating her defense, delivering more wounds than she received from the entire groups of knights today in just a single battle.

[“This is bad... my... demonic energy level and life force level are falling down to a bad point... a point of no return. I didn’t think he was actually dangerous for someone like me, not after two fights against Deryn and Keita...”]

- **Normal Earth Spell, Shredding Dust!**

The attack succeeded, wounding the Templar further and causing him to open for a quick slam with
her new magical weapon. He did not manage to block, but was quick enough to dodge the follow-up.

- You... You attacked Keita-kun... While he was wounded and weakened! The two of you would be evenly matched, normally! Don’t get happy that you won!

- Happy? I’d only be a bit elated if I killed him, and managed to grant him and this Deryn person peace... young men these days, fighting so much until they reach unreasonable levels of skill and fitness...

- Killing? Killing? Is that all you do, killing? People and monsters who are important to one another and even live together happily, you just kill them!?

- That man did not live with anyone happily. One achieves that level of skill by struggling and fighting through years of his life.

- And what about the people here? Couldn’t they have been happy?

- They’re monsters, accursed creatures rejected by humans. Stepping stones to gaining power that will allow me to put all those struggling in unrest, rejected, criminals, monsters, blood knights, eternal fighters, outcasts and outlaws... to peace. True, final peace.

- In... in death?

- Yes. In death.

- GHhr.... Normal Earth and Negative Water Spell : Salty Torture!

The crystals of salt materialized on the templar’s wounds, causing him to shiver in pain, with his movements turning twitchy and uncontrolled from the sensation, but he released no sound, lashing out against Alessa again, striking her hard and fast, if not to the same extent as before.

[“He doesn’t mind the pain... and thinks only about this sick vision of a better world, the way he thinks it’d be better. All the while having all that extraordinary power... at a completely different level than almost any human I’ve met. He’s almost... almost like...”]

- Listen, here! Even if you defeated Keita... you doing that...Now, you’re the tired one! And when I’m serious, I’m even more of a hassle than he is, so if you value your life and health the slightest, give up and maybe you’ll be...

- I value no life. And you’re bluffing. The man was clearly your ace in the hole, and...

- Very well! Intense Venom Spell : Acid Splash Bombardment!

- Normal Air Spell : Gust Lunge!

This time, he used the spell to get away from her, and quickly started running into the next chamber.
Now, she only hoped he wouldn’t ran down these stairs. If he didn’t... then, her plan should succeed.

["... Even if he does it out of a desire for sick ‘peace’ rather than sheer racial and religious hatred… With this power, skill, attitude, and being a templar ‘Inquisitor’... He's way too much... like *that woman* for my tastes."]
Chapter Summary

The long battle is at an end. What'll happen to both our monster-sympathizing heroes and their templar opponents? What sort of direction will their adventure take thanks to the information they gained at the Cathedral, and what sorts of new bonds will arise in place?

Chapter Notes

This is the final chapter of Arc IV and the last I'll be updating in 2015 for Wicked Deity. I hope you all enjoyed it so far and will continue in the future, and that year 2016 will be pleasant for you all. Happy New Year to all of you!

Sela and the few monsters left standing found themselves in front of a door blocked by a wall of earth and small plants... with a slimegirl wrapped non-erotically over a young man’s body. She remembered the boy as being the one Rutivexia talked to before, so she quickly checked his body; his injuries were bad and unless he was helped quickly, or was pretty tough, they might turn out to be fatal. She closed her eyes and concentrated, trying to focus for a positive energy spell while searching for Rutivexia’s energy, which has lessened and waned before. It appeared she was stable and even recovering, certainly the result of being saved by one of the visitors to the temple.

With a small, comforting smile on her face she attempted to heal the youth at least a little bit.

Acid Splash Bombardment was essentially a scare. Alessa didn’t hope it’d do much damage, but doing almost no damage at all was a bit underwhelming. She was already pretty low on energy and casting Intense-level spells that missed the target entirely or were not effective at all was a quick path to depleting her power.

No to mention, things got even worse when he suddenly turned around to strike. Alessa was only capable of blocking one of his swords with her new magical weapon, the other one tearing into her body; certainly these were serious wounds even for a creature tougher and of greater regenerative capabilities than a human... like an Echidna.

She swung her own weapon, but he dodged rather easily, and still quickened by the Zephyr Sprint,
started to repeatedly strike at her from different directions.

- Your struggle is useless, lamia. Should monsters and their slaves share the same afterlife, assuming there is one, you’ll be joining these two anyway.

- I’m not a “lamia”, precisely... And the only one being sent to afterlife is you.

- Surely, you’ve already noticed the difference between our levels? Even with magic at your disposal, you’re only about as powerful as that man was, wounded. You’ll fall soon, and then I’ll deliver my peace to both Keita and Deryn.

[“Why do all these fanatics think they can just... just... kill humans in my presence? Kill the men that kept me company and grew... more valuable to me compared to the others? How many people go around the world like that woman, or this templar, and believe their “judgement” and their vision of the world gives them the right to slaughter whoever...they...want!?”]

- You’re... you are even ready to turn on your former comrades... for this sick vision, you’ve killed us, monsters, maybe even broke apart happy, loving couples... with children, just living their days away taking comfort in one another, enjoying one another. And you don’t even care, because death is your vision of “peace”.

- And you disagree. But, you lack conviction in your weak vision of the world where...

- Maybe I do doubt myself. After all... this new monsterkind... I see both magnificent humans and monsters sacrifice their ambitions, drives, abandon the destinies that their power would allow them for the simple pleasure of sex. A world like this...Yet, it’s not at all a vision we’re meant to hate. There’s a simple happiness in it. So, even if I “lack conviction”...

Something... changed. Elnathan was sure of it. There was something different about that woman now.

- At least I am not a murdering, heartless, blind fanatical freak like you are! I think and I feel, while you... you!

The difference was rage. When their eyes met...

[“That man’s, Keita’s, glare... pales in comparison. If he created anxiety, then... is this... is *this* fear I’m feeling?”]

- You threatened the lifes of humans already precious to me, and I see it quite clearly that you no longer deserve shots at redemption! I’ll give it to you... the deadliest spell I know short of Extreme level...
The woman was clearly gathering power. He could sense as much. Her demonic energy was getting not only stronger, but also more focused. The noticeable fact was however that all the while, it was raising higher. This clearly wasn’t a spell she could just shoot out like the acidic bombardment before.

Elnathan was curious about this new feeling of fear and the power of the woman, but he knew that he had already taken too much upon himself that day.

Or maybe he was just reacting from the fear when he also started doing his worst.

- Intense Negative Air Spell: White Scythe Frown!

Alessa felt a powerful surge of air suddenly sharpen and tear up her body, while the negative energy that drove it done the same to her life force before slowly seeping it away. At the same time, Elnathan was already upon her, repeatedly slashing with his swords, enough to send some of her blood flying over the place.

Her body and mind were burning and stinging with pain. She couldn’t handle all that pressure - that man was just too strong for her wounded self to fight with equally on a physical level, and he just almost interrupted her spell, tore up her life force and threatened to kill both her and her two companions. Her vital energy and physical health both fell below what was a nearly critical threshold. Had she felt less pain, she might’ve had a chance to stop what would happen next, but she’d never know if she’d take the chance to try against someone like Elnathan.

Reacting in a small interval between his attacks, she successfully smacked him with her own magical weapon, causing his body to numb from both cold and pain as he staggered away. Their eyes met once again, and her killing glare was suddenly transformed by a wondrous effect.

There was a glow coming from her irises; a golden shine that clearly resembled a snake’s eyes, but held something demonic in them. Something that seemed like a dark cloud crossed over the whites of her eyes at the same time, and her body suddenly stiffened for a moment as the glow of her eyes pulsed and then, disappeared.

For just a small moment, the earth under Elnathan’s ground shook powerfully, which caused him to fall on one knee.
But he had no time to lose.

[“Her spell’s preparation and power... developed further? Or is it her demonic energy that has grown? Or... both?”]

Alessa suddenly slammed her tail into the ground. Elnathan could feel the power of the spell she was preparing, already nearly ready.

- Congratulations, fanatic. You’ve pushed me so far and beaten me so hard, together with your little party here, that you’ve removed my first conditioning. It took a long time for me to place it.

- Con...ditioning?

- Yes. I’m a powerful Echidna without a steady partner, yet no virgin. This means I should either fall into depression or even a coma, or have a sex drive I have troubles controlling and a strong desire for spirit energy. I find it way too easy to over-expend my demonic energy on spells, especially more powerful ones, so I do my best to conserve energy. To limit myself, don’t go too far, don’t expend my supplies and tire myself out to the point I can’t recover on my own. Literally my best. Like the conditioning. To be precise, I cannot access all my power at this point. I’ve placed a conditioning limiting my demonic energy output on myself, and have done so twice until now. And... you’ve just removed one, by dealing extensive damage. Doing it myself would take a significant effort of will, but you knights made it so simple... I’d say together, they were holding back roughly between one fifth and one fourth of my power. Now, the second conditioning is only holding back about one eighth. This basically means... you’ll be hit with an even stronger spell than I intended. I guess I’ll let you live if you can survive this... but I’ve never met a human who could survive this kind of attack, I think...

- You’ll be the one who will die. I’ll kill you before you complete the spell. I hate rushing and panicking like this, but I’m too wounded to take your attack head on. Sorry, miss. Intense Air Spell...

Alessa somehow predicted what he was trying to do. She dropped the focus for the offensive spell, feeling it’s energy slowly wane as she quickly fired another.

- Normal Earth Spell : Stone Roots!

- Twister!

Much to the surprise of Elnathan, the Stone Roots were meant to hold them *both* down. This meant she prepared him for her attack as well as held herself down to stop his attack from doing maximum damage and allow her to continue concentrating her spell... All this in a moment she used to stop focusing on the offensive spell. The spell’s energy hasn’t even dissipated in any significant amount.

Despite that magnificent show of concentration, she seemed furious before even being hit with the spell, so he hoped she’d die from the next attack or two before she had a chance to release that
anger... and that she overestimated the power of her own magic.

A small whirlwind of the most fleeing element came down on her, suddenly intensifying in force as it attempted to tear her off the ground, break her Stone Roots barrier, all the while shaking and trashing her entire body in it’s hold. Part of the wind even seemed sharp; she could feel new cuts on her skin. But she kept focusing to make her spell ready.

The Twister intensified again, and she could feel it breaking through the Stone Roots as its force threatened to break her body, but she withstood attacks of such strength before; in just a few moments, the air started to clear up, and she could see her target already managing to break through the Stone Roots.

She cast her eyes down to her tail.

Surely enough, a part of it was already encased in a ring of earth, said ring connected to a structure quickly forming out of the dust, the cathedral’s floor and the rocks and sand beneath it.

That structure was a somewhat wide, long tube of earth, held up by her tail and visibly getting pointed at her opponent.

Just as certainly, Elnathan was soon ready to break free, but looking back at the woman, he now realized what the construct from the ground under the cathedral was meant to be.

A cannon.

He knew that if she managed to fire it quickly, he could be a goner, so he prepared himself for another White Scythe Frown...

The problem being, his mind couldn’t conjure up the spell anymore. He was out of magical energy.

Suddenly, as she stated the first part of the most common type of incantation - the level and type of the spell, said piece of artillery was covered in deep, sunset-like orange and red glyphs running all over it’s surface.
- Intense Fire and Earth Spell...

- How the hell are you so... powerful... I’ve never... no monster has...

- Ahhh, that’s kind of a long thing to explain... So you’ll excuse me if I put it simply after I’m done here. Where were we... ah yes...

Suddenly, he felt a wave of heat come out of the cannon. The glyphs rapidly spread all over the surface of it and appeared to pulse with an intimidating, violent energy.

- ... Magma Cannon.

Another pulse of said energy and even more heat.

Half-liquid, fiery mass poured out of the cannon... no, shot out of it at high pressure. Elnathan did his best to summon any sort of air or ground barrier he could with whatever fleck of magic he had remaining in him, but it was completely pointless.

No matter how much a regular human trained their body, enhanced their so-called vital energy, and no matter how strong their spirit was, unless their armor had the living Hells enchanted out of it, they died in contact with too much magma.

Which leads to Alessa having these sorts of doubts and thoughts.[“Precisely the reason why I do my best to avoid using these kinds of spells.”]

- I wouldn’t say I’m all that powerful, especially now, starved and trying my best to hold back, but... it’s really simple. I’ve gotten strong the way any other woman, and perhaps any other person would get strong. I’ve build bonds with others and had them broken... but didn’t give up and continued to try and create new ones if possible. Now, you threatened to break these bonds with people important to me again... and that’s when a woman gets the most dangerous. Well, of course, it’d be way worse if you tried to kill my child or something.

The woman turned around. He could now firmly see the mark resembling a black moth, placed almost in-between her shoulders.

- I hate to say this, but... people like you are beyond redemption. I learned this the hard way. Still, if you survive, I hope you’ll make something more human of yourself from now on.

His vision was lost to him. All he could see in the darkness now were the flames, the heat... and the black moth suspended in the air just beyond the ring of fiery, molten rock that encompassed, engulfed and devoured him, burning away both his body and his life, either a trick of his vision or the last light of his sight showing him one of the markings on Alessa’s body.
Now that he was about to achieve his own “peace”, a part of him wondered what it’d be like to strive for something else in life instead.

[“Bonds... with people, between thinking, living things... are they really such a powerful thing? Capable of making someone so powerful? Stronger than death? Stronger than my conviction, than my vision of peace? Are they a power greater than these... gods I’ve never really believed in?”]

He regained his sight for a moment. The pain was gone. Everything seemed... blurry and translucent. He was pretty sure this was the moment of his death.

[“I guess... peace will have to be achieved another way. Matteo... Father and Sister too... I guess I wasn’t the best knight our family has produced. I wonder if I’ll get another shot.”]

His vision was gone again. This time, along with everything.

Alessa didn’t waste her time looking at or thinking about the White Scythe templar. Humans weren’t meant to survive lava baths. Thinking about something else would also help bury her guilt about killing a human male who might’ve made a great mate for someone else under different circumstances.

There was a man she tried to protect lying there, on the ground, blood seeping from his many wounds.

[“The so-called “treatment” and continuous exposure to that drug must’ve changed him. I already knew he’s strong and fast, but that endurance... Many humans die or get permanently crippled from injuries like that. Either he’s a lot tougher than any human or his pain tolerance is an utterly different level, allowing him to ignore such injuries... for a time. But, if it’s the second one... he may die unless we treat him properly and cleanly to avoid infections, and give him more of that drug.”]

She slithered over to him and gently lifted his body, lying his back onto her tail, his head on what would be her lap if she was in human form.

[“This is ridiculous. Humans...shouldn’t fight like this. Getting so many injuries. He has that stain of
demonic energy as well... the templars must’ve thought he’s an incubus and went all out on him. Why do I... suck at healing at a time like this...”

She ran a hand through his hair, glued together by blood, lifting them from his eyes and face. He had an expression full of pain.

[“We’ve already determined that using *that* spell twice... is way too risky. And I already wasted my one shot... Not to mention, it’d change you. Transferring my life energy through life-force related magic would further contaminate you with demonic energy... break that equilibrium you managed to build with the demonic energy already inside you...And that would further your trauma, too...”]

Her hands travelled down his body, feeling the movement of his chest, raising and falling, sometimes stopping as if in pain. Keita was all wiry and hard underneath the armor; it also seemed his ribs had their fair share of rebuilding from breaking and damaging, and now seemed strong, as did the heart pumping in his chest. Her hands stopped just above his waist.

[“... We could try and use the energy released from sex for regenerative purposes, but... your body is in no condition to do it. Neither is your spirit... you used that weird burst and burned out your energy again, like against Kirika. I’ve never actually seen you do this myself... So, other than your body being too weak for such acts and your spiritual energy being already depleted by that weird... skill, it’d further your trauma and destroy the little trust we already have, so... no. I won’t... rush my plan. You’re supposed to be able to do it at some point with a woman you like, not because your life was in danger and I wasn’t thinking clearly. Sorry I suck at healing magic.”]

Nervously, slowly, she lifted the palms of her hands away from his slender waist. Best not to tempt herself.

[“... Such... irony. Is it because we both fought so hard for these monsters that I suddenly felt like having sex? You’ve... done well. I wish I could do something.”]

There was a sound of weapons clashing downstairs.

[... That’s it. I could use Spectral Moths to transfer Conall’s and that templar’s vitality back to you. True, I’ve never attempted a transfer from them to anyone other than myself, but in theory, it could be...”]

- You can leave him to me. - A voice coming from some other part of the chamber said.
Rutivexia entered the chamber, her legs kind of shaky, but she was clearly conscious. Alessa’s body must’ve made some sort of an odd reflexive move, since Rutivexia’s eyes followed a different part of it than the echidna’s face, and smiled slightly.

- No worries, I won’t do anything bad. I didn’t have a chance to expend all that much demonic energy, since the templar intervened. I can heal people through normal “Positive” spells, too. I guess you have a problem doing that, which is why you’re stuck here, worried what to do, rather than helping your other companions.

- You may act all gallant, but you’re a succubus. Listen. This guy has been... hurt. We can’t afford to make it worse. It’s already a miracle he doesn’t hate all monsters.

- My, my. You’re such an unprincipled, immoral woman. You should already be healing him through experience or allowing another monster to do it... though, he’d be unpopular with that stench of an Arachne-type floating about his spiritual energy.

- I’m telling you he’d hate that! And don’t get all wise on me with that “good is lewd” morality!

- It’s fine, sister. I’m also a well-aged creature. I know how things have been before, even though I spend most of my life under Lady Lilith’s rule. You may have differing thoughts from the younger monsters. Anyway, as I’ve said. I won’t be touching him. I prefer my guys... purer, so I can apply all the stains to them myself. That being said... is Deryn okay?

- Keita will be angry if you touch him. He’s too young.

- Then I’ll have to be careful to make sure *he* does all the touching, won’t I? Please trust me here. We have little time before the damage to his body starts taking a permanent toll.

- Fine. But if you’ll do something to further his trauma... I’ll never forgive you.


Alessa nodded and then started to move away from the Dark Priest and her swordsman companion. Her tail met some resistance, so she straightened it out and shifted her coils to the side to made them slide smoothly as she slithered towards the set of stairs.

All the while, the mature red-headed dark priest kept staring, wondering if Alessa noticed what, or rather whom, her tail was wrapped around when she entered the chamber.
Stairs.

The nightmare of every monstergirl that wasn’t bipedal; the hardship of every one that didn’t have a relatively normal set of legs.

Of course, many a centaur had incredible problems balancing themselves on stairs; same could probably be said about insectoid monsters.

For lamias, climbing up the stairs was acceptable as long as they had time to do it; slowly slithering up them just required a bit more patience.

Moving quickly up and down them... in fact, moving down them at all, hurt due to the way most stairs were constructed.

Thus... Alessa was prepared for a bit of pain, but taking that first clumsy, barely-controlled slide was what was hard for her snake half. She briefly considered changing into her human form, but that would further weaken her magic supply, so...

Knowing it’ll hurt anyway, she decided that maybe “do it as quickly as possible” approach was the best.

Conall was still dueling against Lysander in what was a pretty close clash.

The elder Amberwing brother had to take Lysander’s first attack head on without much protection, and the White Scythe templar was no mere pawn in terms of skill or strength. Motivated as he was to protect and also, in a way, avenge his brother and the slimegirl who risked her health to protect him from this man’s attacks, Conall still had to draw on every little bit of his skill to completely match the templar after being incapacitated with that first intentionally taken strike.

Of course, having said that, Conall’s strike-to-hit ratio was way above Lysander’s; this came simply from the fact that Lysander’s blows, while skillful, were naturally slightly more power-focused and much easier to avoid. Still, the amount of damage dealt to both parties was just about equal - truth be told, Conall probably suffered the worse of it - especially including the strike taken to protect Glaw and Deryn. The battle was too close for comfort as it was, and he was especially worried given the fact that, apparently, Lysander wasn’t the one leading the group. What he heard of the conversation
and templar ‘reports’ suggested that Keita had to run into one of the templars on his way here, and that would explain the injuries; however, if he was supposed to fight another templar of the same level of skill, even wounded after battling Deryn, the situation could turn ugly unless he and the Echidna managed to finish their own battles in time to help him.

However, it didn’t seem like the battle would end anytime soon, and right after dodging Lysander’s flail strike, Conall was kicked away and swung at once again, managing to lessen the damage by moving backwards and respond with a forward thrust of his polearm, an attack that was also dodged. Lysander tried to break his opponent’s weapon with the blunt end of his own, but Conall maneuvered skillfully, punching the templar right after the dodge. The clash changed into something of a brawl for a moment, until suddenly, a mass of purple and dark gray dust struck the auburn-haired man from the side, causing him to suddenly lose balance. That was enough for Conall to run the end of his partisan right through his opponent’s armor and flesh, and then shake it roughly, almost throwing the other fighter off it and to the side.

It seemed Alessa was already here to help him, meaning probably Keita was doing just fine.

- Normal Earth Spell : Shredding Dust!

The templar was struck again, this time with numerous sharper projectiles, and Conall went on the attack just as Alessa finished off her now well-known combo with Salty Torture, covering the templar’s wounds with a mightily discomforting and annoying substance that caused him to hiss and shudder in pain.

And when Conall was just about ready to finish the fight after the next few strikes by exploiting the hole in Lysander’s defense and finish him off - probably killing him... just then, the echidna closed the distance, wielding that spell-created mace she formed during their fights with the werebeasts again, smacked Lysander in the legs, and then, as he fell, smashed him from above with her tail, knocking the templar unconscious.

- You... saved a human? From another human, no less? And an enemy, too?

- I’d feel bad if we were to kill off all the templars, and I had to personally finish one off today. Treat this as something of a repentance for that. An act of remorse, if you will. As I already explained... seeing humans die isn’t something monsters like to look at anymore.

- More importantly... are Keita and Deryn all right?

Alessa lowered her head, saddened, by seeing the panicked look on Conall’s face, she quickly explained.

- They’re alive and safe! They’ve... both sustained some serious injuries... And seem unconscious. It seems we’ve bitten off more than we could chew. If you didn’t appear in time, I’m sure Deryn would be in a pinch... and even Keita wasn’t able to defeat that templar your brother went up against, thought he was badly hurt from fight with the other templar.
Ah... so, since Keita couldn’t, you didn’t hold back and killed him...

Pretty much... Yes. He said some pretty infuriating things, too, so I guess I got a bit too angry for my limits of patience and composure. But, let’s not discuss such grim matters now... I didn’t enjoy it and I didn’t want more humans killed. That’s it. Let’s finish this battle if there’s anything left to finish and take care of our companions’ injuries as well as our own.

Some time later...

Conall lay his brother alongside their new comrade-in-arms, having carried him together with one of the man who were on the monsters’ side on a make-do stretcher.

The two women they’ve got to know before, Rutivexia and Sela, were basically the ones doing most of the work when it came to healing the wounded, along with one of the ex-priests and another “nun”. Conall was a bit worried, especially seeing the way Rutivexia seemed to devour Deryn’s body with her eyes whenever she saw a naked piece of skin, but they seemed professional enough when it came to actually using medicaments and healing spells in treating a wounded person.

Alessa seemed equally worried, if reluctant to show it, supporting herself on her tail and a cathedral wall a fair distance away from the wounded, near one of the actual entrances.

Conall was quite aware of what was the source of that worry. All of them went against a group closely allied with the Church; amongst them, Keita was easily capable of defeating monsters in Alessa’s dungeon, and yet, he also suffered incredible injuries. Conall was pretty sure normal people would end up crippled or dead after trying to fight again in such a state, but Keita somehow seemed... abnormal. In a similar way those called “The Blessed” were, only that his uniqueness definitely didn’t come from any kind of Church or Order blessing.

He guessed they were a bit secretive of a bunch. Deryn had his past, Conall had a past closely tied to his brother’s, Keita had an inhuman capability to take and survive damage, and Alessa also seemed to carry a bit of her own burden.

Glaw was someone capable of sacrificing herself for a brother of the person she raped on the first meeting, which only made the altogether morality of the group more screwed up.

But, there were small bonds forming, and on these, trust could be built. He was ready to sell them
off, but Keita, Glaw and Alessa worked together to help Deryn, who decided to go against his own brother and don’t abandon them. Certainly, none of them had any time to properly explain what kind of moral code they’re trying to follow; while they seemingly all admitted that his dream to somehow serve towards the betterment of the world was gallant, none of them explained what they meant by a “better world”.

But, a man who tries so hard to battle someone who hurt the younger brother of somebody else despite his injuries can’t be such a bad person; someone so set on following his own beliefs and picking the side he deems right despite the anger of whatever powers it may bring must have enough conviction to at least make him *seem* to be right. Alessa came here risking her own freedom if this was a regular cathedral, and ended up possibly saving the life of a templar he was fighting by intervening, and possibly saving his own life by helping him, despite the fact that he originally didn’t want to do anything on behalf of the monsters. Deryn seemed to trust these people to some extent, and Glaw...

Glaw...

[“Well, at the very least, she is honest about her feelings and has courage. Definitely not the worst... person I’ve met.”]

Almost sub-consciously, he approached Alessa, who turned her attention towards him at that.

- So, you came to our aid after all. Even almost managed to bring yourself to kill a Templar. It is to be expected, I suppose... humans... do sometimes have strong family bonds like that, don’t they?

- Yes, but... many do underestimate family, or more like... They don’t appreciate it. I guess I’m no longer such a person, though. When I realized how much trouble this could cause to Deryn, I’ve decided to go back, and... and...

- So, it was the care for your brother after all! Well, then... did you feel your heart skip a beat when you’ve seen our little slimegirl doing her best to protect him? Did some new feelings appear?

Conall gasped. She must’ve guessed most of it, since she wasn’t there, but with Deryn being covered by Glaw when she did and Conall basically willingly taking a blow, it couldn’t take much thinking, especially for someone as sharp as she apparently could be.

- Well... it did change my mind about one thing.

- That being?

- I... originally was ready to call the entire thing off. To push the blame onto you and Glaw, to say Keita is in league with the monsters, to claim Deryn has been put under a spell and is innocent. I was... almost ready to betray you.

- But, seeing your brother so wounded by a templar and yet, being protected by a monstergirl...
- I changed my mind. I... could not do it. Not at all.

- Changed your mind about what? Just that act? About Templars and Monsters? Or was it Glaw that your mind was changed about?

- You seem way too curious about that.

- Of course I am. The depth of a human’s change in attitude towards us is incredibly important. Affection is a wonderful thing that can appear for many different reasons. Including seeing a girl who apparently gives you and wishes for such affection save your beloved sibling, I believe. What I’m asking about is whether your change of mind only considered this one instance, and... whether you’ve gained feelings for our little troublesome red slime, or at least a feeling of camaraderie with *all* of us, including the monsters.

- She’s a... good person. Contrary to what I’ve thought about after our first meeting. I’ve never really managed to have time to fall in love with people, so I guess it’d take a long time to actually do at my current age, especially given certain... experiences, both with her, and before her. But, I guess if that’s what she really needs and wants, she deserves to give her a chance. And, while I have no such feelings now... maybe in the future. Just maybe.

- That’s wonderful! I’m glad you finally managed to see a monster as an actual woman, even after being used by one... I’m really glad. I guess humans aren’t all... how to say this... irredeemable. But, please, next time, try to avoid thinking about betraying us in the first place, okay?

- I... originally... I always had that, maybe a bit naive, dream that I could make a significant difference for the better in the world. And my first plan to do that was by joining the templar-protectors of the Silver Gauntlet.

- I see... that’s why the two of you were quite knowledgeable about them.

- We were knowledgeable for entirely different reasons. I managed to get recognized enough to be allowed entry into a tournament, top two people of which would become squires of Silver Glove immediately and the third placed one would be allowed to prove his worth in an official Templar mission and also become one. I managed to get third place, but... I had to give that up. For Deryn.

- You sacrificed your dream for your brother? Is that why he follows you? Out of gratitude?

- I didn’t “sacrifice” anything. It was a completely fair exchange. While I was out there, trying to become a great famous glorious Templar Protector and realizing my dreams, I had no idea how the rest of my family was struggling. Least of all, I had no idea how far Deryn was capable of going to overcome these difficulties... so, I have no right to complain. I exchanged a part of my dream that, as turns out, might’ve made me into a dangerous fanatic, for a brother I came close to losing. That’s... about it.

- Sounds like the two of you had your own problems in the past. Maybe we’ll be all able to sit down one day and discuss these things freely. I imagine it wasn’t easy to share both the truth about today and your story with me right from the bat, so thank you for your trust.

- Well, today, it started to look like we really should start to trust one another, and that even monsters can be deserving of such trust, to... I wanted to take the first step, since I was reluctant to help you and even let you join our little expedition. I’m also in your debt for helping save my brother, I guess.

- No, it was all Glaw and you. I just finished Keita’s and Deryn’s work and secured Rutivexia.
Suddenly, the duo had to turn to the wounded again. Apparently, one of the nuns was attempting to get naked while crawling on top of one of the wounded, who now struggled weakly.

- *Just you wait, my dear knight Keita! I will heal your wounds with the warmth of my body...*

- *Get the hell away from me! I’ll kill you!*

- *But, you’d get better in no time at all!*

Alessa’s face wasn’t a pretty picture as she nearly shrieked at the lesser succubus.

- *If he tells you to get off, then GET THE HELL OFF HIM!*

A sudden not-so-delicate slam with her tail removed the nun from the top of the swordsman, throwing her onto the ground and leaving her with a painful welt.

- *Keita needs to rest and heal! Get your mind out of the gutter, you stupid pseudo-religious demonified slut!*

- *Ah, but, I’m a maiden, so I can’t be...*

- *Shut up! We’re going to need to get someone to check Keita’s condition, as well as to explain how we may get hold of the information we need... And you’re coming with us!*

- *Nnno! Stingy bad lamia!*

A twitch of Alessa’s tail was all it took to send the succubus running away. Alessa directed her gaze towards the half-Zipangu swordsman, inspecting him carefully.

- *I’m sorry about that, Keita-kun. It must’ve been annoying, given the extent of your injuries... I’ll get someone to look at you right away, but you’ll need to rest for a time before you engage in any more fighting... Of course, resting here will soon be dangerous again, probably, so we’ll have to get you someplace else.*

- *We have no time to rest... if we learn about the location of the seer, we should go stra...*

- *I don’t mind you throwing your health away if you really think that’s neccessary, but that’ll just be risking it. Not to mention, Deryn’s injuries were also bad, so don’t think only about yourself, okay? I’ll go get Rutivexia or Sela here to help you recover straight away.*

- *Y...yeah. Sure, Alessa-s... Alessa.*
Conall and Alessa turned to go. Before they started to move away, though, the swordsman voice came to be heard:

- Um, Alessa... it was you who saved me, right? And defeated that White Scythe templar?

- Well, I did kill him, if that’s what you’re asking about. He threatened to kill you, Deryn and talked about many other infuriating things, so it’s not my fault he had to die. I’m not proud of it, either, so please don’t push more blame onto me.

- No, that’s not it at all. You... probably saved my life, or at least managed to keep me in a state where I’ll be able to live and fight more with your timely intervention, not to mention managed to avenge both me and Deryn-kun. Thank you. I’m truly grateful.

Only the elder Amberwing brother could see the small smile that graced Alessa’s lips, so far pouting or clenching together in pain.

- Think nothing of it. I hope you’d do the same for me, given the opportunity.

- Well, I hope a danger never comes that forces me to repay that debt, but if it does, I’ll try my best.

Alessa and Conall moved away from Keita as they sought one of the two monstergirls.

- Well, with all that being said, and you being a monster, Alessa...

- Mhmm?

- Well, there was a chance that you’d get attracted to one of your traveling companions, so I wonder... I don’t want to push my nose into anybody’s business or insult you, but watching you interact with him, you intervening when he’s in danger, clearly being worried for his well-being and getting so angry at that nun... Do you happen to l...like Keita in a s-sp-special way?

Alessa stopped in her tracks (or rather, slides), and hanged her head a bit lower, apparently considering something for a moment.

- I... I don’t know.

- Or you simply won’t...

- No. Honestly, I don’t know. I like him. He certainly beat my dungeon fair and square and shows time and time again how good of a man he is in terms of skill, power, determination, physique... so he’s certainly attractive, and his emotional side isn’t all that bad as well. But, my reason for traveling with him is different, and, well... what I feel right now is nothing special. There’s no love present. So, whether I think he could become someone special or not... I do not know that right now. I did ask you the same thing, so I’m trying to give a fair answer, but that’s all I can say.

- I see. We’re in a similar spot, then.

- Not at all, young one... Umm, Conall, now that I think about it, could you please check whether the
monstergirls are teasing Deryn and Keita while I get Rutivexia or Sela here? I’m worried what may happen when we’re gone.

- Sure thing.

Some time later...

Deryn also regained consciousness already and they were informed that while both he and Keita were injured to the point of unconsciousness, Alessa’s and Conall’s intervention combined with the other monsters’ efforts was enough to both keep them safe and win the battle in the end.

Conall decided to make it a must that Deryn learns how Glaw essentially saved his butt, but has done so silently by kneeling next to his brother. Said slimegirl was now pretty well-recovered, having only lost a bit of her excess mass and now gently bobbing away from a group of ex-faithful men, now infested with demonic energy as well as just plain old interested in sex, and thus probably interested what it’s like to do it with a slimegirl.

Of course, said slimegirl didn’t reciprocate said interest. Slowly, she approached the duo of Amberwing brothers and gave them both a clearly worried look.

- Ummm... Are the two of you fine? I did not know Conall fought in the end, and, ummm, Deryn, you...

- We’ll be all right. Are you feeling all right?

- Yes, yes. We slimes heal quickly, and any “permanent” damage is easily... healed by feeding. Might be our only advantage over the stronger monsters.

- Glaw, I'd like to thank you for saving my brother from that templar. That was a very brave and noble thing to do.

- I also would like to thank you. I didn’t think you’d do such a thing for me, and honestly, up until now, we didn’t get along and I didn’t think highly of you, but, well... I probably owe you my life.

Glaw jigged in place, apparently a bit overtaken with emotion from being thanked by both the brothers, but turned her head away shyly.

- I have just done what seemed right. I did not want Deryn killed and I am sure Conall would scold or beat us all if that happened.
- Well, you have still done well. Good job, and again, thank you.

- You are both w...welcome. I will... go now. I am sure you two have some stuff to talk about, and...

Suddenly, Keita, laying way too close not to hear these conversations, intervened.

- You should stay. Perhaps the monstergirls here will now be able to tell us something about the diviners we’re looking for or at least where to search for such information. I’ve had Alessa search for Rutivexia and some of the nuns already, so we’ll be having a small chat soon. Oh, here they are.

Alessa re-entered the chamber, followed by Rutivexia, a slug-like monster nun, a Black Harpy, the succubified nun, and one of the Ropers. There was also a man with them, seemingly in a bishop’s robes, his eyes focused on the monster’s asses all the while as they walked. Apparently, he got a bit too much monstergirl sex to care about much else, already.

- Well, I’ve gotten everyone who’s supposed to have any idea of where we could find such information. The harpy was an Order member and one of the two security leaders here, so she might’ve heard of something or be assigned to protect precious information so I’ve gotten her, too.

- Does my Sir Knight Gallant Keita require my assistance with relieving his precious family jew...

- No. Shut up.

- Awww...

- Anastasia, it pains me to say this, but you probably should just give up here. This man enjoys too many dangerous activities and is far too determined to just stay here and enjoy sex with you until you grow strong enough to actually be able to follow him, not to mention, well... the demonic energy in him does indicate he might already be taken, not to mention he’s already traveling with monsters, so you probably should wait for someone more cuter to come here and pay attention to you. And, he doesn’t seem to like you, does he? Young succubi like you should look for people who like them straight away. It’s elder ones like me who can change a man’s heart even if he’s set against them.

- If you say so, sister...

Alessa and Keita both gave a wordless nod of thanks to the Dark Priest, before turning to her with another request.

- While I feel you’re all already repaying part of your debt towards us by helping us recuperate from that fight, I have an important favor to ask.

- Oh, do not worry. Without your and Deryn’s help, we’d probably all be burned crispy or in Order’s dungeon by now, and helping your allies recover after a battle is just natural and a common courtesy. You came here due to a need of yours in the first place, so ask us whatever you like.

- Good... Then...

- First things first - Alessa interrupted. - Rutivexia, as Keita mentioned when he first came here, there’s an astringer named Dianna in an inn nearby. Since Deryn and Keita will have to
recuperate for a few days, I think, and she was instructed to send a report soon, that woman will have to be taken care of somehow, before she brings more templars on our heads.

- Ah, yes, this. We’ve already discussed this issue. Now, there are a few problems, but I’m afraid we’ll either have to somehow capture her or monsterfy her. The issue is how... implanting her with a Roper is out of the question. There are some monsters that hate human females enough to monsterfy them and leave them amongst humans to die, or just kill or cripple them outright, but we aren’t them, we need to take her away from these humans at the inn. We do not have any more kitsune-bi spirits, I believe, so that leaves us with...

- You’ll have sex with her and make her into a Dark Priest or a succubus. That way, she’ll still easily slip out of a human settlement.

Conall and Deryn looked weirded out. Keita was decidedly annoyed by all the monsterfying and sex talk.

- Ahh, yes. Now, Deryn dear, and you, mister Conall, I believe you are aware we monster haven’t been dealing significant blows against humanity... well, that’s the wrong way to put it, but oh well... No such things happened recently. In fact, ever since our dear prince Lucion has been put into a coma, we haven’t been able to expand with the same vigour as before.

Alessa seemed to be reminded of something.

- That’s right, you’ve mentioned it before... His Highness is in a coma? How did that happen?
- Oh, where have you been for the past months?
- Locked in a dungeon? Like, you know, echidnas sometimes are? - Alessa said sarcastically while rolling her eyes.
- Well, Lucion fought against the humanity’s so-called Greatest Hero, the half-angel Nemed, his uncle, and said fight ended up with more or less a draw.

Conall raised an eyebrow.

- That’s interesting. The Church claims Nemed fought Lilith and Lucion at once, killed her husband, prompting Lilith to kill him rather than take him prisoner, and the Demon Lady is now attempting to raise him using the dreadful necromantic spells possible...

- Propaganda. This is all untrue. In fact, Nemed is the only one who died after the fight. Lucion, being much younger and still deeply in love with our Demon Lady, probably fought death away tooth and nail, doing his best not to leave her sad and alone. Not to mention, the entire fight originally happened because Nemed was seeking revenge on one of the Lilim, Lady Deruella herself. Still, he has fallen into a coma. It’s regretful that we neither managed to get such a wonderful specimen like Nemed as an incubus and temporarily lost Lord Lucion’s wonderful vitality and ever-increasing strength and thus, our cause has been thwarted temporarily. But, brave ones like Lady Deruella still attempt to bring human lands under our control, and so, she orchestrated a corruption of the entire cathedral, problem being... now we’re essentially stuck in a place surrounded by religious humans, and we need to figure out a means of group escape. So, we cannot
allow that woman to inform the Church of the danger. Regrettably, we’ll have to forcefully turn another human into a monstergirl, though personally, I feel this is the best destiny for human women—since I am a kind of Succubus, I’ll also be changing her into a one, rather than some second-rate monsters. She’ll probably find happiness after the change, so don’t be sad or angry for her...

She paused for a moment...

- Of course, if any of our brave heroes want to watch said act... or join us... or if you’d like to call dibs on me rather than let me go through with such an impure, improper, not natural act with a woman, I couldn’t refuse, hmmm?

Conall and Deryn both blushed varying shades of red. Hearing all the sex talk, Keita’s patience reached it’s end.

- Enough! I’ve said it’s your problem how you’ll deal with Dianna, and I meant it. Now, I will have you listen to our request, if possible.

A suddenly new, chirpy voice appeared.

- Of course, of course. I don’t think we could refuse you anything after helping us so much.

Sela joined the conversation with that, smiling at the three men.

- Well, the issue is simple - Keita continued. - I have a … mission to accomplish, yet I don’t know the specific details of how to best go about it. Having heard about divination magic and seers from Alessa, I’ve decided to visit a cathedral, since Conall claimed they’re likely to have a lot of information kept on those. I’d basically ask you to direct me to the seer most likely to know a lot about Umbro Star, Tentacle Horrors, of methods of slaying such creatures, or simply the most powerful seer you know of.

- Tentacle horrors? Interesting. I assume you’re not more interested in them than you’re in w...

Alessa’s glare was enough to shut up Rutivexia’s suggestion that Keita seeks to learn more about tentacle horrors due to any freakish sexual desires.

- … Ah, it’s not my place to probe and ask. Well, sisters, do you know anything our friend here could use?

The rest of nuns seemed to focus hard, one of them immediately suggesting simply bringing their seer-related books here, but the slug interrupted.

- This would take a long time. I believe we should simply go for the assured thing here. If they’re
willing to take a small risk associated with the nearby monsters, I’d say directing them to Awena of the Crystalline Karst is the best option.

- Awena of the Crystalline Karst? - the visitors to the cathedral asked in unison.

The slug-girl nodded.

- Yes. She’s the most powerful seer known of around here. Awena was a half-dwarf child of a certain dwarven hermit. She originally had diviner talents, which were taken to the extreme when a certain elemental got corrupted during the reign of the previous Demon Lord and she’s been trapped in a cavern inside a crystalline prison. Her father couldn’t take the strain and both his and the spell’s that caused the tragedy magical powers slowly seeped into her. After our Lady Lilith took over, some monsters battled a bunch of werebats there and she’s been freed. The monsters were hanging out around there since Awena and her crystalline cave release some magic and easy-to-collect non-contaminated spiritual energy, so it’s a good place for monsters to live in. They don’t bother Awena since it’s likely they wouldn’t be able to stand up to her, despite the fact that the vast majority of her power is focused on divination. The church officials were worried about her but discovered nothing impure about her powers, and the presence there allowed for monsters to be lead a bit further away from human settlements. Of course, templars occasionally do a clearing of the area, and they regularly sent checks on whether or not she was corrupted by the power of her magic. Awena generally accepts jewels and either holy water or virgin blood to clean the place of demonic energy, but occasionally requests favor in return, so while I’m sure we’ll be able to provide you with standard payment, but if she asks something special of you, you’ll have to do it on your own.

- I see... and you can direct me to this Crystalline Karst, where I assume she lives in?

Rutivexia nodded.

- Yes. We’ll give you a map. Be wary though. As mentioned, monsters do live there, and those of them who are single will be a bit stronger than regular single monsters, since Awena’s place constantly releases spirit energy they find easy to absorb.

- Well - Alessa started - I’ve run a bit short on spirit energy today, as well, so I guess visiting it will have a positive effect on me.

- Don’t expect miracles, though. It’s likely that given what you expended today to defeat the templars, that little trip won’t be enough. Unless you’d stay there, that is. And the spirit energy is chaotic and unaligned, nothing compared to what a guy can produce.

- I’m sure Keita will be on the run since he’ll have to spend some time recovering, so I won’t be able to stay there too long, but at least there will be a positive effect.

- I won’t be spending much time recovering. Our hosts probably need to go on the run, and we don’t have enough time to rest here. I’ll just try to avoid fighting for a time, and end my recovery already on the road.

- You’re way, way too reckless, you know that? She just said the monsters there will be a bit stronger than usual.

- We’ll just have to do our best to not run into any monsters, then.
Rutivexia nodded.

- It’s your choice, and thank you for thinking about us. Then, you’ll be receiving a map to that place and Awena’s standard payment.

Suddenly, Sela interrupted them.

- Ahh, but if you intend to fight the Tentacle Horrors or do anything with them for some reason, won’t traveling to Zipangu be better or even necessary?

- Well, yes, at some point, I’ll probably be going to Zipangu, not to mention wherever else our travel takes us...

- Then, you’d have to visit a port eventually and get on a ship, right?

- Yes, I think so.

- My younger brother works at a port at the edge of the desert country, and he’d be able to get you on a ship he happens to co-own. I can write him a letter asking to do just that... Not to mention, my brother is an open-minded person, so while he’d probably be unable to keep you on it if he found out monsters are traveling with you, he won’t try to bring you harm or give you up to the church, either, if I say you’re all good people. The problem would be with Glaw, but I imagine as long as you bring her as some sort of cargo rather than letting her wander around, it’d be all right... or she could just stay here, it’s your choice.

- Thank you, Sela. If you’d be willing to do that, it would be very helpful.

- Mhm. I’ll have a letter ready by the time you’re ready to leave... Come to think of it... I haven’t met or given affection to my dear younger brother in a while... and he shouldn’t mind his sister’s change... Maybe I should visit him and make up for lost time...

As Sela walked away mumbling to herself, Deryn and Conall exchanged uncomfortable glances between each other and then Keita.

- Umm... Alessa, Rutivexia, does that mean... between her and her brother...

Rutivexia cut in:

- Not necessarily. Basically, there are at least three groups amongst monsters where the act known as incest is concerned...

Alessa stopped her.

- I’d say that there are precisely four.

- Well, there are monsters who’ll attempt incest out of laziness and convenience, since a human...
attached to them emotionally and one they care about right next to them. And, there’s monsters who’ll start feeling romantic love and attraction in place of regular familial bonds.

Alessa continued.

- Then, there’s monsters who’ll do sexual acts for their family members as ways of showing affection, but won’t go to the extent of making said men their husbands or changing them into incubi - it’s just a way of showing affection. And, finally, there are monsters who’ll be less embarrassed with and more affectionate with their family members, but won’t try anything sexual.

After a short pause, she finished.

- Of course, incest only concerns monsters who were previously humans, or have male human cousins, or whose mothers would permit such acts with their fathers, which is rare.

- Yep, yep - Rutivexia continued. - Personally, I wouldn’t think of putting my hands on my cousins, and once I get a husband, every other monster should keep their hands off, including my family.

- Right?

Both Alessa and Rutivexia nodded in unison. Deryn and Conall felt a bit relieved that there actually are monsters with *some* morals regarding these things out there.

It took Keita a few days to recover to acceptable levels, while Deryn managed an almost full recovery. Sela had written them a letter for her brother in case they needed to travel out of the main continent, and marked the port he worked in on the map, also giving him his name - Oliver Maurer. They’ve delivered the usual payment for Awena - a few jewels and some holy water - and said their goodbyes before taking their separate ways - the monsters were already attempting to move away from the cathedral, given the fact that nothing was keeping them in the dangerous place anymore, many having found permanent partners either during the “mass” that took place after the cathedral was corrupted, or during the knights attack, having “convinced” some of the knights to become their partners instead. The others were chained up in the cathedral’s base with food and water - with Rutivexia claiming she instructed her new monster friend to actually inform the other cathedrals about their knights being kidnapped, only later. The Dark Priest also gave an uncomfortably long and rather gropey hug to Deryn before parting.

That being said, the trio started on their, or rather, Keita’s, quest to deliver the highest damage possible to the Umbro Star’s spawn.

The first mission being finding out exactly how to do that.
Random trivia:
The Air spell "Baselard Stare" and Elnathan's personal spell "White Scythe Frown" come from the phrase "Staring daggers at someone", which makes sense for spells that use piercing/cutting air currents without much manual input from the caster other than directing them.

Alessa's race was originally supposed to be either an Echidna or a Shirohebi. If I was going to write the story now when the number of monstergirls has increased somewhat significantly, she might've been one of the different new types with a legless, serpentine lower body.
Arc V - The Seer of Crystalline Karst

Chapter Summary

After a long travel, the group reaches the place known as the Crystalline Karst. Whom will they meet there, and how will these meetings go? Can they find Awena and will she be of aid to them? How will Glaw and Alessa behave in a place that draws monsters of the land?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The quintet composed of three humans and a pair of monstergirls was already approaching its final place of destination.

The “Crystalline Karst” was somewhat visible even from afar; a large opening in the slope of earth and rocks, adorned on the sides by something shining and definitely not plain “earthly”.

They bothered to keep appearances so far, but this close to the target, Glaw openly joined their main “force” and Alessa morphed back into her echidna form.

In a few moments and without being disturbed, they stood at the entrance to the rather large cavern.

Alessa took a deep breath.

- Sela and Rutivexia weren’t lying. It’s rather rare to find consumable spirit energy flying around like this. It’s usually too tainted with something else or too bent from a spell effect that causes it to be released, but here... it’s weak and diluted, but one can definitely gorge on it if they spend enough time absorbing it. Feels completely different than getting it from someone...

- So, does that mean your and Glaw’s condition will be improved here? - Conall asked straight away.

- Hmmm... well, I can certainly restore some of my demonic energy by spending time here. Quite a lot if we don’t hurry too much and don’t fight anything. But, as for Glaw, unfortunately... slimes are a bit different from most other monsters. Their diet consists of human fluids and their demonic energy is one of the lowest amongst the monsters. All of it is spent on maintaining their form and regenerative abilities, and their ability to truly and consciously absorb spirit energy is almost non-existent, like with goblins. Blue slimes might as well be unable to do it at all, and I don’t think red ones have much more developed, either. There are the dark slimes and maybe some Zipangu slimes
that do behave like other monsters in regards to spirit energy, but on the whole... Slimes feed and grow stronger on the biological. Spawning, constantly fighting, that’s what allows a regular slime to grow stronger. Thus, they’re pretty weak compared to some monsters, and, in short, I don’t think spending time here will be of much benefit to Glaw. It definitely won’t feed her stomach, that’s for sure.

The red slime in question decided to open her mouth.

- I do not think I have a “stomach” like humans do... not to mention I am not “pretty weak”. Your little golem could not handle Conall and Deryn, but we did, right?

- In superior numbers, through and ambush and only after “my golem” has already weakened them.

- I am not weak!

- Strength and weakness are measured purely by comparison. What you should worry about is who is it that you’ll end up comparing yourself to, and whether you’ll have to fight said person... or creature.

- Ahhh, more serpentine wisdom. Just what we needed.

Alessa gave up on the conversation and moved to the entrance of the cave.

- Anyway, let’s try and meet Awena, not necessarily as quickly as possible, since I may recover a bit while we’re here, but try to avoid fighting anything. Monsters here are bound to be at least somewhat strong, and fighting my brethren is not something I’d do... and out of you three, none seem in top condition yet.

- We’re in good condition enough to take down a monster or two. If you insist, we can hang around the cave a bit more after finding Awena, so that you may recover... We’ll probably need you at full strength at some point, but I don’t think your help will be necessary here. Let’s go. - Keita responded to Alessa’s worries.

[“And, again, ignoring my warnings. He’s way too reckless.”]

Conall wasted no time arguing and entered the cave. followed closely by his brother and the red slime. Keita took one last look at Alessa to make sure she had nothing else to tell them or warn them about, then followed.

The Echidna took another deep breath.

Yes, the spiritual energy could be felt, even deeper inside.
This was an extremely rare effect, yet one couldn’t call it anything other than a “natural environment for a monster”. Sure, absorbing spiritual energy from surroundings was a lot harder and trickier than getting it from men, and less rewarding, but having a nearly-inexhaustible supply in nature always around you made Alessa’s drastic attempts to reduce her need for spirit energy and her sex drive seem almost silly - if she knew places like this existed, she’d just live in one of them, rather than a dungeon...

Although, admittedly, she probably could never find another place like this one.

She slithered in after Keita, sensing more and more of the unaligned, floating spirit energy as they got deeper into the cave.

According to what they’ve heard, the cave was supposedly pretty dangerous and not at all free of monsters, so they decided to move rather quietly. Alessa mentioned that many monsters wouldn’t touch a human that appeared “claimed”, but in their case it’d mostly extend to Keita’s spiritual stain and to Glaw hanging on Conall’s shoulder all the time, and it may still not be enough to stop some from attempting to have a go at them. Even if it was, Deryn was in pretty grave danger, so avoiding any conflict would be preferred.

And impossible, of course.

That was more or less the message they received when they almost ran into a small band of monsters on the first curve of the path that lead deeper into the cave.

Only half a level lower, a fact that prompted the group to hunch and step away from the edge that made the cave itself seem like it was composed of several levels, was a group of monsters.

Small ones, but their adventure with the goblin tribe, Rhalia and Triel especially, taught them to never underestimate a monster based on size, so they remained cautious as they studied the little creatures.

Horns, wings, spade and heart-ended tails and fantastic hair and eye colors left no doubts whatsoever to their demonic origin, the main question being whether they were *somewhat* young imps or *very* young succubi.

Either way, the cheerful demons hopped around the place, some purposely glomping others, some
seemingly practicing some flashy but safe and weak spells, and some either practicing flying and failing, or resting.

- They seem... uninterested in anything but playing. Not to mention... young. - Keita pointed out.

- Freshly transformed succubi would be hopping around desperately looking for a mate right now, while simply young succubi may also show such interests... Imps, too, though there aren’t all that many imps that are “born” that’s for sure. However, since these are young and probably natural monsters, it’s pretty possible the aura of this place is enough to keep them well-fed, alive, and with a mind on all kinds of playing around only. If the desire for spirit energy is sated, sex drive is also lessened, especially in such a young demon-family monster.

- So, in case of some monsters, sex drive and hunger for spirit energy are tied to one another? - Conall and Deryn asked almost simultaneously, with the elder Amberwing continuing - So, if there was more areas like this one, it’s possible that monster attacks on humans wouldn’t be as common?

- Well... yes and no. In monster culture, lasciviousness and strong sex drive are often considered virtues and are encouraged in young and adolescent monsters alike. Not to mention, the act is simply so enjoyable that some would commit it even without spirit energy being included, although it’s a big bonus - and for many demon - class monsters, the main food source as well. Also, we need humans to reproduce. But, I applaud attempting to find possible means of calming down the human-monster conflict. Anyway, let’s slip by them. No reason to engage them right now.

They proceeded to travel further into the cave, silently, thankfully not intercepted by the group of monsters.

-So...- Deryn begun his query. -All in all, what precisely *is* that “spirit energy” thing? It doesn’t seem like monsters understand it in the same sense some of the mages define the energy they use for spells.

-Oh, there is a connection.- Alessa begun.

Glaw was seemingly uninterested in the discussion, mostly attempting to engulf an arm or foot of Conall so they’d be moving at the same pace and with him slime-covered. Suffice to say, the young man wasn’t thankful for such treatment but seemed oddly hard to annoy today.

The snake woman continued.

-The magical energy that humans use is a direct derivative of their mental abilities, spirituality and capability to perceive the “supernatural”, and their spirit energy as defined by monsters. Us, monsters, mostly depend on a single type of energy, “demonic energy”, which the spiritual energy we can absorb is transformed into. Thanks to the succubi affinity for it being now found in all monsters, demonic energy and spirit energy seem to be able to coexist, complete, and spur one another. Due to their ability to produce ‘spirit energy’, there are more males with minor magical talents than there are females with minor magical talents, since males have an advantage in one of the areas. If I had to define it... I’d say spiritual energy, other than some sort of mystical strength that is capable of making one into a warrior or mage of great renown, is directly tied to one’s capability of creating life. It might seem like a woman is the source of it, but women are limited; there are times when human women can’t be bred, they can only have a limited amount of children in their lifetime, and so on. Males can impregnate nearly endlessly, produce new sperm almost
constantly and with it, their spiritual energy is always there. Thus, females have a set amount of
spiritual energy that lessens with age, but males continue to produce more and more and can be
made to produce it at a faster rate throughout their lives. Probably part of the reason why there’s
more famous old sorcerers than old witches.

-Hmmm... and which monsters feed first and foremost on this spirit energy? - Deryn continued with
his questions.

-As I mentioned before, most monsters can access it in some manner, but some find it a primary
source of “food.” I’d say pretty much all demon, spirit, elemental and undead-class monsters have
it as an important part of their diet. Also, pretty much any monster that is part of the Sabbath can
feed through such...

There was a clear sound of shouting and possibly fighting going on deeper in the cave. Checking
their backs to see if they might’ve been followed, they’ve dropped the cautious movement and
dashed forward immediately without exchanging another word.

The sight that appeared in front of them was a somewhat unexpected one.

After all, in your usual situation, monsters did *not* fight one another.

But, there it was, right in front of their eyes.

It was difficult to fully explain, but a group of feminine zombies were apparently grabbing a few men
that struggled, trying to follow a group of insect-like, apparently ant women, some of which
appeared to fall back and actually fight the zombies for the men. The undead had an advantage in
numbers, but the men weren’t intent on going with them, and it was apparent that the ants were
pretty strong - possibly stronger physically than the zombies themselves.

The trio of men turned to the Echidna that traveled with them, and asked for an explanation of what
was happening.

-Well, of course I don’t know the situation itself, but I have an idea of what might be going on.

-That idea being? - Conall asked, obviously upset about the situation. The men were trapped
between two groups of monsters and, apparently, the zombies were all over them. Not a pretty
picture in an eyes of a templar candidate.

-The giant ant monstergirls are capable of tracing their path with pheromones that work as
attractant to most human males. Similar pheromones are also in their sweat. In short, for an
average male, a path made by the giant ants or a giant ant after some hard work are rather hard to
ignore as far as attraction towards women is concerned, and many with attempt to follow them
immediately back to their nest. The zombies were apparently simply lead here by the spirit energy in
the air, but still haven’t developed any kind of intelligence and are just trying to grab the men that
follow the ants. Apparently, this time some of the ants noticed and are actively trying to keep the
men following them, since they aren’t mated yet themselves or for a similar reason...

-So, in essence, - Keita decided to sum things up - we have a bunch of men here that are being lead into slavery against their will, potentially being “liberated” from it by another bunch of mindless undead that are after spirit energy.

-What I see - Conall disagreed - is a group of men lead into the unknown due to a biological reaction, but potentially being violated and desecrated by a bunch of dreadful undead beasts!

Alessa simply shook her head.

-Zombies develop intelligence and personality through absorbing spirit energy. If they can’t get their hands on man earlier, they’ll stay completely mindless and will attempt to violate anything and everyone. Intelligent zombies can form bonds like everyone else, and the process shouldn’t be interrupted. As for the giant ants… well, men are taken with them, sure, but if they’re “enslaved”, it’s a gilded cage. The ants are honest, diligent workers who also become quite giving and caring about their partners the longer they’re with a man. The men are well fed and protected, and their physical needs are attended to, not to mention if a man manages to induce enough sexual response and pour enough spirit energy into a worker giant ant, she becomes a royal ant and may go off and start her own nest, the two pair becoming the monarchs, in which case the man is hardly truly a slave to anything anymore. Not to mention, truly strong-willed men or those who have a honest hate or disgust for monsters would be able to resist these pheromones mostly, unless there was a royal ant or one close to becoming one in there.

Deryn opened his mouth this time.

- Basically, you’re saying it’d be best for both us, the monsters, and maybe even the men if we stayed out of this.

Alessa sighed, guessing the likely reaction to her next words. -Yes. Let nature take it’s course. The men even seem to want to go with the ants, as you may see. Not to mention, you may end up badly aroused or even lead by the pheromones if we get any closer.

Both Keita and Conall shook their heads no.

-Sorry, Alessa, but even if the men are ready and willing to go with these ants, as much as it might’ve been caused by their weak will and a chemical reaction, they’re also faced with the possibility...

-Of getting raped by a bunch of corpses that should long be buried in earth and not moving! - Conall finished for Keita.

Deryn raised an eyebrow. -You guys know that we can’t deal with both the zombies and the ants, right?
Keita grinned.

-Can’t we?

-Even if we free them, we’d have to waste time and strength leading them out of here to ensure their safety, unless we want them to run into something else. It might not be so hard, but we’ll risk doing so ourselves on the way back. Not to mention, this is just part of the ant group. If all of them went back and attacked us...

-Let’s go for the zombies, then. I say that’s the worse option. - Conall suggested.

-Well, I’ll let you make the decision this time, Conall-san. - Keita decided to humor his companion.

Alessa sighed again. -Hey, heeey! You realize that in case you do get lured by pheromones, me and Glaw may not be able to hold all of you back from following them? And Glaw is pretty sure to try and hold on to Conall rather than actively try to save everyone, so the risk is highest for the other two of you.

-I won’t be beaten by a useless underhanded feminine vile like pheromones. - Keita stated firmly.

-Me neither. I’d pick a legless thing over thing with this many legs any day, so we’ll be returning to you, Alessa. - Deryn said with mixed seriousness and playfulness in his voice, with the echidna swearing he even winked at her. Keita stared at him in something like surprise or confusion for a moment and back at the zombies.

-Let’s go.

-I’m staying back. I’ll only intervene if their scent starts working too well, and if they fight me about you, I may just have to leave you to them.

-Understood. - Keita answered.

-Yup. Conall, Keita, let’s go.

-W...wait, Conall. The snake-woman might not fight at all, but I’ll at least help protect you, so let me help, too. - Glaw asked.

-Sure. Thank you. Now, let’s go before this monster-monster conflict gets any uglier.

Alessa just sighed in resignation.

[“They complain about the way zombies act and yet won’t allow them what’s needed to actually develop intelligence and personality. Humans are attracted to human females’ body shape, visual presence and pheromones, but as soon as a monster uses those sources of attraction to their advantage, it’s wrong, evil, has to be stopped and whatever. Complicated species they are.”]

Deryn, being less hurt than Keita and naturally faster than Conall or Glaw, lead the charge, mashing the first zombie straight away and lunging with a sword strike for another before they managed to adjust to the additional combatants.
Conall and Keita struck out almost at the same time, with the swordsman doing his regular job of severing body parts while Conall stabbed the first zombie through its head, apparently not much stopped by its feminine shape. Glaw protected him from a side-strike and then shifted her body to give him a good spot for a counter, which in turn resulted in another fallen Zombie.

The trio proceeded to eliminate another patch of zombies as Alessa suddenly slithered closer just as they were about to take on the next group of them - two up to a quartet, the number of undead creatures dwindling at an extremely rapid rate.

Apparently, there was another creature that came into the equation, one that Alessa spotted and was prepared to actually counter in case need of such arose.

[“A... Kitsune?  And pretty young for a three-tailed one, too...”]

-Normal Water Spell : Water Current!

A small, but rapidly thickening and increasing in velocity - until it did resemble something like a quite violent if small river flow - current of water shot out of the Kitsune’s fingertips.

It was directed at two of the zombies, and struck it’s mark perfectly. Keita was still a bit too slow because of his wounds to react to that properly, but Deryn took advantage of the situation marvelously, smashing the bones of yet another of the undead.

Deconcentrated by the appearance of what was apparently an ally, Keita pretty much ignored the fact that another zombie was rather close to him.

The kitsune, who now was completely revealed as an adolescent or very young adult strawberry-blonde haired girl with fox ears and three fox tails that interestingly turned almost pink at the ends, where a regular fox would likely have white coloration... She didn’t ignore that zombie at all.

- Faint Earth and Water Spell : Mudball!

Throwing a small projectile made out of mud at the zombie’s face, it had the desired effect - turned Keita’s attention, disabled one of the zombie’s senses which confused it for a moment - though that
wasn’t enough at all to make it unable to fight given it’s undead, spirit energy-dependent nature - and thus gave the swordsman an opportunity to quickly get back into fight.

That is, if said zombie wasn’t at that point struck down by one of the ants, non-lethally, but violently.

Keita turned his attention elsewhere, and noticed some of the zombies were actually withdrawing, Deryn, Glaw and Conall doing a pretty good job of finishing the remaining ones off, along with their fox-like ally who turned out to be a relatively good melee combatant as well.

Soon, the fight was over, and the issue now was - would the allies in that battle become enemies in a new one?

There was no report.

One of the current triad of commanders of STRIKE coalition (Succubi and Terrorism Reistance of International Knights Elite, a temporary alliance of templars to deal with the most recent effects of monster-supporting mutinies and war with the demons in the lands belonging to the Twin Great Kingdoms of Men, Malvas and Weinga), the name of which he personally found incredibly stupid and needlessly made simply to sound “cool” as an abbreviation, the knight-protector of the Golden Shield Harrold Olieribos LaRoache was expecting a report from the men send by him and his counterpart in the coalition from the White Scythe a day ago.

Yet no words about it reached him, and as such he was getting increasingly nervous.

Sure, there was the possibility that whatever mage they might’ve used for communication fooled them or whatever bird they used to carry the report would be caught by a larger bird of prey, but there were other possibilities.

As such, he was going to mobilize the knights in that area to find out what happened.

And fast.
The ants stayed practically frozen in their spots, as the kitsune turned nervously towards both of the groups. Alessa and Keita approached the young monster girl, her tails moving around in the air nervously.

Alessa decided to take control here, though she suspected Keita might’ve been familiar with *that* type of Kitsune as well.

-A pretty unexpected move, for a Youko. I was pretty certain your intention was to wait till the parties wear themselves out and grab the nearest man you can, then make an escape.

-N...no, that’s mean!

Both of them raised an eyebrow, surprised at the innocent reaction.

-Well, you probably realize your species don’t have the reputation for being most gentle. Keita commented. The kitsune shifted from one foot to another nervously.

-Ummm, yes, I know. But... I just wanted to get the guy I liked back, and thought that if I helped you, you’d help me win him back and negotiate... you travel with a slimegirl and a lamia, so you can’t be really bad to monsters...

-An Echidna, technically. - Alessa cut in on that - So, did these ants or zombies got the man you’ve liked? Your husband, perhaps? Shouldn’t someone with such a bond be harder to charm with phero...

-It...it’s not like that. We’re not... mates. I mean, I still haven’t mated with him or anyone else, even once.

That caused Alessa’s eyes to dart open so wide they almost were approaching “threatens-to-go-out-of-orbit-area”.

-B-but you’re a three tail!

-Ummmm... yes? - It was clear the young kitsune was confused, so Alessa tried to explain.

-Kitsunes are born with a single tail and only develop a second one upon becoming old enough or losing their virginity, so there’s no way you’re a three-tailed virgin! Even with the aura of this place, accumulating so much spirit energy to get three tails at your age is...

-Ummm... would it make more sense if I said I lived here most of my life and learned quite a bit about absorbing the place’s spirit energy? - the girl asked nervously.

-A Youko-type kitsune hiding in a cave her entire life... no wonder you’re different than the usual specimen. Any reason for that? - now Alessa was intensely curious.

-My mother put me here when I was small, to avoid danger. This place isn’t exactly safe, but in many ways it’s better than on the surface. Plus, I could develop by absorbing spirit energy from the air, but now... now that guy I happened to like appeared, and I hoped to get him to live together, here or elsewhere, but as chance would have it, he happened upon these antwomen before we even
had chance to mate... and he already accepted the fact that I was of a different species, so perhaps that chance could’ve come soon. But, that won’t happen if they take him away...

Keita now spoke. The ants still seemed to be waiting in anticipation after the fight.

-Well, she helped us, so I think we should help her. The man would clearly be in a much better position with her anyway, rather than being brainwashed with chemicals.

-Well, you’re probably right, but we’ll have to convince the ant girls, preferably without harming them.

-That’s your preference only. The chemical attraction thing is... strongly disturbing. What is your name, youko-san?

-M... Melissa. You two?

-I’m Keïta, Keïta Haneo. This is Alessa, an Echidna going by the alias of “the Black Moth”.

-It’s... nice to meet you two. Thank you both for taking my side with this.

Keita turned to the two other man and they nodded, hearing the conversation and supporting his decision, apparently.

Now, the entire group approached the ant-girls, who had “packed up the men” already, but were apparently waiting for them to come and discuss whatever rewards were necessary or at least *why* did they come to their aid against the zombies.

Two of the ants stepped forward to go through with whatever talks or negotiations would take place. The two were pretty similar, which made sense considering nearly all members of an ant colony would be closely related; Both had dark brown hair and dark blue eyes, only one seemed slightly more matured and older than the other.

- Welcome, humans, fellow monsters. Do you wish for something in return for your aid in protecting ourselves and our new men from these still feral undead?

There was a certain note of seductiveness in the older ant’s voice, and all three men could already feel the faint effect of her pheromones, getting stronger with time, if agonizingly slowly.

Alessa looked over at the three of them, slightly worried. They seemed fine, for now, and Keïta was even about to speak out, but the youko, Melissa, cut in.

-*Your* new men? You stole one from me!
-We didn’t steal anything, fellow monster. All the men following us into the nest are coming out of their own...

-... pheromone-addled will/- Deryn finished for the ant-woman.

-We’re just doing what we can to make ourselves attractive to them. We’ve evolved that way, young one. Also, none of them are significantly marked with a monster’s demonic energy, so they’re free and up for grabs.

Keita coughed meaningfully and steered the conversation towards its right course.

-Melissa-san here is rather fond of the man who joined your “following” due to these pheromones. I’m sure you can understand her position. I’d ask that you return that man to her, and explain to us a way to go deeper into the cave, preferably to where the seeress called Awena is located.

Melissa intervened.

-I can help you with that. I wouldn’t completely trust these lustful things to point you where they *didn’t* spread their pheromones.

-Talking like that about our species won’t help you regain the man you’re the wannabe-mate of, child. - the younger of the two ants spoke out, spite raising in her voice.

Alessa decided to intervene.

-Very well, we’ll take Melissa on her offer, then, since she also owes us a debt in this case. The man she wants to retrieve was a person she got fond of while they spent time together, and one that already accepted her as a monstergirl. I’m sure you understand this is a bond that any monsters outside the relationship are supposed to respect and admire, not try to break because they may gain a male as *someone they know may like*. Not to mention, once the human develops a certain resistance to the residual track pheromones, he might find himself regretting being captured in this manner.

Conall nodded. -Y...ye-ah, so just... return him to this fox-girl, okay? And we’ll all be merry and on our way. Although me and Keita personally really dislike the means you employ to get these males...

-I suppose it could be seen as some sort of natural competition or survival tactic. - Keita conceded a point for the ants -so while I usually fight this, I think we’ll all benefit if we simply let it slide that time.

The younger ant turned to the older one.

-What are we going to do, Sister? There are still unmated sisters back at the nest, and we’re just going to give a male away? Who’s not getting her share when we get back ho...
-Remember, I’m already mated, so anything I’d be getting back home would either be a dedicated gift for a friend or left for common usage. Any of the other males can do this. I suppose we can let this one go.

Alessa nodded. - A wise choice. And a commendable one morally, too.

The other ants gathered up the men and lead them into clear view; by now, Alessa was well and truly aware that this could be a very dangerous moment - after all, the accumulated pheromones of most of the ants were in a quite dangerous distance related to the men.

Melissa walked over to the group before approaching a man.

-That’s... that’s him. That’s my Klaus. Come, da...ummm, I mean, let’s go. You shouldn’t be around such people.

Slowly, she attempted to lead the young, auburn-haired human away from the group of ants, but he suddenly squirmed and tried to get right back to them.

-Klaus! Come on, Klaus, you’re not telling me you’d rather go with them! Don’t you recognize me and...

-...Leave me be! I want to...what do I... Their warmth is... and such beauty, I...

At that moment Alessa looked around at all the males present.

The ones brought here by the ants all had unmistakable bulges and tents in their lower clothes, clearly marking them as aroused and erect, and apparently pretty brainwashed by horniness.

Turning to her companions, though, who were now in the area of effect of a similar amount of pheromones...

Conall slightly bent forward and had a visible bulge in his pants; despite trying to hard it, it was pretty sizeable, so he had to be well-endowed considering his excitement was visibly showing. Still, his willpower was evidently enough to resist for now and keep his wits.

Keita and Deryn, however...
She expected as much from Keita. Not as much as a blush, not the barest hint of erection, lack of focus being caused rather by the irritation caused by the alien pheromone than horniness.

But, Deryn...

Deryn was equally stoic. Not the lightest change that suggested arousal or an erection.

Alessa was almost stunned.

[“D... don’t tell me that rape by a slime caused him to go completely racist over his choice of women... or was he really serious about that leg policy? No male can reject a monstergirl’s intricate arousal techniques or powers simply based on the amount of legs said monstergirl has... right?”]

However, there was another issue or rather another male to be worried about.

Since Klaus clearly wasn’t going to go completely peacefully, Alessa slithered up to the young human and suddenly closed her coils around him, wrapping him up. Melissa’s eyes darted open, and she turned to Alessa in silent protest.

-He’ll become completely fine once he’s outside the pheromones’ range for just a while. It’s the safest way to keep him from moving, unless you preferred I’d do it with an Earth spell.

Melissa nodded nervously and the ants started moving away with the other man. To Alessa’s relief, none of her companions actually followed the insect monstergirls.

That meant the male instinct problem was out of the way, almost, with the exception of the squirming man, “Klaus”, trying to escape from her coils and follow the antgirls into their part of the cave.

That could end up igniting her own instincts further.

It was such a curious feeling, to have a man struggle and trash and attempt to free himself while being bound by a part of her very body.
Certain instincts arose in members of the lamia family when they felt the man’s muscles struggle and twitch under their own strength, reflexes politely informing her that she should squeeze tighter, draw herself closer, and show the man he’s right where he belongs either through tender affection and pleasure or rougher domination...

Depending on the respective combination of lamia and the man, that is.

But she didn’t like him, not at all, so the call was just minimal. It was just her body responding weakly; not even with strength. Her mind and heart were opposed to this, so she simply closed her eyes, took a deep breath and waited for the ants to leave, and the man to calm down slowly.

Until a loud squeek drove her out of her semi-trance, and caused her to look to the side.

Conall was the source of the sound, with Glaw’s pseudopod pressing upon, and visibly moisturizing, the bulge in his lower clothes.

-Um, why is Conall hard? Why is your thingy hard, Conall? - the slimegirl asked without a hint of shame in her voice.

-Ugh, it’s because... a chemical reaction and...

-Could it be you want to...play? Or maybe just stored up too much tasty white stuff?

Deryn was staring with a face that simply expressed how weirded and possibly grossed out he was by that situation. Alessa stuck out her tongue slightly, and Keita’s hand was now making direct and somewhat audible contact with his face.

-Conall-san, Glaw-san... please restrain yourself from conducting these activities in the open, while we’re on a mission no less.

Conall just looked at them with a face that said “How is this my fault”, and then got even redder noticing how neither Keita nor Deryn seemed to be truly affected by the pheromones.

Or maybe it was that slimy pseudopod now being replaced with what was Glaw’s *hand* stroking his erection through the clothes, up and down, making it twitch more violently and get even harder.

Alessa was pondering on a few things in the meantime.
[“All right, this is getting pretty weird. First, Deryn, who never even had a chance to develop an actual resistance to a monstergirl’s charm attacks, shows no result whatsoever to being exposed to the semi-magical pheromones of Giant Ants. I can understand Keita due to his state, but... does this guy hates us? Or is he *really* that much into two legs? No, that wouldn’t explain it; most monstergirls are quite capable of changing a guys preferences, and the feeling of hate would have to be great indeed... He’d already attempt to kill me or Glaw if that was the case, I think. Could it be this guy has some sort of epic willpower? Or is his spirit somehow especially strong? A magical talent? Or is it something else entirely?”]

And that was not the end of it.

[“... And then, Glaw sticks herself onto Conall’s hardened member... that thing looks big... and he doesn’t go into a “holy fucking cow you stupid slimegirl, stop! I’m an almost-templar, I don’t do dirty stuff with monsters, this is to be saved for marriage with a pure maiden of the human race!” type rant... Actually, I might be overthinking this, but he was very opposed to any sort of touch resembling THAT in the past, so what the hell? Is he really going to try and form a relation Glaw might want due to a change of opinion after she protected his younger brother? Is family that important here? Or was such a deed simply enough to change his opinion?”]

Conall interrupted her train of thought with a small but coy yell. -Come on, you’ve heard them, didn’t you?! Please stop doing that already!

Practically ignoring that, Alessa’s thoughts turned to the ‘most important’ issue.

[“I’m “Alessa”, so, since WHEN is Glaw “Glaw-san”, Keita? Huh? What happened? What the hell changed!??”]

She actually noticed she was somewhat pouting and puffing up her cheeks, and quickly recomposed herself.

[“Is it because she saved Deryn? No, she was still “Glaw” back then. Well, unlike me, she did help fighting both that triumvirate that run the combined goblin tribes *and* the zombies here now, and while I did save Keita, she directly risked her life to protect Conall, which is something I cannot say I did... hell, I was even trying to conserve energy until that templar pushed me too far...”]

She sighed.
-Ummm, Miss Alessa? Klaus stopped struggling, but I’m not sure whether it’s because the ants are away, or because you’re squeezing him too hard...

Alessa’s eyes darted open. Ah, yes, she had a man in her coils. Apparently, the combination of her now-stronger demonic energy, excitement nervousness about the former situation and the fact that it’s been a long time since she had a chance to coil up around someone, not counting that one round of sleep with the half-Zipangu swordsman... she might’ve squeezed him a bit too tight.

Immediately, she released the auburn-haired man, who stumbled on his legs, and was immediately caught into the Youko’s arms. Melissa wrapped her arms around him possessively.

-M... Melissa? What... happened? I feel so light headed...

-Shhh, it’s all right, Klaus. We had to be a bit rough with you, so it’s natural. Not to mention what... they were trying to do to you...

The youko’s hand lingered over the young man’s own bulge. Alessa noticed that somehow it was even more prominent than before she grabbed him with her tail.

[“Did I... rub it? Subconsciously? Am I really that much in the mood for these kinds of activities lately? Well, I’ve been expending my demonic energy quite a lot, one of the conditionings was removed, and I’ve been travelling in a two monster girls - three men combination without getting *any* of the possible perks of it, so that’s understandable, but still... damn...”]

She couldn’t help but cast another look at the two men sporting an erection-shaped bulge in their clothes. Conall’s was partially covered due to the nature of his armor, but from what she’d seen, he seemed pretty big. She got a bit of touching done on the one and only erection she ever saw Keita sporting; she could tell both him and Conall were bigger around those parts than this Klaus person, although it might’ve been better for the virgin Kitsune, and it’s not like size was the most important thing for most monstergirls - spirit energy, emotional connections and, first and foremost to some, sex drive were. An incubus transformation usually came with an adjustment to the genital size, anyway.

However, now, she couldn’t help but wonder how the four men here measured up against one another, and the only one for whom she didn’t have even the shade of a hint as to how big he could be was Deryn. He was the youngest, so understandably he could’ve been the smallest as well, but...

[“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU EVEN THINKING ABOUT, ALESSA?! YOU DIDN’T SPEND YEARS SUPPRESSING THESE URGES JUST TO TURN INTO ANY AVERAGE DICK OBSESSED MONSTER NOW!”]
Concentrating harder, Alessa attempted to absorb more energy from her surroundings to calm these thoughts, before returning her point of focus to the events around her.

Melissa was still speaking soothingly to Klaus, who seemed to slowly drift into sleep in her arms.

Alessa tried to gather her thoughts and slithered up to the pair. Keita and Deryn also approached. Glaw was seemingly apologizing for her misbehavior to a now smiling Conall.

-Thank you all for your help. I’m really grateful. I do think Klaus might be the one for me, but even if he isn’t, having him taken by these ants is just too awful.

-It’s all right. As much as I’d like to learn more about your life story and how you managed to both survive, stay a virgin and get three tails in an environment like that, I believe my friends here will more than likely just want to learn as much as you know about the cave. - Alessa said smiling, not a trace of her inner thoughts from before showing.

-Yup, pretty much. - Deryn said right away, apparently not in the mood to hear sad stories of abandonment, virginity and found romance.

While why he wouldn’t want to hear about the first and the last was a point of curiosity to Alessa, hearing about virginity considering how he lost his might be irritating, or not.

-Of course. - Melissa nodded in understanding. -This cave has two main “levels”, so to speak. I’m well-acquainted with the first one, having lived here, but have only been on the lower level three times so far, so I don’t know exactly what’s there.

-So, you can’t tell us how to get to Awena? - Keita interrupted.

-Hear me out. Once, when I was young, I happened to get lost on the lower level and couldn’t find my way back. I was thankfully found by a most odd couple - a human male and some kind of monster, a woman with the lower body of a horse. They were both quite kind and helped me get back here... Apparently, they were also looking for Awena at the time. A few years later, I went lower again to try and find them, now knowing how to move correctly through the cave, but I couldn’t; they might’ve been just passing, or maybe they *do* live here. Rather than them, I ran into a giant woman with only one eye, who appeared to want to settle near the very bottom of the cave for a time. We’ve talked a bit, and I remembered where she lived. For some reason, Klaus was looking for her when he came here, so I lead him down there and she is still living in the cave. Both the pair of a horse-woman and the human male, as well as the one-eyed tall woman know where to find Awena and would be able to help you, and I’d be able to direct you to the woman. The path isn’t all that hard, you just have to find a certain wall and follow the cracks in stone and crystal there.

-We’d be grateful. We’d also like to know what you can tell us about the monsters here... and on the lower level.

-Well... I don’t know much about the lower level, but pretty much all of monsters here like to set up ambushes for both men and things they eat. There’s a few mimics as well, masquerading as chests or rocks, waiting for someone to come by. They’re probably the masters of it, but always be on your
guard... I guess, on the upper level, there’s also that arachne that I sometimes see. I guess she’d also be likely to come up with some sort of a trap, and you can bet someone may try the exact same thing on the lower level.

-Well, it figures. -Alessa spoke. -The way monsters of old would behave in a wild like this, only current monsters kidnap, seduce, and rape... but, at least, we’ve learned about some of the monsters. Anything else?

-There’s a group of devil bugs traveling between levels, and an odd girl wandering about the upper level. I’m sure... she’s a demon, but she seems very, very young.

-An imp?

-No... seems different. Stronger, somehow.

-No point in considering it. We’ll be trying to leave this level as soon as possible, too. Anything else?

-Well, other than the ant girls, I don’t think so, at least nothing I’ve ever met on the upper level. I’m pretty sure there are at least a few bigger monsters on the lower level, judging by some of the sounds and footprints there, but I wouldn’t know the species.

Keita, Deryn, and now Conall as well, noded and thanked her for the information.

-Now, as for the location of that “giant one eyed woman”, if you will.

It turned out to be simpler than they thought.

Once on the lower level, turn right and move until you see the wall. Then follow the wall until you can see a pond. Move towards it, so that you end up on the opposite side, with the pond separating you from the wall, then turn to move almost “almost-parallel-but-just-barely-away” from the wall. Soon, they should come across another wall, this one largely covered in crystal and with many cracks in both the stone and crystalline part of the structure. Following these cracks leads you directly to where the woman who knows where Awena is lives.

The path to the lower level seemed even easier, but Melissa added in some hints about how to avoid running into more ant-girls and the place where the demon girl usually hanged around.

They thanked her and she returned the gesture with a small bow of her own, both Keita and Alessa stunned at a Youko acting so gently and meekly. They said farewells then, and she want away, supporting a now mostly conscious Klaus.
Alessa quietly wished for the girl to lose her virginity soon and properly enjoy the man she found, apparently one perfectly all right with her actual race.

But, that left them with the actual issue of getting down on the level below.

And there was a pretty giant amount of these devil bugs all over the place...

-We can’t beat that many, can we, Alessa? - Deryn said, straightforwardly.

-We probably can if we all fought, but I’d rather avoid that, not to mention... we wouldn’t have the strength for any battles later, so...

-So we need to sneak by them somehow.

-I’ll have to create a few covers from the earth, but that will take time and subtlety, since we don’t want to rouse them. Most devil bugs aren’t that good at sensing magic or spirit energy.

Alessa proceeded to do as she said, raising first small rocks almost from the dust, and in a safe distance, then, slowly, concentrating them into slightly bigger structures, and soon, enough to truly cover up their bodies as they sneaked around.

It did take an extra bit of time for her to gather the neccessary energy from the around area in a subtle manner, so “soon” might’ve been an overstatement, but for something so subtle, precise and yet, impressive, it was pretty much express time.

Deryn was the first to make a small sprint for the first rock. Followed by Keita. Followied by Deryn moving to the next one, Conall catching up to Keita...

And Glaw apparently just ignoring everything, practically flattening her (quite well-endowed) body to the ground to morph into more formless ooze, and slithering at a moderate pace towards the exit, far away from the devil bugs as if to not alarm them.

Alessa wondered whether that was the stupidest way for her, or the best one, as she made a surprisingly sharp and quick slither for the first stone just as Keita left for the second.

It seemed to work just fine. Deryn reached the last stone, followed by Keita and Glaw, then Conall, and just as herself and Conall were reaching the “exit” to the lower level...
But then, suddenly, two of the devil bugs turned to Conall and one to Alessa. That stopped them in their tracks for a moment, if not too long, as both Conall and Alessa yelled to one another:

- **RUN!**

Not only the two of them listened to that. The entire group darted for a small passage that appeared to lead deeper into the cave.

The bugs were coming right after them, though, and Alessa saw no other way than to block that entrance temporarily the moment they managed to enter it.

- **Intense Positive Earth Spell : Gnome’s Garden Wall!**

The already familiar wall of earth, intertwined with both regular roots and a smaller version of the Stone Roots spell rose right behind them, cutting off the devil bugs at the last moment. They could hear the first three or so ramming into it, the rest of them buzzing angrily in the background.

- **I didn’t put that spell up for too long, since it’s really tiring, so we better move. We’ll have a way to leave when we come back, and these creatures shouldn’t be able to trace us easily. We have to move quickly.**

Not wasting any more time discussing exactly *how* quickly the spell would wear off, they ran down the passage, taking a sharp turn right and making another run for the wall.

Right into a trap.

Thankfully, it was nothing all that dangerous. Just like they were warned, they ran into a mimic.

Alessa stopped, unsure how to react to that ambush. She did help with the devil bugs, although by no means was she actually in any danger back there. However, that was only blocking someone. Now, apparently, they had to deal with an actual, possibly violent battle right on their hands.

The mimic immediately fired a few rocks at the males of the group, apparently to slow down their “ascent” towards its position, and Glaw reacted immediately, shielding Conall from the Rock Barrage using her soft, bouncy body.

Conall immediately used it to his advantage, and charged.
The mimic, however, had another spell up its sleeve. Just when he was about to strike with his polearm, the mimic suddenly released another spell, and the young warrior was stopped right in his tracks.

Completely. Enough so the creature was now trying to reach out to him.

Any possible contact, though, was cut off by a swing of Keita's kusarigama, scratching the creature’s arm before it, or rather, she, managed to withdraw with a hiss.

Keita’s attack was just an opening for Deryn, though, who immediately cut with his sword, inducing pain, and then hammered her head with his flanged mace, knocking her unconscious, with possible danger to her life, even.

He really tried to pull that “punch”, but apparently attempting to do something to Conall was a way to earn his anger as well, same as the other way around.

The mimic fell onto the ground, definitely unconscious, but seemingly still alive. The issue was, that was not the end of their problems, and Conall’s paralysis was wearing off way too slowly.

Because the wall they were fighting under suddenly erupted, a large stone sent flying, an even larger, green, horned figure coming out of what was apparently a hidden chamber in the wall of the cave. At the same time, a roar from the other side could be heard, and a smaller, but also imposing and powerful figure was already charging at them.

-An ambush depending on another ambush? You can’t even call that playing dirty anymore! - Deryn exclaimed as he prepared himself for combat, only to be struck quickly by the charging creature.

That one turned to be an athletic, but curvy and well-endowed female with bull horns on her head, hooves, brown fur going up to her waist, animalistic ears and tail, and a large club, apparently made of the rock and crystal of the cave in her hand.

It was the other figure that really and truly commanded respect with just its presence, though.
A half-naked woman, feral in beauty, but attractive nonetheless, incredibly tall, green-skinned, tattooed body with long, wild, orange hair and horns growing out of her head.

[“An Ogre? This might be dangerous...”] Alessa thought, as her body shivered from an old memory, and twitched in indeciveness whose side should she be on in this confrontation. Remain neutral, or...

The ogre took advantage of Keita just turning to face her, swung her body around to be facing mostly his back again, and grabbed him using her own weapon - a spiked chain, wrought tightly against the young warrior’s body, and being used to steadily bring him to her. Soon, he felt her legs pressing against his back, and struggled to get free, but mostly lacked the strength to do so. Battling against the zombies already strained his tired, wounded body that didn’t get all the rest it needed.

And it looked like Deryn was only in a slightly better shape. Conall was paralyzed, Glaw was probably too weak to go against these kinds of monsters, and Alessa wouldn’t come to their aid if the fight was against monsters.

That mean he simply had to pull through. On his own.

Grabbing his dagger, he stabbed into the towering monstergirl, which caused her to give him just enough space to rebalance his body, jump up using her front and her chain, and smash her in the neck with an overhead kick.

He then fell onto his back, only to be forced to roll away immediately from the follow-up counter, and then, having Deryn land right next to him after being thrown. The duo of swordsmen was immediately back on their feet, ready to battle the two muscled female monsters, but it was plain as anything that this battle could spell the end of their going any deeper into this place. Glaw was already next to Conall, ready to protect him, the elder one of Amberwing brothers still apparently paralyzed, which meant it was two versus two.

The human duo was faster, dashing forward and penetrating through their opponent’s defense on the first try.

[“Go ahead guys, kick their assess! Come on!”] - Alessa found herself cheering from the inside of her mind.

Monster blood flew, but the creatures didn’t stay indebted to the two humans, the club striking both of them, forcing them to take a few steps back as the strength of the blows numbed their limbs, and
the spiked chain repaying the favor they’ve just dealt, smacking and piercing their bodies.

The close-range clash was immediately renewed, weapons weaving around as the warriors danced in the dangerous clash, seeking to outmaneuver the clearly more physically powerful monsters. For a moment, they’ve had the advantage, but that’s when the duo of creatures suddenly switched opponents.

Keita was treated to a double strike of the crystal-and-stone club, first attack causing him to fall onto one knee as he attempted a backstep and block, and the other strike, much more accurate, sending him airborne, his grip on his sword lost somewhere along the way.

The Echidna was gritting her teeth by now. [“This... I’ve seen this before, didn’t I? Take away that stupid cow, and it seems so much... like... years ago. Keita’s better than this, but I told him, I told him to rest properly, I told him to allow himself to recover so many times! Dumb, stubborn, frigid, half-impotent, stuck up, overconfident, hasty... Why can’t you just beat her like you usually do? Where’d all that super endurance and bursts of physical might go? Can’t you repeat what you’ve done in my dungeon? This isn’t... supposed to...”]

But, as she was thinking this, the battle was going on. Keita was hurt, that’s for sure, but wasn’t going to give up just because somebody roughed him up a bit more than usual.

Not to mention, arguably, Deryn received far worse treatment.

Anybody who ever fought an Ogre both before and during the rule of Lilith would tell you that if anything, the new Demon Lady might’ve made them more ferocious. Strong, incredibly suited for brawls and fighting with only their hands and bodies, and, nearly every last one of them, complete, enthusiastic, fiery sadomasochists.

The Ogre’s desire to fight, and then mate, would only end up becoming stronger the more competitive the fight or lovemaking got. Battle turned them on, but if an opponent was actually able to stand their ground, in fight or in sex, it turned them on even *more*.

One can pretty much guess that a monstergirl becomes more determined and stronger to get her way the more aroused she is.

Once a battle becomes an endless feedback of sensations that spur on that arousal, it’s difficult to fight, given that your opponent apparently keeps getting *stronger*. Only a few monstergirls shared this terrifying fighter determination that was only made even stronger by the fact that it was
essentially spurring on the lust of a female who often needed no such additional “motivation”, and said lust could possibly change into love.

There was definitely no love yet present in the ogre’s heart... or in the mighty leg she swung with terrifying power, making Deryn’s strength, balance, and attempt to defend seem pathetic in comparison, throwing him above the ground a few feet and then shoving him through the dust and rocks of the cave another few.

The younger fighter was pretty sure now that when Alessa said monsters didn’t like to permanently cripple males and would avoid situations dangerous to their lives, it was total bullcrap. She probably broke one of his ribs and was on the verge of damaging his spine with that frightening kick, and the *sound* made when it connected made it clear that an ogre’s power wasn’t in the same league as a human’s, even if said human was exceptional.

[“It’s the same as before. Just like back then. How stupid of a race are they? Weren’t they changed at all? Warmongers, rough bitches, quick to brutalize, quick to dominate and mostly eager for immediate gratification and constant violation, no self control, no... conscience... it’s just like back then!”] Alessa’s thoughts were starting to go wild in her head, memories of her past almost mirrored, if in just ever-so-slightly reversed situation as far as “being first” was concerned, right in front of her eyes.

They had no time to waste. Both Keita and Deryn got up, needing to get at least one of their weapons each, and continue fighting. The monsters were more than willing to take an advantage of the men’s handicaps, and rushed towards them, preparing to leap.

[“No. It’s not the same as before. Not at all. This time, I’m the stronger one. I can beat an ogre. Even if she’s strong. Even if I didn’t have a man in forever. Even if I get tired from it, even if I can’t conserve my energy... it just requires me to want to save my comrades instead of associating with something so annoying and potentially dreadful based on something as meager and unimportant as... faction and loyalties... I’m sorry, Lady Lilith. I’ll make sure to try and follow your teachings after this.”]

-Intense Earth Spell : Speleothem Shield!

The two warrior-monsters found themselves faced with a construct of rock and minerals connecting the ceiling of the cave with it’s floor; all of the Echidna’s companions recognized the spell as once cast by the servant of the King of Fangs they fought, except this time, in a cave, the spell made perfect sense, was greater, stronger, and connected two pieces of said cave like a natural construct would.
The minotaur wasn’t able to stop her swing, and although it left a crack in the earth spell’s effect, it was nowhere near enough to break through it, and Alessa had another ace up her sleeve.

These types of spells were *meant* to be used in a cave. They were both stronger and easier to cast, consuming less time and energy, so she was extremely surprised when an enemy mage cast Speleothem Shield in the open. The minerals present in natural caverns and the way these caverns were shaped by the nature itself were the source of additional kick for that subset of Earth spells.

But, the next phase of the spell, the offensive one, would work pretty much in the same way everywhere.

-Intense Earth Spell : Speleothem Burst!

Intense pressure coming from within the construct forced it to break into much smaller pieces, which were then propelled, mostly to the sides and towards the two monsters, bombarding them with heavy artillery.

Frustrated and annoyed, the two monsters turned to the Echidna. The minotaur spoke out.

-**Hey, snake woman, what’re you doing? Neither of those guys is yours, and if one was, bringing him here was an idiocy anyway... well, I suppose you could protect him, but the others are free for grabs!**

The ogre agreed. -**Yeah, we were just about to pin them down and start the fun stuff! I got so horny from getting slashed up by the two of them, too! We had everything planned out, so don’t you mess that up! We’re both monsters, the men are supposed to be grabbed and...**

-**Shut your trap, you cunt-controlled, violent, brainless harlot!** - Alessa snapped.

Both Deryn and Keita were looking at her in disbelief.

-*Alessa...*

-*Never thought you’d help us, snake-woman...*

She was still irritated due to their irresponsibility, so she cast them a somewhat contempt-filled stare.

-*You two stay quiet. It’s your own impatience that forced this on me, so you owe me, understood? And Deryn, may all the gods and spirits damn it, don’t go back to calling me a snake-woman!*

-*Huh? That’s how you win these things? You must be pretty much a wuss, unable to force yourself*
on one... bet ya used all your powers on that attack, bitch... - The ogre taunted.

-You shut up! Men aren’t things! They aren’t toys! They have dreams, feelings, wants, preferences! They can prefer someone to you, they have the right to choose! Just because half of that demonic energy goes to enhance your sexuality to the level where you can change a “no” into a “yes” if you get your hands on one doesn’t mean you should do it thoughtlessly!

-A bleeding heart here, huh? Would explain why you’re a wuss. You probably disposed of your virginity using an old plank.

-No. No bleeding heart. Not at all. Certainly better than your vile, violent, selfish race, green-skinned horny slattern. What you need to understand as a monster is how important humans are to us and how much emotions there are to share, so when you’re allowing yourself or someone else to simply rape a man to satisfy their your desires, you know exactly both what you’re *losing*, and have to carry the guilt of knowing what you might’ve done to them. Well, I guess, right now, all I can teach you is the pain of loss and the hit to the ego, even if it comes from being beaten by a “bleeding heart”, rather than from rape...

All it took was a small moment of concentration.

-Intense Venom Spell : Acid Splash Bombardment!

Alessa set the spell up so that the pair had to move away to partially avoid it’s effects, rather than charge forward through it, and for once, it worked; the pair rather tried to avoid the attack.

-Conall, Glaw, you better hurry up. I could use your help... otherwise, the entire energy concentration here and even fighting to protect you guys may turn out to be pointless. Now...

Her tail hit the ground, suggesting an attack no one here was familiar with yet.

Although, if you had the means to ask a certain person, he’d tell you what to do when you see these motions.

Run. Run like you never had before.

That person was a templar, Elnathan Nussen-Hierro, and the motions Alessa’s body and the earth around it were going through now were identical to the last ones he saw in his life.

Chapter End Notes
And the fully beta-ed chapters are back! Yay! \o/
Keita, Conall, Deryn, Alessa, and Glaw engage the monsters that ambushed them in hopes of winning without any losses, physical or moral. Alessa’s disdain and attitude are bared before the group faces their chance to talk to one of the most powerful seers in the world.

The duo of warrior monsters tried to circle around the small pools of acid resulting from Alessa’s previous spell, just as from the ground, hooked around with her very tail, a tube of earth formed, aiming at the two of them like a cannon. The piece of artillery was suddenly covered in glowing lines and glyphs... but this time, they were bronze or light-brown and blue-colored, unlike when she used the spell against Elnathan.

- Intense Water and Earth Spell: Mud Cannon!

The first burst was directed at the approaching ogre... it threw her off her feet, and into the acid-mud mix, just being created. Alessa then quickly aimed under the feet of the minotaur, causing her to trip and fall, allowing Alessa to smash her down with her tail, and bind her with Stone Roots... a precaution that could only hold the furious monstergirl down for so long.

- Conall... seriously, I actually *could* use a little help here, and you’re spending your time being paralyzed... Or Glaw, at least you could help me.

- They would steal Conall if I left him here! - Glaw responded accusingly.

- I’m almost able to fully move now, Alessa! Just a few moments. - Conall supplied apologetically.

- Oh well... I guess we’ll do a bit of two-on-one mud wrestling, then. Or not. Negative Spell: Spectral Moth Family, Larval Stage.

A couple of caterpillar like, apparently spiritual creatures fell down from a flash of light in front of Alessa’s extended palm, although a good distance ahead of her, relatively quickly crawling over the minotaur and attaching themselves to her to drain the bestial monstergirl’s energy and life force.

The ogre, in the meantime, was back on her feet, slowly building up the pace towards Alessa. [“I’ve got to use so many spells on such a short notice... all energy I’ve built up since we entered here is gone. Well, I guess it’s neccessary, though... I wonder if this spell will be easier to carry out here.”]

- Die, you fulltime estrus-lacking bitch! - The ogre exclaimed.
Suddenly a cloud of dust rose from the cave’s floor, glowing as it concentrated into a spiral flying towards Alessa’s lips and nose, apparently losing all of its physical nature as the Echidna breathed the effect of her spell in... and blocked the foot of the Ogre, sent at her in a powerful kick.

It wasn’t something done effortlessly, but the fact remained. Alessa’s slender forearm and elbow stopped the deadly and well-aimed kick of the large Majin-family monster, the same kind of kick that trashed Deryn like he was a little kid.

[“Yes... this spell has a single flaw at this level...”] the echidna thought, as she spun around, ramming her tail, with power now matching or surpassing the Ogre’s own, right into the other monstergirl, almost causing her to lose balance and forcing her quite a few steps back.

[“It only works until you exhale. So much for super-strength and slightly increased durability.”]

Indeed, the power was fleeting from Alessa as she started to breathe out, but it wasn’t a waste of power, no; in fact, she was adapt enough to channel some of the spell’s energy into the next one.

- Intense Negative Earth Spell: Shadowsand Wave

From the cave surrounding them, sand started to flow in spirals generously, focusing into very condensed orbs in front of Alessa... who manifested a cloud of black and red fog with occasional glowing points in front of herself. The two elements mixed with one another, forming dark, unnatural dust, before the orbs spread as she fired the spell, forming a moving wave or wall of sand flowing straight at the ogre, smashing into her and pushing her away as the negative energy accumulated in the sand reacted with her own magical strength and life force, dissipating both of them as the ogre was once again sent onto the ground by the murky earth under them and the strength of the spell.

At the same time, Alessa realized that she was being charged at by the Minotaur, also a physically powerful monster, while already being pretty drained in terms of spellpower and without the physical strength boost that allowed her to compete with the Ogre moments ago... Thankfully, a gooey pseudopod extended, sending the minotaur crashing onto the ground again. A young man was also moving at increased speed towards the minotaur, which meant this part, at least, would be taken care of. All she had to do was cause the spiritual moths, who should soon be able to assume cocoon form, to burst and implode over the minotaur at the right moment, giving Conall the advantage in their fight.

- All right, bitch... - the ogre panted as she approached again. - I'll admit it, you have the magic and you've got the moves, but I have way more spunk than you do!
- Ahh, if you rape every guy that comes your way, you probably do. It’s quality, not quantity, though, that counts.

- Smartass. - The ogre growled.

- Nope. Unlike you, my “smarts” aren’t accumulated anywhere below my belt.

- You don’t like my race much, do you?

- I almost got killed because one of you ogres was thinking only about how hungry her dirty infested gaping cunt was. That was a long time ago though. You’ll live once I beat you, you may just not be able to take part in strenuous activities for a while. After all, this is nothing but a scuffle between allied monsters, in the end.

- You know... as much as I’d rather rape your men, I’m really considering... Fucking murdering you!

Alessa looked around, noticing the creature was no longer carrying her spiked chain... yes, apparently being utterly covered with mud and her shadowsand, it was now either too heavy or too covered to effectively fight with. Probably both. It just lay in the ogre’s last “I-fell-on-my-butt” place.

The ogre charged at the echidna, who quickly tried to stop the monster’s progress.

- Normal Earth Spell: Rock Barrage!

Stones flying at her forced the ogre to dodge and block them, and the attack was quickly followed with an Acid Splash spell as soon as Alessa was sure she couldn’t dodge that one. The Echidna then...

Turned her tail around and slithered full speed, increasing the distance between herself and the Ogre as if trying to run away.

- Get back here you sneaky bitch!

In the meantime, Conall and Glaw had to deal with the Minotaur on their own. Since she was lying on the ground, anyway, Conal picked up the pace, then leaped at her as she was getting up, stabbing the monstergirl with a quick jumping thrust of his polearm. With no place nor speed to dodge in this position, all the Minotaur could do was recoil in pain as the attack struck. She swung her club down at him as soon as she was up, but Conall dodged easily, and the monstergirl found the slime suddenly engulfing her arms and her weapon, keeping her down so her partner could again stab her with his own.

- All-Lilim-dammit! Two on one!?

- You were not reluctant at all in trying to attack Alessa with an advantage! So shut up! You ambushed us anyway, so there’s no point in fighting you honorably! - Conall shouted as he lifted up his polearm and cut along the minotaur’s arm, severing one of the thick straps of studded leather that
barely even resembled armor, even though they covered a large part of her body and much of her modesty. Glaw “punching” the monster in the face allowed him for another such strike, causing two of the straps to completely fall off, reveling a large portion of her right breast and stomach. Conall rammed the other end of his polearm into her ribs, hoping to cause her pain, before the Minotaur finally managed to put enough strength into the swing to hit Conall.

Glaw acted as a softener for the blow, yet the young warrior was still pushed a couple of steps back, and heard and unpleasant sound as his body was rocked... maybe she did lightly crack one of his ribs or something. A bit of blood also appeared; one of the spikes on the mean-looking club must’ve pierced through Glaw and penetrated his skin.

The slimegirl herself needed a moment to regenerate now, and the monster girl wasted no time in charging at Conall, swinging her club powerfully, apparently no longer caring what she breaks...

Except that the human spun around, suddenly facing the same way as she did, and was now right at her side, elbowing the sport where he previously cut off her armor, then stabbing his weapon into hers, the force behind her swing and how far she extended her reach pushing the creature off balance. She stumbled and, between falling and letting go of her weapon, chose the latter, only to be met with an unpleasant surprise. Fearlessly, the young warrior headbutted her, knee-kicked her under the ribs, re-positioned his leg to kick her right in the breast, causing her to yelp in surprised pain as she was pushed away.

He swung his partisan down now, causing another injury and severing more of her armor-strings, before again ramming the pole of his weapon into her, causing her to stumble back. This was followed up by quickly stabbing her twice and, as she tried to cut him down with a long kick of her own, jumping upwards and thrusting right into her clavicle, causing her to yell and scream in pain. As he landed, the goo-girl partner of Conall immediately followed, ramming her entire mass into the aggressive monster’s head and throat, causing her to lose breath and fall onto her back, now a bit away from her weapon... and with Conall’s partisan dangerously close to her throat.

- Do you give up, monster?
- Yar kidding me! Goddamit, we have one are sure playing hard to get. My girlfriend here would love ya. But, nah.

She grabbed the end of his weapon fearlessly with her unhurt arm and literally swung both the fighter and the partisan, trying to throw him away. Glaw quickly amortized Conall’s unwanted semi-flight, but it gave the minotaur enough time to roll away and grab her spiked club. She also tried to pry the - now changed - spectral moths off her, but to no avail... she wasn’t able to grab something made mostly of energy. Even if she was, which would require focus and some magical skill... tearing them off was another matter.

- Goddamit, annoying things... Anyway, boy, we’ll be finishing that. Ya either give up and lemme have a ride on ya, or this little bull-girl here is gunna start fighting REAL dirty.
- It’s not like I’m having such a hard time right now, you know. - Conall taunted lightly.
- Oh, really?

The Minotaur charged at him, but suddenly moved to the side when Glaw moved to intercept... and swung at the monstergirl instead, with all her strength, causing the red slime to lose cohesion, her substance bouncing and flying around the place, before kicking Conall with one of her hooves...

And following that by charging towards Keita and Deryn, who were apparently focused on yelling something towards Alessa.

- Wait, you dirty...

- Hahahaha, too late! We’ll be having three dicks for dinner this time! - The minotaur cackled, ignoring Conall.

Alessa checked the state of her Spectral Moths spell while attempting to stall the ogre and think of a way to actually win this. As she expected and knew of the race, their endurance, strength, pain resistance, health, stamina and ferocity were through the roof. Alessa secretly wondered if the transformation to womanhood didn’t improve some of these characteristics... it definitely might have made them faster and more agile. Plus, the accursed sadomasochistic tendency that simply spurred the ogre on the more she was beat up was a problem.

Alessa realized the larval stage of her spell was over and she now could make her moths explode... But, suddenly...

- Alessa, watch out! - Keita and Deryn yelled towards her.

She turned and barely manage to somewhat weaken the attack by trying to dodge and block in the nick of time, as the ogress apparently leapt towards her and delivered a jumping kick, almost causing the Echidna to spin from the power of it. She had troubles landing, though, and Alessa took advantage of it.

- Negative Spell: Spectral Moth, Adult Form!

Shoving said moth right through her body, the energy-formed “insect” thrashed through the ogress’ insides as it numbed and drained her, making her feel sick and weakened as it traveled through her and left out the other side, making a circle as it returned to Alessa, processing all the consumed life energy... dissipating some of it as it tried to make it compatible with the spellcaster’s own. Such was the ability of the adult forms of the spectral moths.

But, the ogress would not be undone by such a simple thing.

She grabbed the Echidna’s tail and spun around, tossing her right against the wall of the cave, despite
Alessa’s serpentine form rather large mass - her strength still incredibly dangerous, weakened by the battle, but inflamed by the Ogress’ fiery battle spirit and the intense thriving her race felt from all kinds of pain.

- How’d you like that, snake-trash?

- Alessa! Damn it...

- You stay... right where you are... Keita... ouch...

The Echidna tried moving her body. Thankfully, despite all the bludgeoning and thrashing she just experienced, at most she broke a nail and maybe twisted something in one of her joints. Nothing serious.

- I have to... finish this battle myself if I am to get any... benefit... from helping you, right? I’ve said you owe me so... let’s not waste that on you coming to my rescue, okay?

- But... - Keita started to protest.

- Relax. I know how her kind works... how to stop them... and now, I know how she specifically fights. She’s going down in three moves. Well... four. Five? Yes. Between four and five moves.

- You certainly are confident... - the ogress started to speak as she advanced, and then began charging at the Lamia-kindred half-lying next to the cave’s wall - for someone who just got thrown and is about to get their ass kicked, snake-trash!

- Oh, shut up, sssslattern. - Alessa hissed. Her pain apparently almost got the best of her... and got her a bit angry. She continued to hiss as she named her next attack. - Intenssse Earth Ssspell: Ssspeleothem - Stalagmite!

Indeed, a typical cave structure did suddenly burst out of the ground... except it was at an angle, not only stopping the ogre in her tracks, but actually *ramming itself* into her stomach, causing her to bend over, her eyes bulging out from the intense pain.

- Now, to take care of your little... - Alessa started to speak as she noticed the minotaur charging at Deryn and Keita. - Curses! Spectral Moth Cocoon Stage, Detonate!

The bull-girl was suddenly shook by the force of explosions of the small spectral forms on her body, stopped in her tracks, then pierced right in the back with Conall’s partisan as Glaw extended quickly, wrapping about her limbs.

Alessa had her own problems to worry about, though.

She got hit by a rock, and that immediately turned her attention to the ogress, who, by now, was propelling herself off the bended stalagmite she herself formed... and flying straight at the Echidna.
“Well, I’m certainly rarely the one who gets hit by the rocks...”

Alessa’s eyes opened wider as she watched every moment of the ogress’ fall.

“This’ll hurt if I don’t dodge. Well, someone has to get hurt, anyway.”

In the last moment, the echidna bent and twisted her entire body, both the human and the snake part, at a nigh-impossible angle, causing the ogress to strike the ground while the air around her was filled with snake-coils she missed just by a few inches.

- **Intense Earth Spell: Crushing Barrow.**

Suddenly, pillars of soil randomly raised from the floor, engulfing the ogress’ limbs, as Alessa smirked at both her opponent and Keita.

- **So-rry, Keita-kun. Alessa seems to have miscalculated. It only took three moves, and that’s counting the dodge.** - The Echidna explained in a mockingly cute tone, referring to herself in third person to the boot.

As the density and pressure of the ground on the ogress’ limbs increased, a loud crack, then another, accompanied by her scream of pain, filled the cave... the Echidna’s spell apparently broke two of the monstergirl’s limbs.

- **Well, I guess I did help Conall there with the fourth one... Are we done here? Miss Minotaurus, are you going to continue fighting when already hurt so, against a sorceress such as I, who beat your accomplice here, the warrior with a polearm ran into your back, a slimegirl, and, when situation calls for it, two other men you just attempted to pull into this fight again?**

The minotaur just shifted uncomfortably at being hurt all over, encased in goo, and stabbed in the back with a partisan, all the while having to listen to her accomplice’s scream as her bones were broken.

Yes, it was decidedly a bad decision to attack those people. They’ve gained nothing.

- **I... I guess we won’t be having any actual fun today. Sorry, mate. Overwhelmed. Now, I’d like you to let me at least take her away so she can recuperate.**

All of the people in the cave-chamber raised an eyebrow at that.

- **Truth be told** - Conall said - **I expected her to...**
- Just leave her here, right? I though she’d do the same thing. - Deryn finished his brother’s sentence, equally surprised.

- Yes, that’s a bit of an unexpected display of camaraderie... I agree with Conall-san and Deryn-kun. - Keita added his thoughts.

The minotaur looked surprised for a moment there.

- You have a really low opinion on monsters for someone who travels with a pair of them.

- Not all monsters - Alessa corrected. - Just mindless brutes and ravagers like your friend’s race and those alike.

- And this... witch here... should stop badmouthing the Ogres! I want to kick...her ass... so badly now! - The ogress yelled from where she was still trapped.

The trio of warriors looked at one another, Glaw just bobbing next to Conall, looking him over and seemingly satisfied he wasn’t hurt much. Alessa was throwing a loathing look towards the Ogre, her hands twitching every now and then, either from pain of the fight, or from her wish to finish the job.

- Her and I have been friends for a long time and we shared absolutely everything. I'm not gonna leave her helpless now, you know. - The minotaurus explained.

- D’awww, don’t make me cry now. you just intend to combine your strength again and either continue to fight us, or rob and possibly rape the next group of people to come here. - Alessa hissed again.

The bull-girl just shrugged. - That's what many monsters do in the wilderness. Well, we could join the Demon Lady's army when she recuperates, I guess, but we both enjoyed this place and our lifestyle so far.

- Mindless barbarians. Useless, spineless, ambition-less slatterns controlled by their own feeling of power and lust of any male that comes their way. - Alessa said harshly.

- Aren’t many of those supposed to be virtues?

- ‘Virtue’ not tempered by other values is merely self-righteousness. I'll have you know humans don’t appreciate your... our... virtues to that a great extent. But very well, take your ‘friend’, if my companions whom you've hurt agree to it.

Said companions did voice their opinions on the matter.

- Well, I am kind of worried Alessa is right and you two won't get any better from this little lesson... but maybe after getting your bones broken you just need some time to think. Besides, I'm sure it'd be bad if we just slaughter monsters randomly. - Keita voiced his opinion.

- Well, yeah... Other than me getting kicked around, little harm done. - Deryn commented.
"Next time if you try to harm my brother and my friends, though, I won’t hesitate to kill you, minotaur." - Conall stated, staring firmly at the bull-girl.

"Sure, sure. We’ll be mindful of your group in the future." - said the bull-girl, moving to release her now lame friend from the confines of the earth spell.

Alessa let her pass, and, shortly, she managed to free the ogre and fetch her the dropped spiked chain.

The ogress and the minotaunress were true to their word, and simply withdrew once the chance was given to them, tension still high in all the currents of air between the Echidna and the Ogre.

Once they were a fair distance away, Deryn spoke out.

"She was right about one thing, though. Alessa, you were really pretty keen on getting to fight that ogre and harming her, not to mention you’ve never really lost your cool and became vulgar like when talking to her... any particular reason for that?"

Alessa seemed clearly displeased at the question posed by the youngest male in the group, and turned to look away from him, hiding the frown on her face. It appeared to be a touchy subject, and she seemed to consider either how to make it as short and curt as possible or how to refuse Deryn his answer in a polite, relatively at least, manner.

Finally, she did speak.

"I suppose that if we’re traveling together, then at some point we’re bound to learn a bit of one another’s past. I may as well be the one to take the first step." - She said in a slightly resigned tone.

She motioned for them to follow her and, once they’ve gathered up their things and stretched to lessen the strain and pain, she started her little story.

"As I’ve mentioned before, I’m older than any of you, but also not as old as you thought. I remember the time from before Lady Lilith’s ascent, but I was very young then... This happened quite soon after our dear Lady’s raise to power. As I revealed, an Ogre’s sexual appetites almost lead me to death, and it was, directly, the fault of the ogre. All monsters were finding ways to cope with their changed characteristics and sexual desires. I might’ve been too young to take true interest in such stuff back then, but as natural for a monster, I somewhat did. I found an attractive adolescent half-elven male when gathering some herbs around the mountainside, and I tried to communicate with him... having an elf for a mother, he turned out to be pretty open-minded. Didn’t ran away seeing my real form, and soon, we agreed to meet again at the same spot two days later. An ogress intercepted me on my way to the meeting, claiming she saw him first, and that I had no right to him whatsoever since he was her chosen “prey”. It soon came to blows, if nothing truly violent... When the boy apparently started calling my name to see if I wasn’t somewhere nearby, the Ogress went so nuts during the fight that she broke any and all limitations, taking me by surprise... not to mention,
she was older, stronger, and more experienced than me, and left me there battered and bleeding once she smelled the male was close, and all that fighting got her horny. So, I basically lay there in a mess, some of my blood pooling underneath me, occasionally hearing his moan or hers. It’s a good thing my ... my family... searched for me since otherwise, there was a chance I might’ve end up dead.

- So... monsters fight other monsters over mates like that? - Conall asked, full of surprise. - I was starting to think you were more... civilized?

- Please remember it was soon after the Demon Lady took over, and many monsters didn’t yet have appropriate behaviors and methods of dealing with their favorite male being attached to another female. Some can’t deal with it to this day, since it’s a powerful sensation for us, but... only a certain few species would go to the point of almost killing someone. Ogres amongst them. They’re... vile. They’ll hurt anyone, even men they like, due to that odd sadomasochistic tendency... plus they’re not fair at all. With orcs, if you win, you win, and they fawn all over you, if you lose, they’ll treat you like a sex toy. With Lamias, they’ll either try to make use of you when they’re single and aroused, or they’ll fall in love with you and try their best to keep you happy and around, only getting really angry when you cheat on them. The lizardwomen want someone who can beat them or fight them on equal footing. The succubi want lustful lovers who can go almost all week. The mermaids want someone romantic but easy to get into the mood. The cat-like monsters want someone who’ll fawn on them, mostly, the slimegirls want someone who’ll feed them often, the dragons and echidnas just want someone worthy of them and other monsters have their personal or racial preferences for a sweetheart or officially mating with someone.

Alessa heaved a sigh, and continued:

- Ogres however ... ogres aren’t fair. You may beat them in a fight or over-pleasure them in bed, but that changes nothing. They’ll get back up and demand a rematch, and with their unnatural stamina and spirit for this, you’ll usually lose the second time. You may just quietly allow them to do their thing, they won’t let you go because you’re weak. If you fight back, though, they’ll be more into you. Nothing is ever enough and nothing is good enough as a “no”.

- Well, they really seem to annoy you. - both Keita and Deryn admitted, followed by Conall pointing out something.

- If one of them almost killed you and their actions stand in complete opposite to what you believe about monster and human relationships, then perhaps we should do something about them... don’t you agree, Keita?

- Conall-san, let’s not be deluded about this right now. We have one quest, and, as you perhaps just’ve seen... a single ogre can give us much trouble. You’re talking about changing, beating up, or killing an entire race.

- Admittedly - the Echidna herself stopped them from discussing genocide or beating up ogres - if you three actually listened to me once, and rested properly before we came here, you should’ve been able to defeat these two on your own, without my intervention, and probably even without Glaw’s help. Still, I had to save your butts, save for Conall’s, so you two owe me now.

- Hey! That’s not fair, we’re supposed to be traveling together and... stuff! - Deryn protested.

- That deal also assured me that I won’t have to fight my own brethren. - Alessa responded evenly.
- You said you disliked the Ogres!

- I still shouldn’t have to fight one, much less fight the Minotaur. What’s done is done and a deal is a deal. Admittedly, Keita was the one making it here, so in your case, Deryn, gratefulness for saving your butt may suffice.

- Deryn-kun has a point though.- Keita cut in. - You’ve seemed pretty eager to enter the battle yourself. Well, still, I made a promise, so I will indeed “owe you” under one condition in these circumstances.

- That being?

- Since our condition hasn’t improved at all and your intervention was late, you will help us with any remaining battles in this odd, crystalline cave. If we end up having to fight a high-class monster here after being beat up so badly despite our earlier injuries, I think your intervention will end up being for nothing.

- Ohhhh, so smart of you. Fine, Keita. I’ll accept these conditions, of course. A little bit of exercise won’t hurt, even though it will hurt my spiritual energy reserves, so let’s try to not run into anymore trouble.

- I think we all share that sentiment... let’s go then.

The cave itself seemed to be quite deep and indeed not as monster-filled on the lower level as it was on the upper one. This allowed them to move a little more freely, not to mention letting Alessa recover from the strain the fight itself put on her spiritual reserves.

Going deeper and deeper into the cave, the group eventually ran out of topics for little chit-chat and just moved forward in silence, until, finally, they witnessed the thing they were searching for: A giant woman, dressed in working clothes, with a horn visible even from behind her and a ponytail of dark purple hair slightly contrasting the pale bluish skin. Alessa could feel the demonic energy present in the woman, meaning she was indeed one of the monsterkind and not one of the rumoured - possibly non-existent by now, or at all - “anarch Cyclopses” who didn’t join forces with the monsters after Bres disappeared. Because that’s what she recognized her as. A cyclops.

Alessa decided to go with the direct approach and, before any of the men could stop her, she simply called out to the cyclops.

- Hey, miss Giant-Type! We’re visitors, and we just might need your help...

Keita and Conall raised they eyebrows skeptically, although Deryn simply followed in Alessa’s footsteps... if one could say that when referring to a snake-woman, and he spread his hands wide,
showing he had no intention of pulling out his weapon.

The giantess tugged a smaller hammer she was using to do something to the crystalline wall with, and walked closer to the group, a gentle smile on her face.

- Look what we have here! One, two, three men and two monsters exploring a cave peacefully! A sight for sore eyes indeed. Buutttt, lamia-lady, you mentioned needing my help with something? What could I do for you people?

Keita visibly relaxed and Conall actually smiled, following his younger brother, Glaw matching his pace flawlessly, as the entire group came closer to the cyclops woman. True, she was armed in more than the tool-seeming little hammer, but it appeared her attitude was peaceful.

- My name is Alessa, and our group is seeking out Awena due to a certain quest of one of our members... The people with me are Conall, the one with a slimegirl attached to him, Deryn Amberwing, the young one, Conall’s brother, and Keita Haneo, a swordsman who hails from the land of Zipangu. We heard from a certain young Youko above that a “giant woman” here would know where Awena is, and, well, I concluded you may be whom she was referring to.

- This isn’t some shady business, is it, sister? Like, you’re not their slave and they’re not a group of templar wannabes seeking out Awena so they can learn more about monsterkind to enslave us? Blink if you can’t tell the truth.

- Nooo, no, nothing like that.- Alessa quickly reassured the larger woman. - We’re all friendly here. I consider my companions noble and open-minded people, and as you can see, one of them already has a monster totally infatuated with him.

- Only one, sister? I certainly hoped things were more romantic here!

- I’m sorry, but for certain reasons we shouldn’t discuss that, I think. Anyway... I think we’d like to learn your name as well?

- Oh, sure. I’m Ramra, a cyclops who hoped to take advantage of the Crystalline Karst’s unique construction to... Ummm... this may sound bad, but it’s what Cyclopses do. Well, I hoped to form weapons and other tools out of it! That’s what we Cyclopses are best at and supposed to do!

The trio seemed to understand despite her reservations.

- Well, it’s a profession like any other. - Deryn remarked.

- You certainly don’t seem like a warlike person, though. - Conall pointed out after his brother’s remark.

- Well, Ramra-san, this certainly seems like a more noble thing to do than trying to ambush and rape everyone who passes by, like the pair we met when we descended here.

[“Again. EVERYONE gets honorifics. Everyone except Alessa, that is.”] - the echidna thought to
herself, somewhat jadedly.

- Ohhh, monsters attacked you even though you were with other monsters? Th... that’s bad manners, I think, but let’s not talk about rape attempts! Anyway, you’re here to look for Awena, right? I think I can help. I can even lead you part of the way, if you’d like...

- Sure. - Deryn responded, met with nods from the rest of the group.

They did follow Ramra deeper into the cave and she decided to ask them about their quest. Keita responded.

- Essentially, we want to ask Awena about the best way to combat a common enemy of both humans and monsters given our current abilities and means. Alessa basically confirmed that certain divination magics do work and we’ve made some more thorough research on who’d be the most appropriate person to turn to, and apparently it’s Awena.

Ramra nodded. - Yes. Awena’s magical powers are extraordinary, though, like with all seers, the precision of her visions and divinations can be somewhat chaotic... occasionally pointing you straight to the goal, sometimes just showing you the means, and very, very rarely just leaving one with cryptic notes. So, people do not always leave her place satisfied. But, she seems to be fair and a good person, so I’d like you to treat her in kind. After all, she allows many people like me to live here and survive off the spiritual energy the place combined with her own power produces, so, no harm may come to her.

- We never came here with the intention of harming anyone. - Keita said simply.

- You don’t seem like such mean people, certainly! In fact, if you’re ever interested in weapons made from the cave’s materials, you know where to find me! I appear to be finally moving past the prototype phase and soon will be able to make the weapons of the quality I wanted! As an added plus, the aesthetical value of a crystal weapon is something not to be looked down on, I believe.

- Certainly... currently, we’re all set as far as weaponry goes, but we’ll certainly remember you in case we need some in the future.

- Excellent! Now, we’re almost there. All you need to do is follow that path down, move to the next cavern, and Awena will be somewhere in it, unless she disappeared without anyone noticing. I hope you’ll find what you’re looking for... and get what you hope to get! - Ramra winked her single eye at Alessa and Glaw, something that might’ve as well been a simple blink, but the two monstergirls apparently knew better. Alessa decided not to downplay her interest in the males.

[“Wait, it’s not downplaying it! It’d be telling the truth about it if I said I’m not really pursuing this kind of... relationship!”] - Alessa yelled out in her thoughts.

And Glaw just bounced happily in her spot, extenting a part of her slime to wrap about Conall’s hand which caused him to blush slightly.

Ramra waved at them as she retreated back into her cave, and Alessa, in turn, started to speak.
- As you may know, Cyclopes once were in slavery to Bres, where they were used as blacksmiths and artisans. Hence, their skill in making weapons. Now, most of them are monstergirls, though. Some believe all of them are.

- She seemed a lot nicer compared to that ogre and minotaur, though.

- Yes, the Cyclopes display a lot lower sex drive or at least acting on said sex drive than most monsters. Some say it’s because their mind is so set on their function, some say it’s a complex related to their height or having only one eye. No one really knows. But, a lot of cyclopes will use their extraordinary skill to secure themselves someone to mate with and get pregnant with, and even then, many will try to cheat you into following after them to form more permanent relationships… In that regard, they’re monstergirls, all right. Connecting themselves to the Demon Lady increased their fertility to human levels, and their sex drive to… probably matching a healthy human male, in fact. Still, it’s a bit low for a monster, hence they easily control themselves around guys.

- Well, that’s not anything good to say about the monster race if even the ones apparently all right turn out somewhat devious when babymaking is involved in the end. - Keita voiced, with Conall agreeing and Deryn simply staying silent. Alessa was a bit angry at that remark, but decided she’d simply stop telling them about various monster types for now.

- Well, I am not precisely sure who or what Awena is, as I’ve never seen a half-dwarf in my life… so expect she may look like nearly anything from human through elf to a monkey. Whatever happens though, do NOT harm her. She may be a seer first and foremost, but you will end up hurt, not to mention all the residents of this place seem grateful to her for allowing a small monster paradise like this one to exist.

- As noted, Alessa. We do not intend to do harm.

- You don’t. But what the oracles and seers have to say isn’t always pleasant for one’s ears.

They reached the end of the semi-staircase leading them down into a cave, with two water ponds on both of their sides and bioluminescence present almost everywhere both in the water and the crystal, gentle teal and cyan glow brightening the darkness of the cave, but far from being blinding in doing so.

Keita, Deryn, Conall, Alessa and Glaw wasted no time in moving to the next cave-chamber, one more spacious and equally filled with water and bioluminescence, but with a small table seemingly made of lichen and bioluminescent mushroom covered rock, with a woman sitting next to said table.

She was short and stocky, somewhere in-between a human and a dwarf’s build. Age had taken its mark on her, but she must’ve looked very cute and probably pretty in her better days. Her left eye… was not an eye. Rather, it appeared to be more of a gem-like, glowing construct, that altered in its light from light blue to deep green.
The woman raised her eyes from the table and looked at the group coming in, a small smirk appearing on her face.

- Ahhh, through the storms of time, the thick fog of the future clearing into the past, I see that today’s alternative is a group of both humans and monsters. I’ve seen the possibility of you coming here... more than once, in fact. Though, it wasn’t always precisely that group... Now, if I just could learn your names...

The group was a bit surprised at being greeted that way, but, on the other hand, any self-respecting and fake seer could’ve claimed they pretty much predicted the group coming.

- Haneo Keita.
- Alessa the Black Moth.
- Glaw!
- Conall Amberwing.
- Wait, you predicted us coming, just not our names? Whatever, I’m not sure how that works, anyway. Deryn. Deryn Amberwing.

The woman who apparently was Awena nodded her head in front of the table.

- Ahhh, yes. Deryn Amberwing. The storms of time are especially chaotic around you, young boy, particularly your heart. Not even your companions fully match up to the amount of possible fates just waiting around the corner for you, and ones who seemingly just barely eluded you! You’ll need a strong foundation for yourself eventually, I believe. That’s not to say any of the possible fates for any of you seem boring, oh no.

- I am not sure if you actually sound professional or a bit deluded... but if snakey here thinks we should trust you and Keita supports that, I sure as hell am not gonna question the strength of chaos the storm of time is forming around me or whatever.

- Very well. I take it you’re here to ask a question on one of the males’ quest’s behalf? The seer looked towards Alessa.

That was actually way more accurate, and it continued to make Keita, Deryn, and Conall wonder about the somewhat-dwarf-like woman’s abilities.

- Yes. Mine, specifically. - Keita supplied.

- Oh, oh, I see, it’s the Zipangu’s swordsman’s. Dashing bright talent who’s got his little candles extinguished by a bad encounter or two, yes.

Alessa and Keita both hissed, instinctively, as the bad memory was called upon, and Awena just smiled.
- Yes, you’re like a sharpened blade, very sharpened, cutting through the storm of time with the strength and the precision of an experienced swordsman, hence I know about one or two out of many possible versions of events that could’ve happened to you. And may still happen. After all, even with a blade and a swordsman... if you sharpen the sword too much, nothing will remain of the blade, and if you put a swordsman in the wrong place, he may end up dangling at the end of a noose... One made by humans or one made by filthy spawn of the progenitor of the vilest race in existence. What are you aiming at in this one and only, true life of yours, swordsman? What is your aim in *reality* rather than in possibilities?

Keita seemed to truly believe in what Alessa told him about divinations now. The woman hardly knew anything for certain, but she certainly knew *much* in terms of what things *could* be.

- I wish to know what’s the greatest damage we can deal to, the most we can accomplish against the Umbro Star or, perhaps and, his spawn as a group. All things considered. The real extent of damage that can be done with our powers, abilities, skills, strength, reach, contacts, resources and potential. Even if it’s risky.

- That still doesn’t sum up everything, young swordsman. Is this the quest you wish to accomplish just with the five of you? Or will you accept any and all help that doesn’t put a blemish onto your hearts and souls? Or maybe you’re willing to delve into the very depths of evil and depravity to make your little show of justice against the tentacle horrors to become a huge supernova of the so-called Umbro *Star*?

- I’d be willing to do everything, but I’m not alone now and none of my companions should be exposed to these risks. Now, in a group, we also probably know or could get to know more people who can help us, so limiting this to just the five of us may be dumb. I’d pick the second option. I’ll gladly accept any help that can extend the amount of damage we can deal... but I will not throw the entire group to Hell itself just to accomplish it.

- Very well.- The seer seemed pleased. - First, the standard payment... then, depending on details, I may demand more.

The group handled what was said to be Awena’s standard payment, and the woman seemed to accept it. She closed both of her eyes - the crystalline one still visibly glowing under her eyelid - and hummed... slowly being gently lifted into the air, as the glow of the cave started to increase, strengthen, dim... and finally flash instead of glow, a somewhat blinding burst of brilliant shining light before it returned to the gentle, eye-friendly glow of regular bioluminescence. Awena opened her “magical” eye and seemed to study something far, far away, focusing and considering things, before, finally, she breathed out, then sharply in... inhaled a few times and calmed her breath, slowly, finally closing her eyes again, then opening both of them. - Interesting... She muttered.

- And by that, you mean?

- It appears your fate will remain a surprise till the end, even to me. I wasn’t able to predict the extent of damage you’re capable of doing. It may turn out to be surprisingly high or disturbingly low. But, I know the best path towards it now.

- That being?
The seer smirked, and Alessa spoke out. - Fine, then. What’s the additional payment?

- In order to complete this path I am seeing without it becoming a lifelong strain, you will require a certain scrying artifact. In fact, you should obtain said artifact before attempting anything else. Once you’ve obtained said artifact, you can go and look for whatever is deemed necessary using it. My payment is simple. Once you’ve obtained everything you require and cease to have any need for said artifact, you will return it here, and I’ll treat it as payment. Is this acceptable?

- I think so. Alessa?

- If the artifact is indeed only scrying in nature, we’d essentially only be increasing her accuracy and abilities as a seer. It is doubtful she’d use it for anything destructive... I guess we can trust her.

Conall nodded. - We’ll see about the nature and power of the artifact with our own eyes. Right now, depending on what we know, there’s no reason for us to refuse.

Deryn completed the voice of confidence.

- That, and if it actually was something dangerous, she must realize we could just trick her right now and escape never returning the artifact. It has to be something relatively safe to ensure our word won’t turn out to be less worth than the world’s safety.

Keita and Alessa nodded, and Awena continued.

- South of Zipangu and east of the desert of the main continent, there’s an archipelagos known as the Green Fang Isles. In the ruins on one of the islands of said archipelagos, lies the hidden body of an ancient, long-dead creature. One particular piece of it’s body has been morphed and became an artifact while the dragon was still alive. Hence, the magic item is called the Eye of Texaranox, is apparently the dragon’s own eye. Texaranox was an incredibly greedy treasure hoarder and apparently did his best, including sacrificing another monster and part of his body and lifespan, to change his eye into a scrying artifact capable of localizing almost anything depending on the magical energy output of the user. You’ll require the Eye of Texaranox to find the other items, to which you will be guided by a certain book... A book that is currently in the land of Zipangu.

- Zipangu? We’ll have to go to Keita’s homeland? - Alessa asked, surprised.

- Yes. The echidna is a sorceress, correct? With her powers, the eye of Texaranox, and the knowledge from the book, you’ll be able to locate the things that will allow you to obtain the power necessary to deal the best strike you can against the Umbro Star.

- And those would be? - Keita pressed, a note of what could be mistaken for eagerness in his voice.

- I am not completely sure. You will need to study the book and form a plan. All I know is that the knowledge you need to realize your “potential” to do so is in the book, and you’ll have to support one of the weapons you find there with one of the “spellcasting” items... or maybe it’s the reverse. Anyway, the book, called the “Relics and Magic Items : Grand Compendium”, written by Garmr the Anubis and Maitreya the Tengu, is a completely accurate guide on magic items and artifacts from a few generations back... and most of these items still exist today. Obtaining and reading the book is the key to obtaining the knowledge you require. As a matter of fact, it may even present several ways of harming the Umbro Star... some better than others.
- Usually, I’d call the plan crazy. - Deryn expressed his opinion. - But things... kinda make sense. I mean, we’re even pretty sure Sela’s brother, whom we just received a letter to, would be able to take us on a cruise or something, right?

- It’s essentially a “go find your means yourself” kinda prophesy. - Keita seemed to have doubts of his own. - However, it does tell us how to obtain everything we might need for coming up with an optimal plan to deal damage to this enemy of humanity... Not to mention, being back in Zipangu, we may be able to test these measures firsthand, as there are many more tentacle horrors there than there are here.

Alessa nodded. - Well, this person here was recommended by people who know a bit about how powerful a particular diviner is, so I guess this might be the best way to go...

Awena only listened to them now, the divination apparently over and done with.

- Is that all? - Keita asked.

- Yes.

- So, let me sum this up. We need to sail to Green Fang Isles, obtain the Eye of Texaranox from the chamber with the corpse of a dragon, have Alessa learn how to use said eye and possibly use it to locate the Grand Compendium, sail, apparently, to Zipangu since that’s the last known location of said Grand Compendium, read the book and, apparently, an item from the Weapons section and an item from the Spellcasting section is the key to doing whatever we can against Umbro Star. Correct?

- Yes. That seems to be all.

Alessa slithered closer to Keita and put a hand on his shoulder.

- Well, sounds like an adventure to be had, and with a purpose this time. First, we’ll have to cross over to that desert port Sela’s brother works at, though. Is everyone fine with that? And with going to Keita’s homeland?

- I’ll go wherever Conall goes! - Glaw’s energetic bouncing on that day was virtually endless.

- I agree with the slimegirl, but Alessa is right, too. That sounds like it could be fun in and of itself. - Deryn spoke.

- As long as there’s a chance we’ll make the world a better place, and have fun doing it, I guess the Amberwing brother’s are in. - Conall agreed with his brother and Glaw both.

- Looks like I’ll be going back home earlier than I expected.... Maybe. I wonder if it’s temporary, long-term, or for good this time. - Keita shrugged off his thoughts - Either way... the desert port and Oliver Maurer, and then, the Eye of Texaranox comes first, though.
Chapter Summary

The group encounters the final series of problems with the local monsters on their way out, but will they be given some peace for now?

Chapter Notes

This is the penultimate chapter of Arc V, and the last one is very short. Regrettably, my uploading pace will remain significantly slower for at least the entire month.
For all intents and purposes all of my stories will be on hiatus from this upload to 20th-25th of February.

When the group reached the outside of Awena’s own personal domain, Ramra was already nowhere to be seen. They’ve decided to take their sweet time on the way out of the cave, first and foremost so that Alessa could restore the energy she expended during her last battle.

The other reason was the simple fact that each and every one of the group save for Glaw now had a serious injury or two, with Keita and Deryn thankfully having not made their state much worse during the last clash with the ogress and the Minotaurus.

They were rather successful in managing to sneak around the place, but there was the worry of Devil Bugs appearing nearby the entrance to the upper level, or right after it, or occupying the path...

Well, that one was cut short once they’ve seen the creatures. They were apparently in some state of sleep, or at least half of them were, and as such, maneuvering their way out of the lower level of the cave proved to be pretty simple.

Once on the upper level, the group more freely engaged in small talk.

- I insist that we camp around this cave for a few days. You guys need proper rest for once before we travel into yet another carnage, and I could use a bit of the spirit energy of this place for recovery, myself.-  Alessa stated.

Both Keita and Deryn sighed, but Conall seemed to be in favour of the idea.
- Certainly, we need to recover and probably train a little.
Deryn raised an eyebrow at his brother.
- Train? You want us to... train? After beating up the templars, and now passing the first step on our way to realizing Keita’s plan, you’d rather stop and attempt to brush up on our skills?

- Deryn-kun, you seem a firm believer in learning through experience. - Keita commented.

- Yes, I am. Have been all my life. It seems to have worked out w ell enou ...

- I would like to remind you of something. It’s been a while since we actually won against a serious opponent. This may be accumulated fatigue like Alessa was suggesting earlier, but let us see. I indeed defeated a single full-blown templar-protector in that temple, but then, both you and me in a row lost against the other one ... and it appeared Conall-san might’ve either lost or won against the third of them. If not for Alessa, we’d be burning at a stake as heretics or killed in action.

Deryn seemed to realize something.
- And now, we were beaten by two monstergirls using ambush tactics.

- Yes. We were rash and got beaten by our own stupidity, but also undeniably, the enemy was powerful. Yet, they got defeated. How? - Keita asked, his own eyebrow raised.

Deryn paused, before his eyes widened slightly in understanding.
- Alessa intervened.

- And you realize what that suggests?

Deryn sighed, and Conall looked at the other two nervously, pondering on what they were discussing.

- Well, our snake-woman companion claims to always be short on spirit energy and actually being out of shape, yet she continues to defeat enemies we seem to lose against. And that, in turn, suggests that if we were to face a creature that possessed both the power and the necessary supply of spirit energy to use it fully, we’d be soundly trashed. - Deryn said resignedly.

- Indeed, a very good analysis, Deryn-kun. I don’t know how high Alessa ranks in terms of power in comparison with other monsters, but it does tell us that our current level of ability is hardly satisfactory. Trust me, there are people more skilled than the templars we went up against, and Zipangu has its own share of mighty monsters if we end up there. And let’s not forget that it’s not been long since I’ve almost lost against two golems low on power and you were actually beaten by a slime ambush. Our skills might’ve improved since then, but if the way Awena gave us is any good, we’re hardly ready to face the world at large.

Conall decided to pose a question on that very moment, just to be sure.
- So you do think we should train? Or travel more before going for your big quest, like Deryn was
Deryn just stuck his tongue out at his brother, but turned to Keita with a serious face right afterwards.

- Absolutely. Deryn-kun is, of course, right in that training experience is hardly equal to battling experience, but there are certain improvements one can only make to one’s style by thinking them over in peace, and certain skills one can only obtain by training on them in a safe environment. You certainly can’t hope that you’ll suddenly be able to do more in the middle of a fight. - Keita countered simply.

Alessa was simply listening to all this, deciding to let the discussion take it’s flow. [“And that’s said by a man who’s so eager to deal the greatest damage possible to the Umbro Star and who apparently beat his own physical limits during a fight with first my golems and then Elnathan... Yet he’s not content relying on that odd capacity. And not content with his own level of skill, yet finding it easier to accept I’m apparently on a higher level than he is. Should I be surprised? Suddenly, mister dash-madly-into-fighting displays a patience and a desire to improve before trying to battle. At first, he just used the group as an excuse for more recklessness and bravado, but now, he’s using our travels as an actual lesson. And he’s right in that both Deryn and Conall seem to have improved from earlier.”]

She barely stopped a sigh at that. [“It seems I’m the only one who accomplished nothing nor gained nothing by traveling with this little bunch so far. Well, we did help a few monsters, but that’s it. Huh?”] Just as she seemed to notice something odd, Keita spoke.

- We’re being watched.

- Indeed. - Deryn confirmed Keita’s words.

- I’ve been getting the feeling that... - Alessa started, only to be cut off by Conall.

- You guys can relax a bit now. It’s our new friend, it seems.

Indeed, a turn to the right proved the kitsune from earlier, Melissa, looking at them from afar. The group waved at her and smiled, though she probably couldn’t see the latter as she waved back.

- You know, Conall, it seems that the templars are wrong after all. Sure, some of the monsters are the lowest scum, but there are many quite nice ones. Not different from any other people, I’d say. - Deryn commented smugly.

- Indeed, this may be right, little brother. - Conall answered with a mysterious half-smile.

Nobody commented on that as they snuck about the cave. Alessa, after a while, decided to just ask
- It’s settled then? We’ll stay around the cave for a few days, so you can rest properly and do any training you may want to and I can recover some of my energy by spending time in the cave?

- Yes. - the trio of men answered in unison, only for Keita to add.

- That being said, Alessa, I believe you spoke of us owing you a debt before?

- We’ll settle that once we’ve made a decent camp and all. No point to worry about it now.

- Well, that means we’re going to worry about it soon enough. I can already feel the fresh air from the outside. - Deryn mentioned. - You can smell it too, right, Brother? -

- Yes... it’s such a fantastic smell...

- Uh, Conall, that’s not the right way. - Deryn commented seeing how Conall was looking off down a side tunnel.

- Best air ever... - Conall muttered dreamily.

- Conall?
- Conall-san?

Glaw and Alessa looked at one another when Deryn’s and Keita’s calls seemed to have no effect whatsoever on the elder Amberwing brother, with the slimegirl’s eyes full of worry, and the echidna’s... full of suspicion.

- Conall? - all of the people in the group asked once the partisan-wielding fighter took a step to the left of their original course.

There seemed to be no real way of escape. Much less a way of winning.

The allied forces subservient to the Church and the Order thought their victory was almost assured, but the appearance of a Slime Queen and a Wyvern greatly bolstered the demon forces and caused the forces of Knights to fall into disarray. Attempting to either regroup or escape, depending on what would be more possible, him and his two companions ran into this group of monsters.

Come to think of it, he couldn’t remember the time he saw a male monster.. The monsters were three females, consisting of a six tailed, fox-like woman, a powerful, tall, busty figure with bear claws,
and a woman with a snake’s tail instead of legs, armed with a bow.

One of his companions was already beaten and unconscious on the ground, a rapid if weak spell barrage from the fox followed by a body slam of the bear-like woman sending him down, while the snakewoman’s arrow pierced his other companion’s foot and pinned him to the ground.

The group was now ascending towards the two of them, and indeed, seeing how they made short work of them so far, it seemed to be pointless to continue to resist. The two knights looked at one another and nodded, before the one with higher rank, with both of his feet free, suddenly spoke.

- We give up. Grant us the treatment regular for prisoners of war, but I wish to save my companion’s lives.

The three monsters seemed to significantly liven up at that, and the fox soon spoke.

- Give up, he says! Surrender! Now does he surrender, after probably killing many of our own!

The lamia nodded at that. - Indeed. I think we should punish them for their transgressions before considering their surrender, shouldn’t we?

The bear-like monstergirl licked her lips and agreed with her companion, nodding:
- Yesss... punish them. That’s a given, I think...

The way they approached and gazed at them, coupled with the bear-like monster apparently trying to get rid of the small pieces of lamellar armor that covered her body and the lamia lowered her bow while the fox woman spread her tails wide and winked at him made the knight consider many possible meanings of the word “punish”, some of them not so unpleasant.

Suddenly, an arrow flew past his head, making a loud noise as it cut through the air and pierced right through the lamia’s skull, leaving her dead in just a moment, slowly falling slack onto the ground. With their own shooter gone, the monstergirls were disoriented for just a moment, and that’s all it took for the strange sniper to strike again.

Based on the precision of the earlier shot, it was almost impossible to believe the next victim was unintended, but the truth remained - an arrow pierced through the neck of one of the knights, and then, another struck the fox. She released a ball of electricity and a fire bolt at where the arrows came from, but someone just acrobatically dodged, jumping off a tree, and finished her with the next shot.
The grizzly didn’t take her time as she charged upon the new menace, resisting the first two arrows piercing her body and slamming into the arrival... almost. The dodge seemed almost impossible at close range, but in the next moments, the grizzly was struggling for her breath as an arrow hurt her own neck. She managed to smash the odd sniper away, but he protected his bow and managed to amortize his fall with a skillful spin in the air before sending another arrow at the grizzly. She decided grappling the bowman would have better results, and kept resisting the arrows as she charged onto him, but it turns out she only got one hit in during the last fight of her life - a sudden jump proceeded by a shot was followed by a lightning quick stab with a hidden dagger, right through one of her eyes, finishing her on the spot.

The man picked up his bow and turned to the knight. There was little doubt now who that was. Named amongst the three greatest bowmen that lived in the Twin Kingdoms, and perhaps the most feared.

The Obsidian Vulture. Back when he didn’t have that nickname, he was just “the black bowman”, more due to his clothes and that odd bow he was carrying around than because of skin tone. The half-elf, considered the third most well-known bowman on the mainland, appropriately only surpassed by a single human and a single elven bowmen.

And now, he was here. Shooting both the monstergirls and the Kingdom’s own men.

When the man started his approach towards him, the knight was well aware of how this was going to end. Even more when he just stood mid-way the distance between them and reached for his quiver. The half-elf’s voice was quiet, raspy, and yet carried by the wind, appropriate for a man of such a dark reputation.

- You gave in. Very foolish.

- Gave in?

- There aren’t many reasons one surrenders to a monster, and when you do, it only breeds more problems. You fight them to the death. It’s the only way. They usually end up dying. But you never give up, even if it doesn’t look like you can win. Because then, they will break you and twist you rather than kill you, and you become a force of chaos like them, not to mention arm them with even more power than just your own. A person who dies fighting monsters is a tragedy for us and a blow to their potential power. But a prisoner? A prisoner is the worst that could happen.

- And that’s why you’ll put an arrow through my head? Judgement? Stopping us from ever surrendering again, rather than telling us not to?

- I’m giving you what you wanted and deserved before you’ve made that mistake. A hero’s death. You deserve it no more, but... The monsters don’t get you, you’re killed in action, like a champion of humanity, and the monsters that caused this were killed, avenging you. The result matters. The rest... is silence.
Barely half an hour later, the same archer was sitting on the corpses of the monstergirls, and considering his next move. It was indeed problematic, being nigh-caught amongst the monstergirls on the lands that were the most conflict-filled, but it thankfully appeared they’ve gotten all they wanted out of today’s victory, and yet a couple of his “interventions” helped to lessen their triumph.

Yet, he was still surprised to be approached by a messenger, such a short time after a battle. The letter was sealed and apparently of utmost importance, so the half-elf wasted no time opening and reading it.

- Ohh, from “STRIKE’s” commander... Harrold Olieribos LaRoache. Let’s see what the old knight could require my skills for...

To say Conall’s behavior was odd would be an understatement.

It was downright bizarre. After being repeatedly asked where he was going, he finally muttered he had to “see her” and proceeded to increase the pace. Glaw seemed upset and worried, whereas Alessa claimed it may be prudent to stop Conall before he reaches whomever he is looking for, but doing so would stop them from figuring out what was happening, so they simply followed him in silence.

Once they reached a before not-seen part of the cave, Alessa realized what might be happening, but only once they looked up closely at what, from afar, seemed like an unusual rock formation, was she sure, and the others started to get an idea. A small section filled with mushroom heads presented instead of hair on something that looked like feminine figures lead her to only one possible explanation.

- Matango. He’s been hit with a matango spore. We should stop him from finding the one that secreted it, and try to remove it. Try not to breathe too mu...

A sudden shot from above the matangos connected with Deryn’s arm, revealing itself to be a sticky, strong substance that quickly grew to be similar to a rope of sorts... no, not a rope. A web fragment.

- Giant spider? - Deryn gasped.

The way the string connected proved to make things difficult, but Deryn managed to quickly draw his sword and cut the string. However, another string immediately shot out and connected with the
sword, tearing it away from the younger guy’s grasp. At the same time, Conall kept advancing towards the mushroom heads, and the spider-creature took notice of him...

However, when she was about to shoot out some webbing, Glaw suddenly appeared, wrapping him in slime, pulling him down onto the cave’s floor so the webbing missed.

- Alessa! What is happening with him?
- Those are Matangos! He’s probably been affected by the spores, and the Arachne is using the way they lure guys to themselves for her own advantage!

A quick wall of stone and dirt raised from the ground moments later stopped another web strike by the Arachne.

- How can we free him from the effect?

Alessa turned to Glaw, then watched Keita simply... jump onto her spell-produced wall in two deft moves, using his kusarigama like a grappling hook before swinging it at the Arachne, cutting parts of her webbing and almost causing her to lose her hold on the cave’s ceiling.

That also made her realize how easy it’d be to just make the spider fall off.

- Intense Earth Spell: Speleothem, Stalactite! And... Normal Venom Spell: Serpentine Thorns!

Suddenly, a stalactite did appear out of the ceiling, right beneath the Arachne, threatening to spear her... and at the same time, spiky thorns covered it as well as the ceiling around her legs! It was impossible to keep her balance in these circumstances, and the spider-girl fell of the ceiling, hitting the ground with a loud thump.

Deryn was already almost there with his mace prepared, but the Arachne was quickly back on it’s spider-like legs, blocking his mace’s strike. With uncharacteristic ease, too; the spiderwoman seemed particularly physically powerful, though a knowing person would say it was a trait of all of her kind.

Keita was also immediately upon her, and his blade strike forced her to use both hands to block, yet, even if she was able to catch Deryn’s immediate followup strike, Keita’s sudden second attack caused her to hiss in pain as her skin was cut. She attacked by raising her legs and trying to stab them into the two young men, but the duo managed to dodge... yet their own counters were also blocked, the spider-woman managing to keep up with the two of them so far.

- Alessa, what is going on! What’s wrong with Conall! How can I help him! - Glaw almost cried, calling out to the snake-woman.

- You need to pull the spore out! It’s either stuck around his lungs or his stomach, so it’d be hard
for... anyone but a freaking slimegirl! - Alessa responded, while focusing on her own strike, which should deal with the spider-woman easily enough.

Keita and Deryn were the slightest bit taken aback with the spider-girls physical prowess, possibly due to their injuries, but the fact that she could not only keep up, but almost dominate the two of them in a fact was still rather impressive. After a while of clashing, though, Alessa’s spell was almost ready.

At the same time, Glaw looked at Conall’s face nervously. He was still looking at the odd mushroom heads in the distance, and his eyes seemed to ignore her completely.

- Let me go. I must see her... let me go you sticky thing...

- No! - the slimegirl complained with a bit of anger in her voice. - I am not losing you to some dummy 'shroom! Sorry, Conall, but... but I am doing this for your own good!

With that, the slimegirl’s lips hit the human’s, and his eyes shot wide open as her slime started to move into him...

Keita was just about to get seriously pissed off at himself for being such a busybody and trying to go and do everything on his own even while hurt...

But then, aid came. Lately, it always did...

- Move away, Keita, Deryn! Quick!

The duo of fighters did indeed move away, and looking back, were shocked to see the sight they were already familiar with from a fight before...

- Alessa, you... - Keita began.

- You’re really going to kill her? - Deryn finished.

- If she’s a tough enough cookie, she can take it! Intense Earth Spell: Spear of the Earth!

A polearm created from the ground matter itself, covered in green, glowing glyphs was already fully prepared, and in that moment, shot at the arachne.

The spider-girl couldn’t move fast enough to fully dodge the attack, resulting in her body being slammed and ran through, sand quickly covering the bleeding wound but only adding to the shredding of flesh and the pain. Even so, the arachne would survive, but she recognized the fight as being more trouble than it was worth, even for three males to choose from... Starting to escape
away deeper into the cave, around her original “hiding” spot, amongst the mushroom-monsters.

*Intense Positive Earth Spell : Gn...*

Alessa was feeling a sharp pain in her side from all the fighting and the energy she exerted on that day. Still, one more spell and they *should* be done.

*... Gnome’s Garden Wall.*

A wall of earth, along with something that looked like normal roots, “Stone Roots”, and green plants rose, blocking the part with Matangos from the rest of the cave.

*Now, we’ll be able to leave without any of the guys catching on more spores. Glaw, are you done?*

Conall was lying on the ground, looking up at Glaw who just, apparently, finished french-kissing him.

That’s what it looked like, and he seemed pretty shocked.

*No questions, mister would-be-Mushroom person. The slimegirl just saved your wits, even if it did seem like something a bit naughty. - Alessa commanded.*

The warrior coughed at the glance from his younger brother, one with a raised eyebrow.

*I... feel like someone put a giant tongue made of jello down my throat and licked my lungs with it.* - he explained to his brother.

*And I’m pretty sure that quite accurately describes what happened. Still, it’d probably be fair of us to give credit and thank your slimefriend for doing this. If not for her, apparently you’d be just a guy tapping mushroom ass in a forgotten cave for the rest of your life. Or *prey* for a spidergirl.*

After saying that, Deryn turned to the other woman in the group.

*Saying of which... Thanks, Alessa. I hadn’t expected you’d go for the overkill for the three of us.*

*Like I said, it wasn’t actually likely that the attack would kill the Arachne, even if it hit directly. Don’t give me *too* much credit.*

*We still appreciate your help.* - Keita added, before reaching out to Conall and helping him stand up. *Let’s get on with it and just start setting up that camp, shall we?*
It did not take all that long for them to indeed set up a camp, and soon, a couple of tents and a bonfire were ready just a bit outside of the cave’s entrance. Thankfully, they’ve had no more combat-related issues since the fight with the Arachne, and were allowed to leave the cave in peace.

The first night, all that happened was them sleeping. The next day, they mostly took care of one another’s injuries and tried to recover.

Alessa was in what she hasn’t entered in a long time - ever since leaving her dungeon - a meditative state, a deep trance in which she just calmly tried to restore her spiritual energy by absorbing the one that permeated the cave’s air. Said state also allowed her to sense other, stronger magical powers everywhere around the cave. There were indeed a few larger ones - a moving, powerful force, possibly matching her own, quite likely the youthful-looking demon Melissa spoke about. She could feel something that could be Ramra, too, but was familiar with the fox-specific energy by now to identify Melissa herself. Near her, there was a much smaller, far weaker spot of demonic energy... Seemed like her virginity issue was over and done with. Unless that wasn’t her boyfriend’s energy and she adopted a little imp, that is. Unlikely.

There were also many ants, with the queen included, radiating power this way and that. The queen’s of the more colonial types of monster-girls were nothing to scoff at, after all.

Seemed like they had at least one Ant Arachne too.

However, what surprised her was a rather unique energy moving towards their little camp from *outside* the cave, through the woods surrounding it.

It was unlike most things that she ever managed to sense during the trance. Not a typical demonic or monster energy at all, no. It seemed to bear some similarity, and Alessa’s first thought was a tainted angel, which prompted her to imagine the reactions of such to seeing men, and she decided to go in case the guys needed help.

Crawling out of the cave was much, much easier without any company. Truth be told, she said it straight to the guys that it’d be better if they didn’t enter the cave. After all, it was crawling with single, even if not precisely hungry, monster-girls.

There were a few things in the cave that seemed edible, particularly some of the mushrooms, and it might’ve contained some of the ingredients that could’ve supplied Keita with his much needed “medicine”, but she would’ve had an easier time picking it out herself or with Glaw than with any of
Getting out of the cave and into the camp proved the visitor was already there. It was a surprising sight, but one that might’ve worried Alessa nevertheless.

- O...oh my, I didn’t expect... there to be three of you. Ummm, hello, brave gentleman, I am...

- Clearly lost and asking random passerbys for directions. - Alessa finished the sentence for the woman. She didn’t like the way she scanned her three male companions.

A unicorn. On the prowl for virgin husbands. Keita was safe from the start, given how he was already marked by a monstergirl, though Alessa cringed at the way the centaur-like woman’s face changed when her oh-so-delicate senses picked up on the taint in the half-zipangu swordsman.

Unicorns, of course, were unique in their needs. They’d hold out on their sex drive until they managed to find a virgin husband they liked enough, then go wild for a while, and then be a bit smoother with it than your regular monstergirl. That mean Keita was safe from scrutiny and the way Glaw seemed possessive with Conall would’ve pushed the unicorn away from him, but Deryn might’ve seemed like a good enough target - best to what she knew, he only ever had sex with a single slimegirl and they don’t really leave a mark.

- Oh... oh, you’re traveling with two other monstergirls... may I ask if there are any p-pa...

- Relax. None of the guys here are as pure as you’d like, unfortunately. However, I don’t really believe you were following us or chasing us, so why don’t you tell us what brought you here?

- Oh, uh, hello. My name is Anastasia. A while ago me and my sister Larissa went out to travel and find our destined husbands. I’ve... I’ve had completely no luck, even though we’re of the same age and she’s already had a mate for a while, so when I’ve heard about a powerful seer living here... Awena was her name, I believe, I decided to come, and try to seek out her council... You wouldn’t happen to be here for the same reason?

Alessa looked at her companions but Conall just spoke out immediately.

- Actually, we’ve already been to Awena and received our little prophesy. Now, we’re recovering from the wounds of our former travels and that particular trip.

Keita and Deryn both nodded to that, responding:

- We can tell you a good way of reaching Awena, though. - Deryn offered.

Alessa decided to add. - Ohh, and the place is filled with clear, spiritual energy. As long as you don’t come in the vicinity of a powerful monster, it’s perfect for you.
The unicorn called Anastasia blushed.
- My, you're all so kind... are you really all taken?

Alessa proceeded to explain.
- Glaw is extremely attached to Conall, Keita and Deryn both owe me... favors, and had sex forced onto them in the past by monsters.

- Ohh... that's too bad. Still... thank you all for your kindness, and let me do something for you as well...

Her starting with Deryn made Alessa a bit anxious, but the unicorn had pure motives despite hugging the young male to her nigh-naked abdomen right under her breasts. Touching her horn made a light appear in her hand, and sending that light into a wounded body was apparently the equivalent of a healing spell. Anastasia proceeded to do the same with Conall, Deryn, and even looked to herself, but she just shook her head no.

- It's okay. Now, for the directions...

It was evening soon after they were done explaining the directions to the unicorn woman, and their camp was now almost completely finished. Deryn, Conall and Keita were sitting next to the bonfire after a small training session they managed to get once Anastasia left to meet with Awena, and Conall got up once seeing Glaw pass by once, apparently wanting to talk to her about something.

Only a couple of moments later, Alessa slithered up to them and Deryn easily caught on what THAT was about.

- Okay, so... what do we owe you? It's about that, isn't it? Not that I think just thanking is enough after having yourself saved a couple of times in the same week by a person who wasn't originally supposed to intervene.

- Well, it's... almost about it. Could I borrow you for a minute, Keita?

- Hmm. I suppose you could, if the reason's g... - the Zipangu swordsman soon went quiet, realizing he was in no position to actually stand up for himself. When Alessa saved his life from being taken by a Templar, it was a reason for gratefulness, but helping both him and Deryn against one of her own kind was already incurring something that could only be called a debt.

A pretty large debt, in fact.

So he just went quietly.
That in turn left Deryn alone next to the camp’s fire. It’s not nice feeling like you’re the fifth wheel, and it certainly was one of the first time he felt like it, left alone when Conall would apparently explore his newfound bond with Glaw, and Alessa...

Well, there was a chance that Alessa would make Keita pay up both of their debts, but he was worried if it was true or what it’d entail for the swordsman. He certainly started to respect and even like the echidna. He just didn’t truly trust her yet.

Alessa slithered away from Keita and tilted her head a bit to look at him.

- You’re all right? The wounds were certainly worrying these last few times, and I almost never actually manage to catch you taking this drug you’ve supposedly been addicted to... - Alessa asked.

- I am fine enough, yes. - He replied simply.

- Good. That’s good. - Alessa responded, a little nervousness entering her voice.

- What did you want to talk about, if you don’t mind me asking?

- Ehhh, there’s no real easy way of putting this. I hate actually forcing such favours onto people, even if they owe me. ..

- Well, I more or less owe you my life, so as long as it’s a reasonable thing...

Alessa sighed before deciding to just outright say it.

- I think we should start sleeping together. It’d be incredibly helpful to me. - She waited for the reaction, not yet sure what to expect.

- Pa... Wh... What... Pardon me, but WHAT?!

At the same time, Conall was sitting down in the grass nearby, motioning for Glaw to approach as well. She did, flopping in front of him, messing one of his boots up with her overflowing, gel-like body. Conall didn’t seem to mind much.

- I guess I owe you yet again, don’t I? This time, you saved me rather than my brother, though. And you tried your best to protect me from that minotaur and ogre in the cave. Thank you for that.
Glaw moved a bit closer and tilted her head. - I will always do my best to help you! I like you.

- Well, I haven’t done much to earn being liked by you, I think. So far, at least.

- Conall? Uhh... but you are not mean to me... unlike the snake-woman! And I think you are very cool, and you taste good, and you have a nice family you care about, so it is clear that you are a good guy!

Conall rested his head against the trunk of a tree.
- I didn’t use to be that much of a family guy, you know. More of a dream person. Chasing my dream to be a great knight, a true Templar. That caused my family some trouble that Deryn had to deal with... and it in turn caused him trouble. When we met again, we got onto the road and decided to just make things better the best we could. But we harmed your own species a lot, so for you, I should be the bad guy.

Glaw just shook her head no, confused about all of this.
- Whatever bad you have done, it can all be undone. It is not fair to like someone until they mess up one thing after all the good things they do, and I am sure you helped a lot of people.

- But I didn’t help you much yet, did I? Let’s go ahead and try to do something about that. You haven’t fed in a while, have you? You must be getting a bit hungry.

- Uh, yes. Since that time when you let me wash you.

- Well, how about we do that again tomorrow morning... but this time, we can play all the way and you can take in my... uh... you know, the white stuff, too? I can’t guarantee yet it’ll always be like this, but I think I owe you at least a good meal.

[“Heck, Conall, that’s actually like wooing a real girl. Except, for her, a meal is something different.”]

Glaw seemed really overjoyed at the concept.
- Really?

- Yeah, really. Since we’ll be by the stream, it won’t be much of a problem to just wash off any remaining slime. I think it’ll be a good and easy bath, once the only thing on me is a bit of your slime.

The slimegirl positively gleamed and threw herself at Conall, quickly embracing him and planting a kiss on his cheek.
- Thankkkk youuuuu! I will make it really good for you!

Conall blushed a little bit before stroking what passed for hair on the cheerful slimegirl.
- Yeah... I’m sure you will.

Alessa decided to continue to press on.

- Well, I know it may be embarrassing and you may have your reservations about it, but it’d really be such a huge help for me! I mean, it’s not really such a big problem, is it?

Keita’s outburst surpassed most of her least pleasant imagined outcomes of this situation.

- This is blackmail! I refuse! I knew there was something wrong with your goddamn race! You almost had me convinced you were a good person, but you’ve had this stupid sexual slavery thing on your mind all along!

- W...what are you talking about?

- You know where you can shove your goddamn suggestion! There seems to be no doubt as to where you want different things to be put!

- Wow, Keita, I didn’t expect you to react so... badly. - Alessa said softly, allowing some of hurt she felt to emerge in her tone. - I mean, it is just sleeping together. I didn’t mean you becoming my consort. Heck, I didn’t even say ANY sex would happen at all.

- … come again? - Confusion replaced the anger in Keita’s tone.

- Well, just because I suggested sleeping together doesn’t mean I am suggesting a liaison. I actually meant just that. Sleeping together. As you already know, maintaining my body temperature is rather hard. Especially if I do my best to *not* expend my spirit energy, and *avoid* tricking or forcing guys into... putting different things into me. So, well, having someone to snug up to and warm me at night and *just* that would actually be *immensely* helpful.

- W...why me?

- It’s pretty simple. Conall and Glaw... well, let’s just say they may as well be a couple. Plus, you and Deryn are the only ones I have an excuse to actually ask for this. He’s the younger one and would probably be way more awkward about this. Do you really want me to ask him, instead?

- I somehow don’t trust that’s all of your motives. - Keita said with narrowed eyes.

- Well, I am not doing this to get you into bed with me *metaphorically*, only *literally*, so if there’s any underlying motive it’s nothing bad in your book, I... think.

- Ehhh...

- Come on. - Alessa was starting to get frustrated at his reluctance. - I did my best to help you, didn’t
“I? I promise it won’t be so bad, and you’d be helping me out a lot.

Keita still seemed reluctant to admit his loss.

- You see, for humans this is...

- No other humans around but you three, and I’m sure Conall and Deryn will understand. I mean, Conall lets Glaw eat his fluids for all of our sakes. I wonder how long it’ll take him to allow her to... nevermind. In any case, we’re weird company and human judgement isn’t exactly the best way to go here. I may be big help against your main enemy, but I won’t be able to do it if I need to waste my energy or am useless in the mornings, right?

Keita was silent for a long moment before sighing.
-... Fine. Fine, okay. We’ll... at least try that out.

Alessa just smiled in a surprisingly girlishly-cute way.
- Thanks.

Deryn did not expect guests after the unicorn earlier that day, but here there were some.

Funnily, both seemed like *very* young women, girls, rather, one a brunette, the other one with auburn hair, dressed in some clothes that screamed “I’m a wizard, hahahaha!”. Interestingly enough, they did carry a few things that seemed to be somewhat magical in nature.

- Hello, Big Bro~! We’re The famous Pemadma sisters! It’s nice to meet you!
- Famous? Never h...
- Relax, mister, my dear sister tends to do a good job of overstating things. We’re just a sorceress and her witch sister! I’m Kara!
- And I’m ~Sara!
- Parents not too creative with the names, huh? - Deryn commented. - Well, I guess it’s cute for sisters to be named similarly. In any case, what could an old fart like me help you with
- Old fart! Big bro, you’re funny~ I think you’re a hunk, and funny, too!

The other young girl sighed.
- And now, Sara likes you. Well, the world’s not over, but I better get her going before it becomes a problem. May I ask you dear gentleman, this is the place where the seer Awena resides, is it not?
- That’s correct. The cave has two levels, and you can access Awena’s place from the lower level.

- Two levels~... That’s cool! It’s like a dungeon!

- Yes, but ironically, I’d say as long as you’re cautious on both, the first level is worse, so it doesn’t follow the usual mechanic.

- Awww! - Sara voiced her disappointment at this not being a stereotypical dungeon.

- Well, mister...

- Deryn. The name’s Deryn.

- That’s a nice name~!

- Quiet there, Sara. In any case, mister Deryn, are you here alone? Or did you come with companions?

- I’m not alone. It’d be dangerous to wander the...

- We know, but we’re prepared~! It’s so sweet that you’re worried about us~!

Deryn just looked at Sara. Sure, the constant melodical shifts in her voice were repeatedly either cute or annoying, but he didn’t say that to suggest he was worried about them. In either case...

- Well, my companions and I are currently staying here for various reasons.

Sara and Kara looked at one another. - Well, we’ll be spending a short time in the caves, but we’ll probably leave in one or two days... if you were around here by that time, we sure could use brave warriors like yourselves to help us on the road! -

- For as long as you can, of course~! We’d never demand that you follow us indefinitely~! Although I’m sure it’d be nice to always have my brave knight Deryn by my side~!

The trio shared a small laugh at that, before Deryn said. - I think we’ll still be here. I mean, my friend wanted to train and recover from a few injuries, so we’re likely to stay for a short while. -

- Injuries? Oh my~! I hope you’re okay.... but battle scars are kinda cool, so don’t be ashamed of getting them~!

- Well, I’m sure we’ll have a chance of talking with you and your friends and asking about your help when we get out of there, in that case.

- Sure thing. Will you really be all right, though?
- We will, pinkie promise~!

Sara did indeed get Deryn to do the pinkie promise. She and Kara proceeded to enter the cave.

- You really like him.
- Oh yes, I do.
- Well, if they're still out here when we leave, feel free to hit up on him while I check out his friends.
- Of course~!

That evening was actually the worst and most embarrassing part.

Earlier on, Conall pondered actually telling Alessa about what he was going to do and whether she had any advice on the... 'Special slimegirl bath', second attempt, but upon noticing the way Keita behaved nervously and the split of the newly-made tents - originally, he intended the large tent to house him, Keita, and Deryn, namely the guys, while the other tent would be for Alessa and, on the rare occasions she needed it, Glaw.

The slimegirl was a perfect night guard, really, never getting sleepy and only needing an hour or hour and a half of lazy, enjoyable rest per day.

The tents themselves were a new addition. Upon getting two rather large pieces of cloth on their visit to the cave - one from fighting the minotaur-ogre duo and one from Melissa on their way out of the cave - Deryn and Conall decided to add to the few animal skins the younger brother decided to obtain on his turns to hunt by doing so extensively after they left the cave. So far, the smaller tent was unfinished, but they were already deciding on how to split... and, apparently, Alessa and Keita were intent on staying in one together.

- So, the two of you are now...

- This is purely for practical reasons. Alessa, as a lamia-kindred, is cold-blooded and has troubles maintaining her body temperature through the night. You might've noticed that when she was getting up in the mornings. No shady business will be going on.

- I guess any excuse is good... Okay, okay, Keita, I was kidding, you don't have to look at me as if you were going to throw a punch! Whatever you two will be doing is your own business. Not that I think you're going to be doing... that. Though she is a monster.

- I may be - Alessa decided to cut the discussion short - but have I demonstrated anything but self-
control on our journey together? You three are no less pure than when we started traveling together.

- Not more so, either. - Conall threw in. He had a small doubt. About both Keita and Alessa, as well as himself and Glaw. He also worried how Deryn felt about all that. Would he be nervous? Jealous? Insecure? Worried? Pissed off, especially given what ended up happening due to his own, the eldest’s, wish to be a templar... only now, he was going to do something for which templars imprisoned or executed people?

- Something wrong, brother? - Deryn asked, seeing his brother’s introspective look.

- No... not yet, at least. I guess for this one time you two can take the bigger tent so the lying together thing isn’t pointless, but afterwards we’ll have to decide anew.

The bigger tent was made from the obtained larger pieces of material they got on their way. The smaller one would come once they processed the animal skins enough.

- Is this a comment on my size, Conall? - Alessa said it with a glare that sent a shiver up the Amberwing brothers’ spines, but she quickly broke into a smirk.

- I’m not being serious. Anyway, let's set up the camp and get down to the resting part, unless Glaw herself needs to rest first?

- No, no! Sleepies! You go to sleep! Conall needs to wake up early and take a bath! The sooner you sleep the sooner he can do so! - Glaw was almost shooing them into the tents.

The elder Amberwing brother didn’t comment on that, except for a small blush.

And as such, Keita was in a situation he never thought he was actually going to put himself willingly.

He was in a tent. With a woman, and who was going to sleep in the same bed as him.

Well, sleeping bag, but still.

- You're nervous. - Alessa said from behind him, hand gently moving to his shoulder. He shivered for just a minute, but the touch was tender, soothing. And her hand was way smaller and more delicate than the one who caused a couple of his scars.

- A bit. You have to agree, it is odd.

- Only because it's your first time doing it. We’ll probably need to move around for a bit to figure a pose that's good for both of us to sleep in and also allows me to warm up, but it won't be *that*
hard, I think. - She said with a warm, soothing smile.

Keita ended up taking off his armor, something he often didn't do when going to sleep alone. When trying to figure out the change, he guessed it was so Alessa wouldn't feel too uncomfortable against him. He figured at least parts of their bodies would touch, otherwise it wouldn't be as effective.

Alessa just let him lay down before slithering beneath the cover right next to him. His heart suddenly started beating a little faster before she brought the front of her own body closer against his.

The position made it impossible not to look either at her face or her chest, plus any movement of his hands would likely end up in an accidental brush or grope.

It was the way their eyes would meet and the sudden influx of physical warmth and emotional turmoil that made this unbearable, though.

Keita made a clear attempt to push himself away from the woman, the sudden touch surprising her.

- No, this won’t work.

- What makes you uncomfortable about this position?

- EVERYTHING!

Alessa pouted a little bit, turning gently away from him to lay on her back rather than facing him. In this position, he could clearly see her generous, ample chest falling and raising with every breath... yet it was somehow more bearable.

After all, he had no interest in such things.

- I guess we either need to lay side by side with arms on the other’s shoulder or hooked together, or spooning. I can be the big spoon.

- Spooning? Big spoon?

- One’s front to the other’s back? The big spoon is the person whose front is involved. - Alessa responded, surprised he never heard of the concept.

Keita took only a minute to imagine this and decided against it.

- Can’t we just lie back to back?
- You really are a minimalist when it comes to warming people up, aren’t you?

Keita sighed. Indeed, he didn’t seem very grateful right now from anybody’s point of view.

- Let’s hook arms then. And… stuff.

Alessa scooted over to Keita in the bag, her left breast pressing against his side, left arm snaking it’s way to under his neck and resting on his other shoulder, right arm lying on his side as he quickly scooted it away and hooked his own arm around it to lessen the contact Alessa had with his actual torso. She was indeed a bit cooler than he expected... her body temperature must’ve been getting lower already. Still, she smiled brightly and warmly at the young male, as if in thanks, and decided to voice said thanks right after.

- That feels much nicer. Thanks.

Keita wasn’t sure if it felt “much nicer”, but contrary to the last time, this time around he sure found it much harder to sleep than on the one occasion Alessa crept into his sleeping bag on her own.

In fact, the moment he finally fell asleep after lying awake for a long time, would be soon before Alessa started to shift around.

This awoke Keita, whom noticed he was in a vastly different position than before. Something soft was smooshed into his upper back, and slender arms were wrapped about him. The half-zipangu swordsman realized that she simply “decided”, though she was still asleep, to shift to this whole... “spooning”... thing. He was never that close with a woman without it being a violent act of rape, at least not since his childhood, and as such was completely not accustomed to the sensation. In a way, it was making him extremely uncomfortable - he was resting, and failing to fall asleep, in the embrace of a woman who proved to be quite a bit more powerful than he was. Her breasts were offensively pressed against his back, and her hands wrapped about his chest and waist almost-possessively while her tail seemed to slowly capture his calf.

On the other hand, it felt so utterly different from his only experience with a woman, and Keita found himself all worked up with adrenaline, heart thumping, partially from a certain bodily reaction to the contact - one Keita could not think of having and didn’t realize it was there, buried under a ton of ice over any sexual or intimate desire or urge, and partially from his body’s instinct to protect himself from the dangers that could come from a being with demonic energy flowing through her.

It seemed like he’d have a few semi-sleepless nights before he’ll get used to it.
This lack of sleep would turn out to be something that might’ve cost him a lot, and sooner than he could’ve expected.
Chapter Summary

Conall and Glaw get to enjoy their new type of bathing together while the next threat looms on the horizon...

- What are you waiting for! Take them off! Take them all off!

Conall wasn’t sure whether he should be regretting doing this out of sheer embarrassment or feel happy he decided to do this due to the sheer amount of enthusiasm Glaw was displaying. Still, getting naked - completely, absolutely, stark naked - in front of a woman one wasn’t wed to after going through all that templar training… And a monster no less - it was painfully obvious Glaw was a slimegirl and not a human - was kind of confusing and embarrassing for him.

Still, his underwear was off, and now it was time for the shirt-like cloth he normally wore under his armor.

With it removed soon enough as well, he was standing, entirely bare, in front of the slimegirl. Glaw immediately scooted over to him, parts of her body exaggeratedly bouncing and jiggling in a pleasant fashion. He still remembered this was a girl that essentially raped him; his first time wasn’t “stolen” like his brother, but his most recent and potentially most stimulating ‘time’ ended up being a very confusing experience. From that point onward, though, Glaw didn’t do anything other than help him and the one time he allowed her to feed off anything of his, she stayed within the boundaries he asked her to respect.

To top it off, the girl who was now kneeling, seemingly sinking into a puddle of her own substance until she was way, way shorter than him, saved his free will and the life of his brother on separate occasions. It’s not *just* that he owed her, he begun to genuinely appreciate the single-minded, pure, naive devotion and adoration, and rather than cast them away out of worry that he didn’t deserve them, a part of him wanted to finally become worthy of such affection.

The issue was, to be worthy of such affection meant to kind of defy the gender archetypes and offer his own body to sate a need of hers. He was just now going to see if that was about to become a problem.

Glaw was running her hands up and down his thighs, then moved closer, her breasts almost glueing to his thighs as her hands moved upwards and upwards, fingers running his well-toned musculature,
as well as the few battle scars he managed to earn.

- *I like your body, too.* - Glaw confessed, hands and breasts moving along his overall crotch area, the slippery strokes and gooey “kisses” that caused her slime to stick to his thighs or member once she pulled free, forming saliva-like naughty lines whenever she’d separate, were quickly making his member more and more prominent.

- *It’s just a regular b...*

- *Not true! It is totally amazing. You are so well-shaped and strong and tough... fast, too, yet you can also look so cute and so strong for your size! Even with you being more of a hunk than your brother or mister grim reaper!*

- *Keita’s not so grim and certainly no death personification.* - Conall had to pause when her hand rubbed all over his taint and then testicles. For some reason, touches from Glaw made him feel more sensitive and she could make the situation seem both light-hearted and intimate. To his surprise, her cheerful and adoring behavior was actually boosting his confidence.

Glaw suddenly moved herself upwards by sheer solidification, the pool of her excess slime becoming smaller while her legs were now halfway up her calves. She started to kiss Conall’s abdomen, now almost high enough to reach his nipples with her mouth. He shivered when her little smooches reached his bellybutton, her tongue slightly moving out of her mouth to tease him. There was a sensation decidedly different than with any human lover - the way her body was malleable and clung to him, sometimes as if she was melting... he kept wondering how much of that treatment came from her will or instinct and how much was purely a physical trait of a slimegirl’s body. However, logical thinking was slowly going out of the window in favor of the fever that was starting to ignite between his thighs. Last of Glaw’s kisses had his member rub against the front of her neck as her lips pressed just above the shaft, and this caused him to twitch and harden completely.

Finally Glaw came “face to face” with his manhood, her eyes opening wide in admiration. The spiky-haired young man was well-endowed, especially for someone who could still have a year to four of growth ahead of him. He was nearing eight inches in length, coming maybe about one third of an inch short, and was rather thick as well. Such attributes frequently either visually pleased or frightened a human woman, but for monstergirls, it often worked far more oddly. Perception of being attracted to one penis or type of such or another was often attained rather than something completely instinctual.

- *Can I... start sucking on it a bit? This place does get sweaty and... and it holds the most delicious stuff.*

Glaw said that with a slightly dreamy expression on her face and already aligning his manhood with her mouth; Conall would’ve had a hard time refusing even if this was supposed to be a “bath” first and foremost.

Moreover, Conall wasn’t the type of guy who’d just try to relieve himself of any accumulated desires and frustrations on his own. That made the perspective of a slimegirl giving him those wonderful
sensations again all the more tempting.

Said slimegirl did not waste time seeing that he wasn’t opposed to it. Opening her lips wide, Glaw placed the tip of Conall’s manhood right on her “tongue”, which soon started to encircle the member and draw it into her mouth, elongating to wrap up about its length.

That was one trick you couldn’t get from a human woman. The other was absolutely no gag reflex whatsoever. Glaw could just swallow all of Conall’s aching manhood, no matter the angle or how sharp the move or how rough the thrust... and she did take him down, slowly at first. Her throat was slightly cool and very tight around his member, rippling around his length with its slippery texture.

Glaw gave him a deep sound of apparent pleasure, almost as if just getting him inside her mouth was setting her on the path to her own ecstasy. Conall’s hips shivered and eventually he pumped forward in out of plain reflex, burying his cock completely in Glaw’s throat. The slimegirl contracted it in pulsating waves that almost got him stuck inside the jello-like passage that formed in her neck, but, slowly, she’d pull her head away from him, intensifying the suction on every step of that way. Languidly, the slime’s head started to bob up and down on his member, drowning him in the syrupy sensations of her own slime combined with an unusual tightness and constant, sublime, nigh-otherworldly movement of the insides of the slimegirl’s mouth and throat.

Conall thought he was going to simply blow right then and there, but his legs failed him first; he fell straight on his ass, plopping on the ground by the stream, his erection leaving Glaw’s mouth with an incredibly loud and lewd slurp that left several strings of slime and precum connecting the two before most of them broke due to the velocity of the human man’s fall.

Glaw giggled a little bit at the panting warrior and moved her entire body upwards, re-forming a full set of legs and straddling him. He felt the familiar sensation of the twitching crown of his member penetrating a membrane, but that sensation was soon lost as Glaw sat on his abdomen, spreading her legs wide and pooling her excess substance around his sides, even seeping beneath him. She smiled at him warmly. Despite the heat emanating from where their loins met, her voice seemed fresh, and cheerful, almost innocent about the whole affair.

- Time for your bath!

Indeed, there was sweat and such over his body, but while he felt there were more pressing matters to attend to, the sensation of Glaw’s slime shifting all over his body, her semi-solid “legs” sliding over his skin and absorbing perspiration, her artificial slimy vagina rubbing over his abdomen and his chest - those things were enough to temporarily make him forget about how *badly* he wanted to ejaculate.

His eyes could also focus on the excessive jiggling of her chest when their contact seemingly sent slight shudders through her form. Those feminine mounds seemed to be a little bit bigger than he remembered, but it might’ve been just her directing her excess substance to make them grow.
Glaw’s bath did not stop at that, though. She continued moving upwards, before finally resting just her buttocks on Conall’s pectorals and pushing her hips forward.

- *Please put something inside me. Fingers, tongue... anything.*

The elder of Amberwing brother’s decided not to discuss the abandonment of a perfectly good penis downwards that could’ve taken care of that and instead in his feverish haze immediately shot his fingers towards Glaw’s groin.

It didn’t react the way a normal girl’s would. The scent of that area was completely different, with an almost fuity aroma despite the fact she just absorbed his sweat. The way it didn’t fully “spread”, instead rubbing against and almost engulfing his fingertips with her make-do “labia” before he plunged a finger inside wasn’t human. The way her entire body twitched against even the smallest insertion of his wasn’t human either, but it’s not like he’d ever muster the care to worry about this in this situation or would’ve actually thought about exchanging Glaw for someone else in this situation.

The slimegirl atop of him was releasing both slurping sounds of flesh entering slime and slight pants and moans of pleasure.

- *Switch hands.*

Conall complied before he realized what this was about. He almost wanted to laugh, but didn’t. It might’ve scared Glaw and ruined the intimacy of the situation.

The reason why she asked him to ‘switch’ was simple; this wasn’t really about the pleasure of insertion. She was ‘washing’ his hands.

Eventually, though, the little bath was almost over and Glaw instead returned to what she had to work so hard to earn the permission for - making Conall ejaculate.

With a rapid twist, suddenly instead of her crotch rubbing on his chest, her bum was almost precisely in his face. Her mouth rapidly descended towards his erection and immediately engulfed her into her exotic mouth. In this position, Conall’s straining member would much more often brush against what, in a normal mouth, would be her cheeks and her palate, and the young adventurer couldn’t help but shudder from the onslaught of the sensations that came with how the inside of her mouth stickily clung to him. At the same time, Glaw’s backside was right in front of the warrior’s face, shaking with every bob of her head over his crotch. Conall didn’t seem to mind much... no, in fact, it turned him on. He pushed himself slightly up to deliver a small, gentle love bite on her left buttock, then a kiss on the right, causing Glaw to moan and shudder in pleasure.
Conall himself was not far off and tried to reciprocate even in the slightest by licking over whichever part of Glaw’s make-do sex organ and buttocks he could. For a moment, he pondered just moving his face straight between the globes to check if she simulated that hole as well, but with his mind in a haze, he just focused on trying to get a taste of the syrupy liquid that would occasionally gush out of her slime-vagina. Conall felt the pulsing waves of Glaw’s throat milking him before her tongue once again started to elongate and wrap about his dick.

The male threw his head back and let out a groan from being overstimulated. Moments later, any shred of control he might’ve had simply dissipated, and he erupted inside of her mouth.

Glaw’s throat quivered and contracted, letting his semen move through any membranes, forming a mess in her mouth and throat that she quickly started to absorb into her own body, all the while delivering milking squeezes and suckles to Conall’s still ejaculating member. The white liquid kept squirting out as Glaw tried to absorb it and feed, quite successfully thanks to her body’s composition. Gradually, the ejaculations slowed down to a dribble, and finally his member softened a bit, with Glaw allowing it to leave her mouth after a short while of excessive nuristic on the now more sensitive organ.

Conall was panting from the strain the somewhat excessive ejaculation caused on his body, while Glaw quickly got up to face him and bounced around cheerfully.

- *You taste so good, Conall~ and it feels good to play with you, too!*

- *I... guess that’s good... -* Conall answered, panting.

- *Did I manage to make you feel good?*

Conall just smiled and extended a hand to gently rub her cheek.

- *Yes. It’s just a little bit tiring for us sometimes, like I said the first time around.*

- *Yes, yes! I tried to remember things you did not like! Ummm... eventually, if you will be okay with the feedings, I would like you to put it in... down there...*

Glaw would hold his hands and gently help him raise to a sitting position, slowly slithering behind him only to smoosh her curves against his back in a sticky hug.

- *We should wash your back, too.*

Glaw’s prodigiously malleable breasts were now pressing against Conall’s back and causing that odd, tingling sensation of sweat consumption as his member still throbbed from the pleasure from before. Glaw started to rub herself against him more quickly and aggressively, and he leaned back with a sigh. Her hands would move over his front, feeling up his muscles, and he felt his tension
slowly evaporate, relaxing into the mushy embrace of the slime-girl. Indeed, he never predicted he’d feel safe with a red slime spooning him and essentially smashing her breasts into his back, but he could allow himself a moment of bliss here.

Glaw’s hands were getting increasingly gropey and would slowly move lower and lower, and soon, he’d feel three fingers wrapping about his resurfacing erection.

- Wow... you can already go again, Conall... You are such a healthy and tough stallion! With the snuggliness of a bunny, too!

The feeling of relaxation washed away when Glaw started stroking his still oversensitive erection and coaxing it back to full size. The breasts against his back became more defined, and he could suddenly feel two bumps press into his back from all their mass; Glaw just formed full nipples. The unusual softness and wetness of these breasts, as well as the increasingly warm body of the red slimegirl pressing against him allowed her to easily send his member back into full glory. He felt the girl flow over him, around him, and temporarily settle in his lap to deliver a loving kiss onto his lips and a teasing rub of of his member between her buttocks; rolling the twin globes of her backside over and around his blood-filled rod. Her kiss was passionate, not as cool and refreshing as usual, her body warmer; but there was not even a hint of the taste of his own seed in it, only an odd mix of slimy substance that may or may not taste like a mix of fruits.

Glaw ended up dragging her nipple-tinted breasts over Conall’s chest and slowly down as her main body moved away, gently pushing him backwards to allow better access. He could now see her accumulating her excessive substance and increasing the size of her breasts to be perfectly suited for what she apparently intended to do.

Suddenly, his erection was wrapped between them, rubbed from all sides by a mucuous membrane that seemed wet, malleable and yet capable of providing pressure at once. With his cock lodged between Glaw’s re-sized boobs, the slimegirl started to bounce them up and down in his lap, with occasional movements to the sides as she resumed her feast.

Conall didn’t get to experience even a regular ‘titfuck’ before in his life, so this was a completely new sensation to him. Not having regular breasts to compare it with, all he knew was the tingling, sublime feeling of his member, prickling with sexual sensitivity from the previous orgasm, being doused in her slime while rubbed from all sides by semi-liquid mass was both soothing and incredibly stimulating. Her breast shifted to respond to every throb of his member and Glaw could feel perfectly through them, alternating in pressures and watching his expression carefully as she squeezed her breasts more and started to more intensely pump them up and down.

- Where... did you learn... to do this?

- Learn? But, I did not learn it anywhere? My body always tended to produce curves and slimes can further enhance them in that regard with excess substance, so of course one would think of ways to use these curves! Does it feel good?
- Y... yes. This squishy pressure from everywhere is so relaxing, yet... it keeps pushing me so close to the edge, bit by bit.

Glaw winked at him and let her tongue hang from her mouth while removing some of the excess material from her bust, allowing the tip of Conall’s erection to appear in her cleavage once again whenever she pushed down.

The tongue caused Conall’s erection to twitch continuously while his body shivered and shuddered from the onslaught of sensations; he was glistening all over from some of Glaw’s residual slime and he felt covered by her, staying completely in the most direct and intimate of touches even when their only points of contact were his manhood, her breasts and her elongated “tongue”. Glaw slurped nosily as liquid started to run from her mouth, right into her cleavage - that hardly required any lubrication - and over the member, the head of which was now halfway wrapped up in Glaw’s thick, long tongue. Conall just had to resume thrusting against the pumps of her breasts, already feeling another orgasm welling up within him.

Glaw moved her face lower and unwrapped Conall’s erection from the warm half-cocoon of her tongue, switching to licking the underside of it and allowing it to move into her mouth instead. She was looking up at his hazy eyes, staring back down at hers. The young man was panting heavily and she recognized the telltale signals that he was about to blow.

With a loud slurp, her tongue moved down to his withdrawn balls and massaged them while her mouth simultaneously intensely sucked on his tip, her cleavage pushed to the sides a bit but still embracing a large portion of his ejaculating cock. The first two shots were immediately sucked up by Glaw, but slowly she returned to the pumping motion of her breasts and, soon, the later shots and dribbles of cum instead flowed out onto said breasts as Conall’s manhood popped out of her mouth.

The surface of her breasts ended up being decorated by pearly drops that she either licked off or allowed to slowly seep into her body through her membrane. Afterwards, she leaned in to give Conall’s member a few last gentle sucks, draining him of the remaining drops of his seed.

Conall would once again lay onto his back and pant heavily, with Glaw laying next to him.

- Thank you for letting me do this, deee-ar~.

- It was my pleasure. Thank you for always helping me and saving both me and my brother.

- I will always do my best to do just that!

- I am glad you’re one of my companions. It... gave me a new perspective on certain things.

- Conall?
Two little shapes, with some cosmetic differences in their dresses and one being a brunette as opposed to the other one’s auburn hair, were sitting in a somewhat dark corner of the cave. Surrounded by glyphs on the ground, a multitude of spells caused two objects to fly around and levitate. The duo was simply enjoying the visit, occasionally going for walks to absorb the spirit energy from a different part of cave, yet they were already discussing the real reason why they were here.

- I wonder if we’ll have to charm them...

- We probably will. I mean, there were monster girls around them. It doesn’t seem like there are strongly-bound couples in that group, though.

- Hmmm... should we try to do it normally, then~? Or, shall we use the Indomitability Breaker and the Grand Charmer straight away?

- Well, I guess it depends on the quality of these guys as big brothers, does it not, sister?

- Yes~! I like that guy, so we may as well use the artifacts straight away! After all, we’re here to charge them with energy!

- And what good would be all that energy, my sweet sister, if we didn’t get to use it soon, am I right?
The power of magic is a wondrous thing. It creates magical artifacts, it produces energy and heat, cold, or an element, frequently where there was none before. It heals bodies and influences mentalities, it can strengthen your friends while weakening your enemies...

Are there ways magic shouldn’t be used? Combinations that, if employed, change magic into something horrific and abhorrent rather than a thing of wonder?

A group of young adventurers and their monster friends have to develop an opinion on that.

Alessa and Keita were watching the Amberwing brothers spar from the sidelines.

Alessa didn’t find the result so far surprising at all. Conall was in better physical shape, less encumbered with injuries since their fight against Elnathan in the cathedral, and they both suffered about as much pain from fighting monsters in the Crystalline Karst. In addition, it’d make sense for the older brother, who had templar training in addition to a probably longer fighting career, to simply be naturally better at one-on-one combat with weapons when compared to his brother.

Of course, Alessa wasn’t a a warrior in mind nor at heart. Both Conall and Keita realized how dangerous Deryn usually was in single combat, or when fighting against small groups, including human opponents, whereas Conall was more used to fighting small to moderately large groups of monsters than solitary human - or humanoid and weapon-bearing - opponents.

Both Keita and Conalll recognized that long ago, so the Half-Zipangu swordsman decided to take control of this little training and sparring session and see if the younger Amberwing brother wouldn’t fare better against him, rather than against his older sibling.

Keita rose to his feet and interrupted:

- All right. Switch. Conall-san, I’ll spar with Deryn-kun now.
- Why?
- You two seem to be reluctant to step it up when fighting one another, and you’re so used to fighting
together putting one of you against another probably won’t make you learn all that much. This holds especially true for you, Deryn-kun.

- Hey, it’s not like I’m not holding back! - Conall complained about the suggestion that his brother was less serious somehow, and then realized he just confirmed Keita’s words.

Resigned, the elder Amberwing brother stepped back.

After stepping up and drawing his sword, Keita was the first to move, although Deryn simply waited him out, dodged, and struck with his own sword, a cut from below, almost surprising the Zipangu swordsman with the sheer speed of the move. Keita parried and attempted to immediately slice him crosswise from above, only to be met with a kick to the leg and a sudden strike with Deryn’s mace. Barely dodging it, Keita was pushed into defense for a couple good moments, limited to parrying and dodging until his body finally started to respond to the suddenly quick pace of the spar, evening the battle out.

After a short while, the exchange slowed back down and Keita started talking.

- Based on fighting style alone, it’d be difficult to assess your relationship as an older and younger sibling.

- What do you mean? - both Conall and Deryn asked, surprised at that “revelation”.

- In some ways, Deryn-kun seems to be equally mature as a fighter, if not more so. I mean, when fighting an opponent, between the two of you, he is usually the more ruthless one. Also, young speedster-type warriors sometimes start relying on their speed and agility so much they start to sacrifice precision and skill for it, their attack patterns become predictable and, most of all, they become very easy to counter-attack by someone of sufficient skill or speed themselves. They cannot control their own pace well enough to limit the opportunities their opponents get for such counters, since they’ve invested themselves too much into just being faster than the enemy. Deryn-kun seems to have avoided all these traps and recognize that in a fight where you try to overcome a slower opponent, reflex is even more valuable than speed.

Conall slowly took in what was essentially a compliment for his brother or a comparison to him which Deryn apparently won, but couldn’t really argue with it. Deryn himself just smirked.

- Oh, but of course, you’re way better and discovered it while you were a baby, didn’t you? - Deryn was apparently a bit annoyed at being called ruthless or at his brother being used as a comparison for him at all.

- Not at all. In fact, I’d probably be doing the before-mentioned mistakes myself hadn’t my reflexes naturally overcame my speed at some point due to a certain... life-threatening situation. It’s only then when I made the observation of how much better of a fighter this actually made me, even if it’s obvious in theory.
Alessa, Conall, and Deryn were both slightly stunned at the information - Keita essentially comparing himself unfavorably to Deryn when it came to combat perceptiveness and maturity, at least back when they were the same age - and, seeing how the sparring changed into talking, both Keita and Deryn sheathed their swords after the little workout. They still weren’t in their optimal physical shape, after all.

Alessa decided to voice a doubt that came from her realizing something rather than allow Deryn and Conall to start drilling the Zipangu swordsman for answers.

- It’s kind of odd that Keita would’ve learned all this by accident, while living in a land where the way of the sword is almost a culture in and of itself, and yet Deryn figured it out on his own while being the younger brother of a would-be templar. Did this come with getting some early fighting experience, Deryn? Or did studying fighting with Conall made you go by the book?

Ironically, she achieved the first purpose of the question - to stop Deryn and Conall from asking Keita about his own past, but both of the brothers suddenly got very grim from the direction this conversation was headed. Deryn opened his mouth only to stutter, and finally Conall coughed and cut this short.

- Gee, the conversation kind of strayed from our skills, though, to where we’ve gotten them from! That’s not important at the moment, is it? So, Keita, how about you and me spar for a change?

This was an obvious “let’s not talk about this” speech, and Keita just nodded, taking out his sword and walking over to Conall instead.

[“So, for whatever reason, Conall and Deryn both seem about equally mature as fighters to Keita... and Deryn is the more ruthless one of the two in combat regardless of the opponent, even though he’s younger by two or three years. And, when asked about the possible result of that, they’re not comfortable giving us the answer yet. It seems the Amberwing brothers and their combat skills hide some sort of a secret of their own.”]

- Indomitability Breaker, Ready~!

- Grand Charmer is ready as well, Sara. That means we’re done. So, shall we go and check how our potential targets are?

The auburn-haired sister turned to Kara and smiled.
- Of course! I wonder what it’ll take to get big bro Deryn to come with us!

- It doesn’t really matter. Even if we have to use the artifacts, if we do, it’s as good as done!

- Yay! Now we can return home with the bestest Big Brothers ever!

- Is Bestest a word?

- It is now~!

Deryn was the first to wake up next morning, while it was still very early and saw a basically empty campsite - save for Glaw, who, as usual, was up on watch duty yet seemed to only be “watching” Conall.

The younger Amberwing brother stretched and walked over to the newly-christened-something-like-a-couple, deciding to make his own doubts known while Conall was asleep and the new “deal” between his brother and the slimegirl was still fresh.

- So, you and Conall took a step forward from “bathing”, didn’t you?

- You... you know?

- It’s not hard to guess, especially for someone who knew him forever. Conall’s been acting funny ever since the two of you kinda disappered that one morning. No, there’s been some odd atmosphere between you two for a short while. Anyone that’s not a sociopath would be able to pick *something* up. And I’m his brother, so any weirdness in behavior is all the more obvious to me.

- Woowww! That is really amazing!

- No. Amongst humans, it’s pretty normal. Still, as a brother, I have something to say about whatever the two of you have going on.

- But does it not concern me and Conall only? It is not like you are the one feeding me or him...

Deryn raised an eyebrow.

- We’re family and I have a say in his life. I’m his brother, not his parent, and I’ll let him do whatever he deems appropriate, good, or right. I don’t have to accept everything *you* do, though.

- What do you mean, Deryn?

- It means I’m going to keep an eye on you two. I’ve heard enough of Alessa’s rambles to know that you monsters can mess with your partner’s spirit energy. If I get the feeling anything wrong is happening with my brother’s personality or soul or whatever else, if I deem what you’re doing to be unhealthy to him... the least of what would happen is you getting out of our lives, pronto. You’ll be lucky if your own little slimy existence doesn’t end.

- B-but slimes are...
I don’t want to hear it. This is it, Glaw. All I’ve had to say. We can act all nice to one another and if my brother wants it, I’ll even try to figure out how to become the closest we can be to friends. You fought the Templars with us and protected me, so it’s not like I believe your intentions are really malicious. Just in case, however… if you do intend to do something that could, in any way, harm my brother, this is your only warning. That’s all there is to it.

Glaw was trying to respond, but Deryn just turned on his foot and went to wake the other camp-dwellers up.

The day was a regular one in camp otherwise. They’ve spent some time training and hunting, as well as preparing the new tent so they could be split accordingly. Anyone would call it a job well done, and Keita didn’t even take as much time as on the previous night to fall asleep - though, he was feeling decidedly underslept in the morning before, and was still worried a bit by his inability to simply relax in the presence of the lamia-kindred next to him and fall asleep.

Thinking back on it, the entire situation could’ve been avoided if they weren’t so lenient to the people who were visiting the cave, and weren’t so slack with the morning defenses once everyone was up.

The morning went fairly regularly- after a day of break, Conall was going to... help Glaw feed again, Deryn got up once Conall woke him up to go with Glaw. Deryn let Keita sleep only a short while, then woke him up so the two of them could prepare for training.

In short, Keita was changing into his battle gear a short distance away from camp, Alessa was slithering to meditate inside of the cave to replenish some spiritual energy, and Deryn was still sitting in the camp proper, preparing his gear as well.

All of these circumstances were too advantageous, too good, for Sara and Kara.

Kara decided to hand both of the artifacts to her sister for now, since they might’ve not been neccessary for their plant to succeed.

The Grand Charmer was a large, heart-shaped mirror that could be held like a buckler. It was adorned with pretty pink, red and lavender embroidery and little gems.

The Intomidability Breaker was, perhaps even more appropriately, a one-handed flail. The ball at the end of it was not your usual metal and spiked ball, though; it consisted of something that appeared to
be a sizeable crystal orb fitted with pretty large pearls in place of spikes. That part of the “weapon” alone might’ve cost a fortune, but Kara and Sara learned the true worth of this artifact.

Both the magical items did exactly and precisely what their names would have suggested, and without a fault. The Grand Charmer vastly augmented enchantment and magical compulsion spells, especially charm spells.

The effect, while allowing one to charm or control a person normally outside of their capability to influence with such spells, enhancing their strength in that area, still paled in comparison to what the Intimidability Breaker could do - it was capable of sapping willpower, determination, motivation and mental strength from someone in massive amounts with each hit.

As one could predict, one or two hits with the Intimidability Breaker, the use of a proper Charm spell enhanced by the Grand Charmer and... voila.

One would end up having a slave, and often for life. Such a slave could be made from even the most strong-willed of people, far outside the range of what normally could be accomplished with charm magic by regular people.

Of course, Intimidability Breaker consumed massive amounts of spiritual energy, requiring a lot of spellpower to continue utilizing its effect with every hit under normal circumstances, so it needed recharging unless they wanted to expend all energy they’ve had for weaving spells with every single use of it.

So, if possible, Sara and Kara would’ve preferred not to use both artifacts at once unless the situation called for it, assuming they’d have a chance to use them at some point.

Rushing into the camp that nobody save for Deryn guarded was easy.

The younger Amberwing brother got back to his feet and even held his hand on the sword that was lying next in its scabbard after picking it up, but noticing it was just the duo of little wizard-looking sisters, he put it back down.

- Sara, Kara, you shouldn’t scare me like that! I assume your business is done? I’m sorry to say, but we can’t accompany you straight away if that’s what you’re here for.

- It’s okay, big bro~ We came back for you specifically!

That had Deryn pause for a moment before he responded.
- Uh... what do you mean, me specifically?

- Well, we came here so you can come with us! I don’t think any of your companions are as fun as you, so you’ll be the one we’re going to take on our trip!

- Uhhh... I can’t exactly come with you. You understand, I have...

Kara was the one to interrupt Deryn. There were a couple of presences nearby that made her worried that the operation might not run as smoothly as she hoped.

- No worries~! We’ll make sure you do not worry about your friends after coming with us! I’ll personally devote my time to not make you feel lonely, too!

- I don’t think you understand me. I cannot abandon my comrades because...

- I told you not to worry~! From now on, you won’t be able or allowed to make such choices so the discussion is pointless!

Deryn seemed a little more aware of the danger now, hands on the handles of his weapons. He was also relieved once he heard Keita’s voice from the other side of the camp.

- What the hell’s going on here?

Kara turned to regard the new addition to the “party”. It was the only one that she was capable of sensing save for the apparent monster sorceress somewhere nearby the cave. The man looked like an experienced warrior, and had a really old mark of a mating, probably forceful mating, with a monster, hard to identify... it might’ve been more than one mark, too. Kara wouldn’t mind, but her train of thought was quite clear on the matter - someone who gets raped by other monsters is probably weak and unfit to be her sister’s Big Brother, much less her own! Still, his presence meant he could call the others, and that meant one thing.

- Sara, let’s stop playing and get things done. We gotta get away before too many of them are on hour hands.

- Yay! Okaaaayy! My Big Super Extra Spell of Getting Big Brothers!

Kara slapped her face lightly with a free hand.

- Sara, there’s no such spell and you know it.

- Okie-Dokie~ Sorry about that! Grand Charmer, Activate, Function, Store! Normal Positive Mental Spell : Limerence!

- Limerence? Wait, that was a word, but didn’t it mean...

- Deryn-kun, that’s enough. Those aren’t kids, they’re spellcasters, so...
With a dash, Keita was rapidly approaching Kara, prepared to attack her with his swords. The ‘little girl’ knew better than to allow herself to be slashed up.

- Negative Water Spell, Octopus Spit!

After a rapid gathering of something that looked like transluscent light blue, lighter green and dark purple particles, a blast of ink-like fluid mixed with clear water was fired at high pressure like at the approaching warrior.

Deryn, meanwhile, also had his weapons ready and was about to dash at the two sisters as well.

- A-a-aaah! Big Brother can’t get mean with me so soon~ not when still clothed! Normal Electricity Spell, Shock!

The Zipangu swordsman was too close to avoid any significant part of the impact. Deryn was far enough from Sara that if he was attacked with the same spell as Keita, he might’ve had it in him to dodge - but electricity was a different matter. He felt it temporarily paralyze his muscles, although the damage sustained from the discharge itself seemed practically non-existent.

- Intense Positive Mental Spell : Great Fondness!

The Grand Charmer was positively glowing from the mirror’s surface now, in a rather warm mix of gold and pink. Sara pouted, but then winked and smiled at Deryn.

- Okie-dokie! Just the finishing touch now! Grand Charmer, Unleash Function, Extreme Extension! Grand Charmer, Unleash Function, Intensification! Yay! All done!

Kara was in quite a different situation. While the most of her liquid strike was on target, it didn’t exactly push her opponent away much, nor send him down on the ground - Keita managed to avoid some of it and take a defensive position, with his strength and persistance allowing him to limit the effect to a slight slide and push back, combined with a momentary loss of balance. It was problematic to continue the charge not knowing what spells the girl had at her command, but still, there was a way to deliver damage and stop her from unleashing another attack of hers immediately.

The childish-looking sorceress just saw the - apparently still human - fighter leap at her like a predator and deliver a rather painful kick that sent her body flying back a bit, with her barely managing to land on her butt and not her back.

On the other side of that battle, with a quick incantation about some “unleashing”… Deryn felt like a better man.
There now was this girl lying right atop him, screaming funny words like “Onii-chan” and “Big Bro” and “we’ll have so much fun”, and he somehow realized his life wouldn’t be the same without her. He couldn’t precisely remember how long they’ve known one another, but by now, she was easily the one person he wanted to protect the most in the whole world, and one of the two he cared the most about. It felt so... refreshing, so much better to have someone like that compared to the empty life he had without her.

The object of his affection though looked back, worried, once he heard a certain spell incantation, and a shout to the girl, Sara.

- Intense Earth Spell, Speleothem : Stalagmite! Damnit, dodged? At that range... What the... Sara, a little help here?

- Kara having a problemmmm! Right in the middle of my intimate time with my dear Deryn~ How annoying! Intense Wind and Electricity Spell : Kirin Charge!

The spell stopped Keita from counter-attacking - he felt a sudden blast of air push him right onto a nearby tree, and to add to the damage, electricity was running through his body, painful prickles and much more painful ‘stabs’ of lightning-like damage disarming his muscles, leading to intertwining moments of odd numbness and violent contractions, and slowing down his reaction.

- ~Catch, Sis!

- Good idea! If we have him on our side he’ll slow the others down! Grand Charmer, Discharge!

Sounds outside were barely something she could register, much less something that would distract her from a refreshing, strengthening trance that combined with breathing the heavily spiritual-energy infused air of the Crystalline Karst, but Alessa’s sixth (if it was indeed the sixth, not a higher number) sense gained when she entered that trance informed her immediately of the situation outside - and the situation outside was that there were quite large sources of decidedly non-human magical and demonic energy outside, battling what was Keita’s unmistakable, tainted energy signature with another spiritual energy, most likely Deryn’s given that it was human, just... observing it?

Whether it was some stupid male bet or Deryn didn’t have the balls to hit something Keita would’ve no qualms about hitting, Alessa immediately ceased her meditations and rushed to the outside, slithering on a pace above her normal one.

It was by no means too late for the Echidna to move. Keita’s mind was assaulted with happy images of being hugged and exchanging innocent massages, with a tender, sincere friendship and strong hints of something more - all these sensations and images relating to the rather adorable, if way too serious for her apparent age, little girl that was sitting on her butt, slightly panicked, not that far away
from where he was before the odd electrically charged blast of air pushed him away from it. Like they’ve had that sort of relationship for a long time.

- My dear Kara... - Keita half-sighed.

- Yes. I think I need your help with something, my dear swordsman...

- You don’t even know my name. It’d be a fatal flaw of the relation had your little spell completely succeeded. It appears you and your... friend? No, sister, more likely, are attempting to gather up some slaves, huh? Think having a magical artifact is reason enough to use it and break a person’s will? Whatever. Once I kill you both, there will be no object of affection for Deryn to push these magically-induced feelings onto.

- W-what? What?!

Keita got a better grip of his sword. It’d be difficult to approach them. The only way was to do it fully focused and ready to take advantage of his reflexes. Still, the girl still down on the ground, sitting after flinging several spells. There was a good chance she couldn’t hit him with anything harder than earlier.

Keita’s charge couldn’t have been stopped even by another dark liquid bolt fired at him - this time, he managed to dodge - and even though the girl was back on her feet, that just saved her from dying from the incoming strike. It didn’t matter how she looked - she was a sorceress that aimed to come here and apparently steal Deryn away with some mind-clouding spells, and he would go as far as killing them to stop that from happening.

The girl’s clothes were torn apart, and a long wound was present on her from the slash - along her stomach, abdomen, rib, a small stop, and further cut skin above, an abrasion over her barely budding breast.

- Sara! - the freshly-wounded girl exclaimed, now truly fearing for her own safety.

It wasn’t Sara that moved though. It was Deryn, who immediately was upon Keita, spouting some nonsense as he attempted to push the older fighter away from Kara.

- Sara, give me the other artifact.

- R...Really?

- You get your Deryn and all. But that guy... that motherfucker is the first person in years I considered worthy of becoming *my* “Big Brother”, and hurt me or not, I’m not letting this opportunity slip by.

Moments later, Keita was once again forced to engage in a duel against Deryn, only this time the
younger Amberwing brother was way more frantic in his attacks… and much less careful. The aggressiveness lend some strength to the attacks while deevaluating other crucial points of the youth’s fighting style - thus, Keita was confident he might’ve not even…

… Get hit.

It was the weirdest sensation he felt upon being struck by the little girl, but somehow, he lost the desire to try and dodge the next strikes from her and Deryn that came. After that, he managed to muster it to block human’s attack, but not the little witch’s.


He must’ve been struck five or six times in total. By the time the “surprise” attacks were done, he didn’t particularly find it in himself to try and count… or stand up for more. Normally, when one got hit, the sensation was one of an influx of stimuli - in general, mostly almost pure pain. Keita barely registered the strikes made with the Intimidability Breaker - however, he did notice losing his desire to fight, failing to remember what caused him to defend against Deryn’s attacks in the first place.

Indeed, what was his previous motivation for anything in the first place? He wanted to fix something first and avenge something the as a secondary priority. But it couldn’t be really important, because otherwise he’d actually want to remember, yes?

He then heard a voice he did recognize. First a girl he thought was just going to… hit him, and then… Alessa?

- Sara, the Grand Charmer now, please.
- Sure! There ya go, Sis~
- KEITA!

The duo of witches turned towards the woman shouting… and noticed a monster rather significantly bigger than them slithering down the small slope of a hill right towards them. Kara could immediately tell a spell was about to stop being a plan in the lamia-kindred’s head and get into the ‘making’ phase.

So she reacted first.

- Intense Earth and Water Spell : Slurry Avalanche!

A quick “draw” of hand over the short line of horizon Alessa was descending from, and the lamia
was followed by thick, entrapping sediment of water mixed with earth, stopping her in her tracks.

- **Double Negative Spell, Intense Level: Necromantic Drill!**

- W...what?

The echidna was truly surprised to be assaulted by a spell that was apparently a creative application of a traditional modified and strengthened necromantic ray of negative energy performed by two little witches at once - the beams spun around one another in spirals, creating a shape similar to a traditional unicorn’s horn - or, well, a drill.

The sudden assault literally drilling a mass of flesh-numbing, weakening, life-draining energy right through her put Alessa’s concentration through too much strain to counterattack properly, and that’s just what Sara and Kara aimed for.

- **Double Negative Water and Air Spell, Intense Level: Glaciate!**

Alessa has not felt so… powerless and yet forcefully put down and detached in a long time.

The mix of fluid and muddy ground on her body, turned into a carapace of frozen materia both fluid and solid keeping her in place, feeling as if she just slept for twenty hours outside during hail with breaks for snowing.

Well, that was probably the cold-blooded lamia side speaking.

However, her eyes and mind were still intact enough, though she couldn’t hear, the little girls talking a little, apparently casting a spell on Keita… And then running off, forming familiar-looking walls of ground between the nearby trees to force any pursuers to go on a rondabout way.

Alessa finally managed to start to direct her energy to heat herself up and move fully, but then, she felt someone help her… Conall.

- **Where... where are Keita and Deryn? What happened?**

- K... kidnapped. Two little bitch-witches with artifacts... came and used them to cast some powerful mind-controlling spells or charms on them and...
Conall could feel the slimegirl slithering behind him. Obviously, his first reaction was to blame it on her, but he knew better than that. Facts were facts - he slid off to blow a load and get a far more pleasant, intimate bath than any his until-recently virgin brother ever got to enjoy… while said brother and their traveling companion were being subjected to one of the worst kinds of mental invasion imaginable - a twisting or limitation of their free will.

While he was losing control over his body to pleasure, his little brother was losing it to some hideous spell.

- … they must’ve had been here earlier. Kept an eye on them. Witches of the Sabbat, they seemed to be. In search for “older brothers” to claim. The “bond” between these two and Keita or Deryn will be anything but something between siblings… siblings don’t write themselves into your life and reduce your capability to refuse them… affection for a sibling isn’t fake!

- C-can we track them? Follow them?

- Probably yes. Even if we can’t, I can make a pretty good bet as to where Sabbath witches could be taking new prospective lovers…

- Can the charm be taken off them? Even with these ar…

- We’re wasting time. Make me a fire and try quickly grabbing the essentials and we’re giving chase

- Alessa cut him off, only for Conall to shake her.

- CAN YOU TAKE IT OFF?! Can you make my little brother just Deryn again instead of some magical puppet?

- There’s a chance the artifacts being destroyed would limit the time of the charm… if not…

Alessa managed to move the entirety of her body, coils sliding to where their bonfire usually was.

- Death of the caster generally doesn’t cause more than a few days of coma to the being charmed through magic.

It’s been then that Conall noticed it. He was confused, angry, desperate. But Alessa?

The echidna’s just been plain old furious.

Chapter End Notes

As I mentioned earlier, it isn’t easy for me to write any new content these days, and I'm trying to limit the amount of mistakes in my chapters by re-checking them before posting. However, Wicked Deity still has a bit of content in stock so I might be able to
update it some more even before I hit my free Summer period.

This chapter reflects some of the things certain Western (or even worldwide) audiences might find unsettling about the Monster Girl Encyclopedia... Including people who never age and having your sexual or romantic preference altered magically. While there were both monster and human villains up to this point, I wanted to go for a combination that'd thoroughly show both our heroes' and my overall attitude towards this and paint someone believing themselves to not be a villain at all in a certain light, as well as show how scary 'debuffing' magic can be when utilized in combination with something else.

Certain artifacts might be perceived as immoral by many monsters and humans alike, no matter what they're used on.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!