

Synopsis: When Emperor Jircniv departs the Great Tomb of Nazerick that fateful meeting, he leaves behind his trusted secretary. Reaunet Vermilion, the poor, unfortunate secretary, must now figure out how to survive amongst monsters that would sooner use his organs for stew and his bones for toothpicks than welcome him into their fold. And perhaps, just maybe, he will discover secrets better left buried along the way.

The Strangest Cult To Ever Exist

Reaunet Vermilion, Emperor Jircniv's close secretary and scribe, has always considered himself a patriotic man. He has stood proudly by his liege's side when the young man was but a prince, and never wavered even as said man later drowned the streets in blue blood.

Many whisper about Reaunet's shrewdness and greed for power, and others attempt to buy Reaunet's allegiance for their own merits. Reaunet always turns away the coin, of course, because whilst he *is* an ambitious, opportunistic man, he has never been a snake or turncoat. Some may try to paint him as such, whether to hurt his reputation, steal his position, or even both, but as the sun sets in the west, Emperor Jircniv knows for certain where Reaunet's loyalty lies.

So it's a memorable day when a man willing to personally escort any corrupt family members to the guillotine, thoroughly and heavily considers lopping off his ruler's head with his own two hands. The knight on Reaunet's side is even kind enough to still have a sword sheathed and within reaching distance.

Reaunet watches, with the power of a thousand burning suns in his soul, as his liege and entourage prepare to embark on the journey home. A journey for which *he* should be in attendance!

"... But I would like to establish a way to contact you, perhaps by leaving a representative somewhere with you," the living horror, with a voice and presence that threatens to pull you into the abyss, commands. The two magnetic, crimson flames where eyes should have rested glow brighter as the creature speaks, and it sends an icy shiver down Reaunet's spine.

"Aah, that's a good idea. I'm quite stupid for not thinking of that myself. I'd expect nothing less of you, Sir Gown," his liege chuckles.

"... Mhm."

"All right, I shall be taking my leave, but I'll have my secretary stay here. Could I have you work out the details with him...? Reaunet Vermilion!"

And reality as Reaunet knows it crashes down around him, shattering into tiny pieces at his feet.)

The Emperor is conversing in hushed whispers, heads slightly bowed and backs turned from the rest of the party, with one of the Head Knights a few paces apart from Reaunet. Reaunet's gaze settles upon the Emperor's shoulders like a leaded blanket, and the Emperor is unable to help himself from glancing the secretary's way.

A flicker of guilt crosses the Emperor's expression when his eye locks with Reaunet's, gone too soon to be noticed.

'I will kill you!' Reaunet seethes, mustering every fibre of his being. The white-hot suns in his chest expand to the point of pain, crushing his ribcage, and Reaunet fears he might just combust.

Paint the lush grass red with his blood, so much so that the green blades drip and the soil becomes rich with it.

If someone had told Reaunet that he'd dare to glare at the Emperor like he is now, even a day prior, Reaunet would think that the person had lost their mind. And yet here he is now; praying that the man drops dead with sheer willpower alone.

Emperor Jircniv grimaces before quickly pretending not to have seen it.

Reaunet is jolted out of his dark, tumultuous fantasies when the knight beside him lays a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Hey," the knight coughs awkwardly, "I just wanted to, well... wish you luck, I guess. I don't know much about all of this diplomatic stuff, but it isn't forever, right? I bet you'll be returning home in no time! It'll be nothing more than a bad dream in a few months' time."

Despite not having spoken to this man before, nor does Reaunet remember his name, if they've ever been formally introduced, a wave of gratitude soothes some of Reaunet's sharper edges. Hundreds of good men and capable arms were killed the day the Terror Twins descended from the sky.

The Empire is still reeling from the devastating loss, and will continue to ache for some time. It's sent the military scrambling to fill the sudden void in its wake, and Reaunet doesn't think he's seen so many sorrowful promotions before. Some of the casualties Reaunet knew on a professional note, a few he'd even dared to call his friends.

This reminder that Reaunet isn't the only one in danger, even if he'll be the closest for the foreseeable future, cools the rest of his anger. It steels his spine and sparks a newfound determination. True, Reaunet may have just been thrown to the wolves by a person he once, and foolishly, trusted with his life, but his duty to his countrymen remains.

He is no mage or knight, no, but that simply changes the environment of his war. Not the nature. Reaunet will now be the first line of contact with Nazerick and the Empire. The Empire's sole representative. It'll be up to him to ensure that the great and terrible monsters don't receive another reason to send another golden-scaled 'warning.'

The pen is mightier than the sword, as they often say.

Reaunet inhales deeply as he re-centers himself. "Thank you, Sir. You are correct that it's not the end. Please, I wish you a safe journey home." He smiles brittlely.

He watches as the golden carriages pull out, taking Reaunet's collages and a piece of him along with them. He stays there, rooted in place, long after they disappear. The sun still shines brightly overhead from when it was spelled clear hours ago, and the warm wind caresses his arms and sandy blonde hair.

But despite the pleasant weather, Reaunet has never felt so cold.

"Shall we head inside?" One of the many beautiful 'maids' -what actual maid wears *combat gear* so openly? Reaunet inwardly scoffs- steps forward, drawing his attention from the open plains. She's tall, with inky-black hair pulled tightly into a bun and glasses perched on her narrow nose, which gives off a dignified air.

If not for the giant green gauntlets, white apron, and armour plates at her hips and left shoulder, Reaunet would have clocked her as a young, yet stern governess.

He clears his throat. "Yes, thank you. I am looking forward to getting better acquainted with your marvellous... nation. I will be in your care."

The maid inclines her head, ever professional. "This way, please. I shall guide you to your room."

'For the Empire,' he reminds himself grimly, as he follows her back into the beast's maw.

'This is a cult,' is Reaunet's firm conclusion five days into his stay. He would have come to it sooner if the sole human maid, Tuareninya Veyron, hadn't been assigned to his room and therefore provided a fleeting hope otherwise.

Alas, it was not meant to be, and Reaunet has been swiftly stripped of this delusion the first time he overheard talks about 'creation' and 'Supreme Beings.' Hell, watching that terrifying succubus and vampire duo nearly duke it out in the hallway convinced Reaunet that he's no longer on Earth, but some sort of parody dimension.

Reaunet is also highly insulted by the very premise of their argument, on behalf of all men -how do they expect to birth a freaking *skeleton's* child?! And why does a monster without a libido get all of these stunning, hot as hell beauties?!

It's unfair, Reaunet declares! Unfair!

He expected a lot when he stepped into the Tomb for the second time. He'd even braced himself for torture in case this 'Lord Ainz' fellow went back on his word sooner than expected, or he got caught trying to find a turncoat for the Empire... but never did he expect to be a spectator for such outlandish fights among the upper ranks, or even whatever... *this* is.

"Shinier! Shinier, I said! Do you know what 'shinier' means? It means more shiny!"

Reaunet stares, flummoxed, as a stout, talking penguin lectures three masked men as they hurriedly polish a metal armour each. *'What...?'*

"And you there!"

He jolts as the penguin suddenly spins around and points a fin straight at him, a determined gleam in the animal's beady eye. "Er, yes?" Reaunet questions.

"Why are you just standing there?" The penguin demands, waddling right up to him with frightening speed. "You should be cleaning! Cleaning! How do you ever expect to reach even a *tenth* of my magnificent skill with such an appalling attitude?!"

"I-"

"Well, even a tenth might be too much," the penguin continues, beak pointing up as he laughs boastfully. "Still! That's no reason to be lazy! I, the spectacular Éclair Éclair Éklare, will teach you! No need to thank me!"

"I'm not a servant!" Reaunet blurts out, double-checking his attire. Tan vest and slacks, pressed white shirt with a deep ocean blue scarf and matching handkerchief. Decidedly *not* a help's uniform. His neck and cheeks flush uncomfortably.

Éclair peers up at him curiously. "No? An Area Guardian, perhaps? Well, why are you here then? Which floor do you belong to? You're tracking mud all over my clean carpet!" he accuses loudly.

"A what?" Reaunet asks dumbly. *'And how rude!'* He wonders how on earth he's found himself being held hostage by a talking, flightless bird. His older brother would laugh himself to death if he saw him now!

"Ah, I see you've met our guest, Éclair."

The low, matter-of-fact voice acts like a bucket of ice-cold water dousing Reaunet, causing him to go ramrod straight and flinch backwards simultaneously. In comparison, Éclair is much more excited to see their newest member, snapping to a salute as the monster draws closer.

The three masked men immediately drop their cleaning supplies and bow at the waist, side by side.

"My Lord!" Éclair cries in delight.

Reaunet closes his eyes and inhales deeply. *'Gods, please no please please no -anyone but him! Don't let it be him!'* Gathering his quickly scattering nerves in a mental fist, Reaunet slowly, stiffly turns around and opens his eyes. Only to promptly deflate inside.

The Gods have abandoned him.

"L-Lord -ah, I mean Your Majesty! What brings you here?" Reaunet squeaks out, only to instantly despair. He wishes desperately to snatch the words back, mocking him as they replay in his head. Dear Gods! He prays that the monster doesn't take offence and skin him alive. Reaunet swears he didn't mean to imply that the monster required anyone's *permission*, much less his own!

"There is no need for such formalities," he says, stopping a polite distance away. "'Lord Ainz' is sufficient." Even still, his imposing frame looms over Reaunet like a guillotine to a criminal. Reaunet doesn't even notice the maid who shadows King Ainz's every step, placing herself three feet behind him as a constant companion.

The morbid part of Reaunet wonders what he was before he became the undead, as surely no *human* skeleton could ever be so large. Why, he must be at least seven feet tall! A giant? Half-giant? Ah, but Reaunet has become distracted! Not good! Not good at all!

"Oh, but I couldn't possibly! To act so informally would not only insult your lordship, but the budding friendship between the Empire and the Great Tomb of Nazerick! Emperor Jircniv is dedicating himself to having your nation recognized worldwide as we speak!" Is Reaunet sweating bullets? Is his voice a higher pitch than he ever recalls it being? Yes, yes it is.

But it's either this embarrassing display... or the utter humiliation of soiling oneself. Put like that, Reaunet doesn't mind the pitch all that much.

'For the Empire. I am here for the Empire,' Reaunet reminds himself faintly.

"... Mhm. Indeed," King Ainz responds simply, and Reaunet feels a bit of the tension bleed from his shoulders.

Not all of it, mind you, but some of it. *'Looks like he was only being modest.'* In high society, it's considered polite for someone of a lower class to politely 'reject' a request to discard or lessen further respectful mannerisms. Only after the second insistence may they accept in good faith. And it appears that Reaunet made the right call here, too.

He might not be skinned alive after all! Oh, how he does enjoy his flesh intact!

"Did you come to praise my effort? Are you cowering in awe, in the sheer splendour? It won't be long until *I* will be ruling the Great Nazerick! Hahahaha!"

"Tch." The maid's expression becomes pinched as she watches her indirect superior, but says nothing more.

Reaunet chokes, utterly aghast. Mouth ajar, eyeballs nearly popping out of his skull as he stares down at the penguin. He's pretty sure his soul is drifting towards the grand ceiling, all the while the demented bird continues to laugh and boast proudly.

An abnormally large, glossy skeleton hand reaches out, and Reaunet instinctively shuts his eyes and shifts his torso away, certain that the pristine carpet will be replaced shortly. Reaunet's own suit and stomach contents, as well, depending on the blood splatter.

"..."

"It is impressive," King Ainz agrees easily. "Well done, as always. Please continue to serve Nazerick well in the future."

'What?'

Reaunet cautiously peeks, only to be flummoxed anew. He hardly dares to believe his eyes, and considering he once witnessed a walking mushroom man with tentacle-like root hands mixing drinks, the bar is extremely high indeed.

At least all of the unique, grotesque inhabitants still fall within the fact that it's a monsters' underground palace. Made for, and by said monsters. Of course there are all types of creatures that Reaunet has never had the misfortune of meeting before!

But *this*? Watching King Ainz pat Éclair like one would a pet and... *congratulate* him on a job well done after he *literally just declared intent for treason* is... is...

Reaunet has no words —absolutely none.

No, that's not entirely true. He would very much like to go home, back where society makes sense. Right now!

"Of course! By the time I'm done, the palace will sparkle bright enough to blind! Come, come, you fools! We have work to do!" Éclair announces as he herds the three masked men to a different part of the floor, out of sight.

This leaves Reaunet alone with the undead monster without a proper buffer. The man begins to sweat heavily and prays that neither the King nor the maid sees it.

"..."

"..."

"... Lord Vermilion, was it?"

"Y-Yes, Your Majesty?" Reaunet stutters, voice raising another octave.

"You have been here a few days now, correct?"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

"How have you been settling in? No trouble, I hope?"

'Why is he asking me this? Why is he trying to make polite conversation?' Reaunet wallows quietly to himself. Yet, he can not allow it to show on his face. "Oh, splendidly! Your staff has been very accommodating, a guest couldn't wish for a better welcome!" he lies easily.

Reaunet thought the King would recognize such an obvious white lie, but it appears not, based on the response. Perhaps Reaunet is a better liar than he thought?

"Indeed? I heard that there was a bit of a disagreement amongst the maids about who would have to attend to your rooms at first, so Miss Veryon volunteered to take up the task. It's heartening to hear that they've warmed up to you since then," King Ainz hums.

Behind the monster, the maid flushes red and lowers her eyes in shame. In truth, they hadn't been very welcoming to the royal guest in the least, and after Reaunet had made the poor blunder of assuming them human slaves due to their numerical names, had iced him out entirely. That was on the very first day, and since then, Miss Veryon had been the only one to see to Reaunet's needs.

To think that they've unknowingly disregarded and spat on the Supreme One's will...

King Ainz and Reaunet are once again plunged into awkward silence, neither party knowing what to say next, when King Ainz spots something on the far wall.

"Ah, I had forgotten that we had placed it there..."

"Pardon?" Reaunet twitches, glancing behind his shoulder to follow King Ainz's gaze. There, against the dark wall trim, is a large, golden-framed painting.

It consists of nine members, one of whom is King Ainz, dressed in much less impressive red and black robes than his current attire. A tall man in silver, full-body armour has his arm wrapped around the skeleton, and on the knight's other side are a pink slime monster and a birdman. Reaunet doesn't know what to make of the other five, grotesque figures.

'No, this is no simple painting,' he corrects himself a moment later. He watches in fascination as the image changes, and another one with an even larger group of people is revealed. *'It's a magic artifact!'*

"Are these the other Supreme Beings?"

"How do you know that?"

Reaunet jolts at the sharp note that King Ainz's tone has gained, heart thundering, and responds with the utmost care, lest the terrifying monster decides to cut out Reaunet's shameless tongue; "Ah, Your Majesty, I meant no disrespect! Simply, I had overheard a few of your servants briefly mention the greatness of the others, and once I saw this masterpiece, I knew without doubt that they could be no one else! Truly, their power can be felt even through the paint!"

King Ainz visibly calms down, and Reaunet breathes a sigh of relief. "Is that so? Indeed, those are the very same comrades. Do you recognize them by chance?"

Recognize them? How, and why, on earth would Reaunet *recognize them*? "Er, I'm afraid not. I surely would have remembered if any human had the fortune to cross paths with such distinguished Beings. No, I'm certain *legends* would have been told of their greatness!"

They'd be legends of *horrors*, but Reaunet elects not to voice that silent bit. The heavy weight of the maid's gaze bores into Reaunet's skull, and a shiver runs down his spine. He's never been

frightened by mere servants before, but something about these Tomb grunt workers probs at his hindbrain.

"Mhm."

Is it just Reaunet, or does King Ainz sound disappointed? He hesitates to ask the sole question that burns his tongue, one which has haunted him for days. King Ainz has appeared chatty to some extent, but that could swiftly change if Reaunet oversteps his bounds.

'For the Empire.' Reaunet takes a deep breath and steels his spine. "Your Majesty, forgive me if I overstep, but are you by chance... *searching* for your comrades?"

King Ainz stills, and the orbs of light for his eyes burn brighter. "What gives you that impression?" he questions curtly.

Reaunet licks his lips, and he resists the urge to wipe his sweaty palms on his pants or fidget. "Nothing too glaring, but, mhm... your tone is rather wistful when speaking of them. If not lost, are they... departed?"

The maid stiffens, eyes wide as she turns to her liege.

Reaunet holds his breath as he waits for the response. *'Please be dead, please be dead, please...'* It's horrifying enough to be in the presence of King Ainz's underlings. For the monster to possess *equals*?

No, no! It's too much! Humankind won't survive!

"..."

Just as Reaunet prepares himself to get down on his knees, certain he's gone too far, King Ainz speaks:

"They are not dead. However, it has been some time since I've seen them, and Nazerick will never stop waiting for their return."

Ice freezes Reaunet's veins. *Truth.* King Ainz is speaking honestly, and it scares Reaunet more than that toad demon, Demiurge, placing Reaunet's group under his thrall in the Throne Room.

For the first time, Reaunet despairs over his natural talent, Truth Seeker. The ability to know when someone speaks falsehoods to Reaunet, so long as the person knows it is a lie. It also has a passive ability for the user to appear more trustworthy to strangers, but it's so weak that it doesn't act as more than a mere suggestion to the subconscious.

It's primarily why he's been able to climb so high within the Empire and has stayed at the Emperor's side. But now it only serves to careen him further into the abyss.

"I see," Reaunet chokes out. "Do you know where they are? When will they return?" His mouth is dry, blood rushing to his ears. It takes all of his remaining energy to stand up straight and not collapse right then and there.

"Unfortunately, I can not tell you. It is partially the reason why I seek to bring Nazarick into the light and spread the name Ainz Ooal Gown. If I can not find them myself, I hope that someday they will be able to find us." King Ainz visibly startles, surprised by his own words. If he'd had lips, he'd surely frown.

Perhaps the smart thing to do is to back off, excuse himself before King Ainz realizes what's happening. But then what? There is no guarantee that Reaunet will be afforded such a golden opportunity again!

Reaunet doesn't dare waver his attention from the monster even for a second, and adjusts his body language to something more open. "And in the meantime, until you and your comrades can reunite? I beg you to pardon my boldness, but someone as knowledgeable as your lordship is surely aware of the... less than stellar reputation the, ah, undead have with the living..." he trails off, slowly losing the courage that had carried him this far.

Thankfully, King Ainz is not offended by Reaunet's words. He tilts his head as he regards Reaunet curiously. "You are referring to the mindless, bloodthirsty nature of the common, low-level undead, correct?"

'*Low-level?*' Reaunet blinks at the odd phrasing, but quickly pushes it aside. "Yes, Your Majesty."

King Ainz chuckles, and the grave sound raises goosebumps along the man's arms. "I am what is known as an Overlord, formerly an Elder Lich, and have long since surpassed the crazed hatred that the undead wandering the Plains possess. To compare me to them would be like comparing a mighty dragon to a pet lizard."

"Please forgive me! I am but a mere scribe, ignorant of your ways!" Reaunet hastily bows low. Even still, he can't help but wonder how many of these 'Elder Liches' exist in the world, and his head spins in ways he can pass this information to the Emperor. If he survives his stay, that is.

King Ainz raises his hand, dismissing Reaunet's plea. "Consider it forgotten. I understand your fear and curiosity, and do not hold it against you. Know that I do not harbour any anger or disgust toward humankind, nor do I intend to graze the world to ash. I meant every word when I told your Emperor that I look forward to what Nazerick and the Empire will achieve together in the future."

Truth. The reality is nearly enough to buckle Reaunet's knees, and it's through sheer luck that he's able to lock his legs in place. Even knowing that a lack of anger and disgust does not necessarily guarantee goodwill. The fact that his main goal isn't humanity's destruction is a mountain off Reaunet's shoulders.

"If that is all, I will take my leave. I hope that you enjoy the rest of your stay with us," King Ainz says.

"Yes! Thank you, Your Majesty!" Reaunet bows again as King Ainz turns his back on Reaunet, returning to where he came from. However, before following her master, the maid glances towards Reaunet and hesitates.

Squaring her shoulders, she clasps her hands in front and bows shallowly. "On behalf of the homunculi maids, I sincerely apologize for our disgraceful behaviour. It has become clear to me that you have begun to see the light, and it would be remiss for us not to help guide you. If you'd like, you may join us for meals in the cafeteria, and we can share further testimonies of the Supreme Ones." She straightens with a nervous smile.

The offer is eerily like the ones Reaunet received on diplomatic trips to the Slane Theocracy, only back then it had been to church and lunch afterwards. Reaunet has never been particularly religious, either towards the Four or Six Gods. But for his nation? He will gladly play the part of the devoted sheep. Even if that entails dining with servants.

"That would be most appreciated, thank you," he smiles.

Meanwhile, King Ainz is left wondering to himself why he'd been so unusually forthcoming with another soul.

"Reaunet, over here!"

Reaunet plasters on an easy smile when his name is called, adjusting his course to meet up with the beckoning group. "Fifth, Twenty-Sixth, and Eleventh," he greets the ladies warmly. "I hope that it's been a pleasant morning for all?"

Fifth, the ash-blonde with a bob-cut who originally introduced Reaunet to this circle of friends, beams with pride. "The best! I just got off Lord Ainz duty this morning; Fourteen replaced me. Oh, but I do wish the shifts were longer. I wouldn't mind forty-eight hours, or even ninety-six!" she giggles.

"Oh, stop bragging already! My day off isn't for another week, which means I have to wait eight more days until I get a turn!" Twenty-Sixth groans as she buries her head in her hands. Her curly, ginger hair is pulled into a high ponytail and cascades down her back and shoulders. Her skin is paler than even Reaunet's, a feat he considers impressive.

'*Urg.*' Reaunet hides a grimace as he sits down on the outer end, next to Eleventh and tucks into his breakfast tray. When Fifth first offered to include him in sharing their 'testimonies' over a month ago, he'd prepared himself for Mass. An organized time and place where they read scriptures, listen to lectures, and sing hymns.

Instead, he finds himself stuck in a women's celebrity gossip circle.

True, they occasionally drop useful information, but he could do without knowing which shade of gold brings out King Ainz's eyes, or how gracefully he sits and rises from his desk chair.

Reaunet's elder brother must *never* find out what he's done to collect the meagre information he has. Let the lazy lout think whatever he wants, so long as he never knows that Reaunet once let his nails be painted in different Supreme Beings' colour theme!

'*This is a cult,*' Reaunet reminds himself as he listens with half an ear as Fifth describes her shift in excruciating detail. '*The strangest cult to ever exist.*'

"What do you think, Rea?" Eleventh asks him. Like every other humanoid, her dark skin is perfectly unblemished, her many tiny braids dangling just past her collarbone as she stares up at Reaunet.

"Hmm?" He blinks, looking up from his delicious eggs and ham. Honestly, if it were for the food alone, Reaunet wouldn't mind staying forever. Absolute heaven!

"Master Demiurge has organized a session where we can gather and share memories of the Supreme Beings on the seventh floor, with food and drinks provided. He even personally requested to Lord Ainz that you join! And Lord Ainz granted it! Isn't that wonderful?" Eleventh claps her hands excitedly, hazel eyes sparkling.

... Reaunet suddenly loses any and all appetite.

"Demiurge?" he repeats in a strangled voice.

"*Master* Demiurge," Twenty-Sixth corrects him swiftly.

"Right, yes, Master Demiurge. Did he truly?" '*Please be a joke, please be a joke-*'

"He did!" Fifth confirms brightly. "I heard it from Thirty-Third myself! She was on Lord Ainz duty when he asked!"

"So you'll attend, right?" Eleventh repeats. "I remember you mentioning that you wanted to explore the other levels, but aren't allowed to leave the ninth and tenth floors."

"Ah, well... a memory session, you say? It sounds like we do already, only with a larger audience," he chuckles nervously.

"Oh, it's much more than that!" Fifth gushes. "He even promised to tell all those in attendance the night he and Lord Ainz gazed at the stars together!"

Reaunet blinks. "Gazed... at the stars together..." Is *Master Demiurge* also desiring to carry King Ainz's child? Honestly, Reaunet can't tell what the fiend hopes to accomplish by inviting him along. Reaunet's done an excellent job at avoiding the demon, and he has no wish to break the streak.

He still vividly remembers his first encounter with him. The way his toad eyes had stared down at him as if Reaunet were an annoying, insignificant bug to squash. How deep the self-betrayal cut when he was forced to kneel without his permission, feeling like a prisoner in his own body.

But can Reaunet afford to decline the generous 'offer'? No, no, he can not. So Reaunet smothers down the instinctive need to run away screaming and tells the ladies, "It would be my pleasure. What time is the gathering?"

The seventh floor, Reaunet comes to learn several hours later, is the embodiment of hell on earth. Sweltering, oppressive heat, smelling of sulphur and anguish. There is extremely little artificial light, so Reaunet is forced to navigate the rocky terrain by the sizzling lava's glow and the fire torches lined on the cavern walls. He makes sure to stick close to his guides, who appear much more confident in comparison, and only partly to avoid the other monsters' curious and hungry gaze.

If not for Reaunet's Truth Seeker talent, and the chattering of the rest of the herd, he would have thought that this was a trap. As it is, he morbidly wonders if anyone is planning to 'accidentally' push him into the lava.

All in all, the seventh floor feels tailor-made for its head Guardian.

Everyone, humanoids and grotesque monsters and everything in between, congregate in a large opening, where a three-foot-tall wooden platform has been prepared with dozens of rows of blankets and pillows scattered in front. Reaunet and the three maids he's attended with are about to settle in the middle of the pack, when a dominating raven birdwoman at the front spots them.

"You there! Empire guest and friends! Come here!" She beckons them forth, gesturing to four empty pillows centre stage in the first row. Reserved, apparently, for them.

Reaunet knew it. The fiend is out to get him! On what *Demiurge* plans to do, exactly, and why, Reaunet can't possibly imagine, but he bloody well *knew it!*

Meanwhile, the maids are pleasantly surprised and all but drag Reaunet to their assigned seating, thanking the birdwoman enthusiastically. As they settle down, Twenty-Sixth peers at the growing crowd behind them.

And promptly makes a face. "Urg. Why did the Prince of Fear have to attend as well?"

Interest firmly piqued, Reaunet struggles to spot who she's referring to. "Who?"

Twenty-Sixth points him out. A damn-near one-foot-tall *cockroach* in a red cape and tiny crown, sitting politely three rows back.

Reaunet chokes. "*That's* the heir-"

"Oh, no! That's just his name! He's not the Prince of *Nazerick*! He was created by Lord Lucifer to help guard the second floor," Fifth explains hurriedly, even as she turns a bit green around the gills as she stares at the humanous bug.

'Again with this 'creation' nonsense. They must truly take the rebirth through faith ideology seriously.' He believes that the Six Gods' following has something similar. Reaunet glances towards the homunculi maids. *'Then again, perhaps it's literal in some cases.'*

"If anyone is the heir, it must be Pandora's Actor, right?" Eleventh muses.

"Who's he?" Reaunet questions cautiously.

"Lord Ainz's son, of course."

'Hold on, so the skeleton can actually sire offspring?!' It takes all of his self-control not to blurt out the words, and to grapple with his spasming facial features. Fortunately, none of the ladies are looking in his direction. *'Don't be hasty now, it could be a case of adoption,'* he scolds himself.

By the Gods, he sincerely hopes that's the case!

Reaunet is forced to forget the line of succession for the time being when Demiurge steps onto the platform, and the hundred-something crowd of monsters quiet down in anticipation.

"Welcome, fellow denizens, and a *special* welcome to our royal guest from the Empire," he purrs, eyes acting like shackles as he pins Reaunet to the spot. His metallic, spiked tail flickers behind him lazily, reminding Reaunet starkly of a prowling, mischievous cat. "I am delighted that so many of you were able to join tonight, and I look forward to hearing your personal experiences with our esteemed Supreme Ones.

"Before that, however, I would like to start us off with a story of my own." Demiurge waits patiently for the responding, roaring cheer to settle down. His grin widens. "Yes, yes, I'm sure some of you may have heard a version of this by word of mouth, but for those that desire the full, original version..."

Lie. Instinctively, Reaunet knows that Demiurge just lied. This 'experience' will either not be the full or original version. Although he supposes it's to be expected, for Demiurge to edit events in consideration of his foreign ears...

"Lord Ainz appeared one night, searching for a leisurely stroll outside. Of course, as the master amongst even the other Supreme Beings, Lord Ainz is much more than a mere 'force to reckon with'," Demiurge chuckles, to the crowd's singular cheering. "Even we, lovingly handcrafted by the Supreme Ones, are nothing but an insignificant speck of dust in light of Their utter brilliance.

"Still, perhaps greedily, I feared for Lord Ainz. Terror had gripped my heart at the idea of the last remaining master walking into unknown danger, and I knew no matter what, I would never forgive myself if something happened. So I pleaded with Lord Ainz to permit me to escort Him, to use my body to shield His precious lordship as we were born to do. In His infinite generosity and wisdom, He granted me this favour."

The maids on either side of Reaunet coo and sigh, as if the demon had just waxed the most beautiful poem. Demiurge's expression as he regales all of this... Reaunet has witnessed less intense, 'blissful' expressions on the prostitutes that his uncle likes to parade around. Earlier doubts of Demiurge's orientation are beginning to gain increasing traction, and Reaunet isn't certain if he should be more disgusted or embarrassed on Demiurge's behalf.

Even the maids were never able to make such innocuous actions sound so... so *dirty!* And nothing has even happened yet!

"The marvellous feeling of Lord Ainz's magic caressing His majestic form as He expertly performs [Fly]... It never touched me directly, unfortunately, but simply being in His presence caused a thrill to go up my spine!" Demiurge continues proudly.

'Yep. Most definitely gay,' Reaunet concludes resolutely.

"As we ascended higher and higher into the cloudless sky, the very world opened up as it sensed its one true ruler's presence. Each time the wind made the lush grass sway, they sparkled. The jewelled stars and moon shone in the heavens. For a moment, Lord Ainz became engrossed in His memories of Lord Blue Planet, who, as we know, is deeply passionate for the earth's wellbeing, which humans have selfishly poisoned with their filthy ways-

The audience erupts in loud growls and scorn, causing Reaunet to flinch and curl into himself. The maids he's taken painstaking efforts to endear himself to either don't care, or are too consumed in the narrative to notice as they join in cursing the humans.

"Disgusting bugs!"

"Inferior lifeforms!"

"Their blood will never be worthy to wet our throats, much less the Supreme Ones!"

The darkly satisfied look Demiurge sends Reaunet's way ensures the man knows that's what *he* intended. As if to say to Reaunet, *'See? You thought you had forged connections? Did you foolishly delude yourself into believing that you could ever pry us from Lord Ainz? Have us give our allegiance to the Empire? Stupid, useless human.'*

Eventually, Demiurge gestures for the riled crowd to settle, and it takes a few reminders from the mid-ranked monsters for the noise to finally cease. Demiurge clears his throat, projecting a deeper voice as he imitates King Ainz. "For He had turned to me and said, 'Being able to see just by the light of the moon and stars -this definitely can't be the real world, huh, Blue Planet? Everything sparkles like a box of jewels.'

"It was at this exact, glorious moment I was able to grasp one one-hundredth of our illustrious Lord's masterplan. That He had approached the first floor, knowing that I would meet Him there. That I would strive to follow Him into the night. He had never attended for a simple flight, no, but to allow a single glimpse into His plans so that I may help teach and guide you in His stead.

"Overcome with appreciation" -indeed, Demiurge is getting choked up recounting the day- "I said, 'Perhaps it *is* a box of jewels. This world must be beautiful because it contains jewels you are meant to adorn yourself with, my Lord.'

"It is truly beautiful. Perhaps this untouched box of jewels exists to be mine for the taking,' He agreed."

'Oh Gods no...' Reaunet thinks with a sickening horror. Dread sits in his gut like a stone in water, with a startling clarity that there's not a single thing he can do to stop this upcoming catastrophe. Worst still, by sharing this with Reaunet, it seals his death warrant. Reaunet will never, ever leave the Tomb.

"In my haste, I eagerly offered to mobilize Nazerick's army and take the entire box of jewels for His pleasure. I declared that nothing would make me happier than to do so! Alas, to my shame and gratification, He scolded me for being too rash. Impatient. That we first must gather intelligence on the surface dwellers before we act.

"We are truly most fortunate to serve a wise master like Lord Ainz. No, King! For when we put the Re-Estize Kingdom in their place, we will be one step closer to adorning the Great Ainz Ooal Gown, the Sorcerer King, with everything this world has to offer!" Demiurge announces loudly.

If Reaunet thought the applause was uncomfortable earlier, it's *deafening* now. People are showering Demiurge with a standing ovation while Reaunet can do nothing but sit there, paralyzed with the truth. King Ainz may not desire to see the world burn... yet Reaunet believes that Demiurge will lay those same ashes at his feet regardless.

May the Gods, any God, save them all.

End.
