

# LIFE OF A SUMMONER

## 召喚師的馴獸日常

*This fantasy tale of magical creatures and powerful summoners was one of the bestselling light novels of 2016 on both Books.com.tw and Kingstone.*

*Life of a Summoner* takes place in a world where mankind coexists with magical beasts who are compelled to obey when called by a summoner into the human realm. The beasts are divided into grades according to their strength, and a summoner can only call on them if he or she has a corresponding level of magic and willpower. Norr, an insouciant fawn, is a grade B beast. He would be capable of battling with the most powerful of beasts if he chose to, but Norr, the guardian of the grasslands, keeps his true strength hidden.

One day, Norr finds himself summoned by a nervous-looking young summoner named Nyshi. Unlike most summoners, Nyshi has no interest in bullying the most powerful beasts, preferring the company of rabbits, earth spirits and trees. Instead of forcing Norr into battle, Nyshi invites him to share an afternoon tea. Yet the relationship between the two is threatened when an encounter with the crazed dragon clan compels Norr to reveal his true power. Upset by Nyshi's decision to quit summoning him, Norr tries to win him over again, but ends up endangering himself in the process. Now Norr will have to find a way out of trouble – and, in doing so, perhaps find out the real reason why Nyshi seems so afraid of the highest-grade beasts.

This innovative debut from Cao Cao Ni was originally serialized on Cite Original's online platform. After an overwhelmingly positive response from readers, *Life of a Summoner* was published in a series of six print installments over the last eighteen months.

By Cao Cao Ni 草草泥

Cao Cao Ni belongs to a new generation of fantasy writers in Taiwan. A keen fan of western fantasy and fairy tales, she draws inspiration for her fiction from action RPG games. She is currently working on *Alice Online*, a new internet novel that updates the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

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By Cao Cao Ni

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## Prologue

In ancient times, humans and magical beasts were locked in a territorial war for thousands of years. At last, one thousand years ago, the war concluded: after the beasts were steadily forced to retreat, the two sides signed a peace treaty.

Although the magical beasts kept control of their land, they did so under the condition that every beast had to obey mankind. At any time or any place, they had to answer man's call to go to the land of humans to help them finish any task.

Because of this, a new profession appeared in the world of mankind: the summoner.

Since anyone could become a summoner, this profession grew popular very quickly.

Today we will tell the story of a summoner... well, no... the story of a summoned beast.

## Chapter One

Norrcesei always said there was no equality in this world. From the time they were born, magical beasts were mankind's slaves. They had identifying charms branded on their bodies. Even newborn beasts were no exception.

In the few hundred years after the great war was over, the need to appear at any time and any place was the cause of great discontent among the beasts and incited several notable revolutions. However, the revolutions always failed.

And so, the magical beasts could only resign themselves to their fate. They had no time of their own; they could be interrupted at any moment, no matter what they were doing. They were lifelong slaves of mankind. This was a tragedy no matter how you looked at it.

But after a thousand years, the situation had changed.

"Well, you can't say it was a change. We're still mankind's slaves. It's just everyone's used to it; you may as well say being summoned is a part of our lives."

A hare dressed like a gentleman farmer sat on the lecturer's table and spoke to the class below. His listeners spanned an assortment of different clans: girls with goat horns; boys with striking plumage and rooster combs; a young girl with a cowbell around her neck who looked as if she was about to sleep, holding a squinting, fluffy sheep.

"Look! I stole – ahem – brought back – this textbook from the world of mankind."

Mr. Hare wriggled his body, and enthusiastically pushed a book from behind him to the front of the table. He struggled to steady and open the book, which was almost as tall as he was.

The book was full of intricate ink illustrations; each page held the image of one magical beast with its summoning charm and description below.

"These have been recorded in mankind's textbooks – they're the really famous beasts!"

This brought a light to the eyes of the beasts listening below; they began to shout excitedly, and even that sleepy little girl woke up.

One picture was of a headless knight in black armor. Carrying his helmet, riding a stalwart black stallion, and lifting a sharp blade, he looked noble.

"This is the doughty headless knight, Legans! He belongs to the supernatural clan, and his summoning level is S! It's said his blade can cut any magical knot. He is one of the most famous fabulous beasts. It's also said that three hundred years ago one of the bravest of men summoned him and so was able to rescue his country."

"Wow – brilliant! Rescuing the whole country!"

"Why is his summoning charm visible? Won't that make it easy for people to call him?"

"There are very few men who can summon an S level beast. Even if everyone in the world knew his charm, I'm afraid there wouldn't be more than a handful who could use it."

"That's great! All the glory goes to us beasts!"

"Don't you agree? Norr?"

When he heard people calling his nickname, Norrcersei, who had been leaning against the corner sleeping, slowly opened his eyes.

On the outside, he looked like a man in his twenties: he had a pair of beautiful green eyes and a head of gleaming raven-black hair; he was the kind of man people would call beautiful. He was dressed head to toe in black except for a puffy white wool scarf around his neck. The only thing that set him apart from a human in appearance was a pair of curling horns.

"Yes. Splendid," Norr replied half-heartedly. Just as he was shutting his eyes to continue his nap, a small furry hand tugged at his horns. He frowned, and shot a dirty look at Mr. Hare, who somehow had leapt before him.

"Now really! As the only B level magical beast, you need to show more energy! What are you doing napping?"

Faced with Mr. Hare's criticism, Norr gave an enormous yawn, sat up, and straightened his sleep-tousled hair.

"But everything you're talking about is impossible for us."

Mr. Hare's face darkened; what Norr said was true.

It was indeed impossible for farm animals like them to reach the level of the warring, noble, magical creatures. Most of the time they were summoned it was to finish farmwork; Norr, for example, usually helped take care of sheep. Mr. Hare also knew that his own most common task was farm work, and sometimes to serve as a lucky charm. Sometimes people would even summon him just to pet his soft fur.

"As long, as long as we work hard, we can be like them one day too! We can't have the other fabulous beasts looking down on us!" Mr. Hare said doggedly, stamping his paw.

A man with a rooster comb stood up. "That's right!" He said loudly and fervently. "We farm beasts can do battle too! There will come a day when we'll show everyone how powerful we are!"

Norr looked at the listeners applauding with a dispassionate look, then yawned again.

He thought of the books he had read that morning about the past revolutions. When he looked at the scene in front of him, he couldn't understand how things had come to be this way.

It was a fact: the animals before had hated being enslaved by the humans, but the animals today had come to see being summoned as a source of meaning.

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"Hahaha – did you really say that?"

"Yes – they were very moved afterwards."

"Well, of course! The magical beasts today glory in being summoned!"

In an unusually noisy bar, Norr sat after work, drinking and shaking his head. His good friend Feytney drained a glass of beer and pounded his shoulder. The force of the blow almost made Norr spit out his beer. But this was far from being the first time, and so he had already gotten used to hastily swallowing down his drink.

"The more mankind reveres us magical beasts, the more useful we are!"

Feytney wagged his tail happily, one arm locked affectionately around Norr's neck.

Norr glanced at Feytney and took another drink without speaking. Naturally being summoned was a sign of honor to Feytney, since no-one was going to call a wolf to do farmwork.

Feytney's head was crowned with a pair of coffee-colored wolf ears, and a fluffy but uninviting tail wagged behind him; his spirits were high. He was a strong wolf, but like Norr, looked like a human on the outside.

"Is it interesting? Going into battle, I mean." Even though Norr did not hate farmwork, it would be false to say he wasn't interested in battle.

"Of course, especially biting your enemies to death, hahaha! Although my summoners are few."

"Well, of course."

That was because his good friend Feytney was an unstinting alcoholic.

As a wolf, he had notable fighting skill and a wild spirit; to men, summoning a wolf was thought to make you look handsome and full of spirits, so wolves were widely regarded as one of the greatest fighting beasts. But Feytney had one tragic flaw, which was that he loved drinking too much. Eight times out of ten he showed up to battle hammered, and the other two times he wasn't yet sober.

Norr had heard Feytney complain about one time when the summoner's door had appeared just as he'd dragged himself into bed after spending three days and nights in the pub. He could only roll out of the bed and through the door. When the summoner saw him, he was still groggy; as a result, he was beaten by a beast of a much lower rank.

As far as magical beasts went, Feytney was a pretty bad one, never showing his true abilities. Even if he were to display his summoning charm right in front of the summoners, it wasn't guaranteed anyone would use him.

As a fabulous beast's obligations grew, he grew more valuable, and busier – any summoner with the charm could call them anytime. Feytney, however, did not have this problem because he had too few summoners.

"When will you go with me to have some fun? It's a pity you don't go to battle."

When Norr heard this, he looked at Feytney without comprehension. If a summoner didn't have both of their charms, it was inconceivable that he would call them at the same time.

As if seeing his disbelief, Feytney added: "When I get called you should come with me; it's just a door...."

"You're talking nonsense."

When a fabulous beast was summoned, a round door appeared in front of him. According to the treaty, no matter what time it was, the beast had to go as long as there was a door.

But... for two to go together? When had that happened? If someone had called a wolf and a goat came along too, what summoner would stand for it?

When he thought of that, Norr couldn't help shaking his head.

Just then, a small gleaming door appeared by Feytney; across for the door was a winged, sharp-toothed serpent glaring fiercely.

"Perfect, do you want to come?" Feytney flashed a bright smile.

Just as Norr was thinking about opening his mouth, a door appeared over his own head, a blue sky on the far side of the threshold.

"Another day." He put down his glass and stood up.

"Hey – pay first, then go!" The pub-owner quickly blocked them.

Norr shrugged, fished out a couple of coins, put them on the table, and looked at the summoner's door. He certainly hadn't made it easy for him, putting the door so high above his head. If Norr couldn't jump up, he could only ask the other animals for help or for a ladder; that would be awkward.

Luckily, he didn't need the help; he was a goat, a mountain goat made to bound.

Norr stood on the chair and was through the door with one leap.

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Norr would admit that he was not a good summoning beast.

He had been a summoning beast for many years, but he had almost no summoners simply because he was more trouble than Feytney.

When he leapt through the door and landed skillfully on the floor, he saw a youth standing before him.

The youth looked at Norr, an excited expression on his finely featured, childish, fair face. His hair looked as if it was made from gold silk; his eyes were like lakes so clear you could see to the bottom, and they sparkled. He was holding a large book, and his small frame looked even more delicate in the thick summoner's gown. Even though he looked like a normal human, Norr was sure this youth was not normal.

And why? Because a fat green caterpillar lay on the youth's shoulder, its black eyes watching just as the youth's did.

Norr looked wordlessly at the youth, but the youth didn't seem to notice his strange gaze; he only looked at Norr with incomparable excitement.

"It's a human-shaped beast!" The young man's voice was full of excitement. "It's the first time I summoned a human-shaped beast..."

Norr ignored the gaze of the young man, looking left and right. He was standing in a wide classroom, just in front of the lecture podium. Behind him sat rows of young humans. Behind the podium stood an old man who looked at him in disbelief. It was as if he was surprised that the young man had summoned him; the other youths were also dumbstruck.

"Um... Mr... Mr... Goat, may I ask you to do something for me?"

The youth spoke to him nervously. Norr couldn't help frowning in the face of such an overly gracious attitude. It wasn't that he thought such an attitude was bad, but it was strange. He had never encountered a human so polite to a beast.

"Could you please drive away the beast back there? Thank you." The boy was like a puppy shaking an invisible tail, pointing to a beast behind him with an expectant face.

It was a beast of the supernatural clan. It looked like a small, grey ghost with dark red eyes and was about as tall as a man's knees; with a helmet on its head and a shield in its hands, it was peering all around.

Norr looked at the beast, then looked at the youth.

Then he turned around, and lay down with his back towards the youth.

The youth's eyes grew large, and he stared at Norr with an open mouth. The other students started to snicker.

"Um, um... Mr. Goat..."

"I'm sorry, but if you want me to move, you'll need to use your *will* and order me."

Norr said lazily, basking in the sunlight falling from the window.

The youth stood stupefied.

"Order him." The older man said coldly.

"Bu... but..." The youth looked uncomfortably around, and finally walked to Norr's side.

"Please, Mr. Goat, this influences my midterm grade!" He knelt down, put his hands together, and begged.

Norr glanced at the youth, then shut his eyes and continued his sunbathing.

"Hahaha, didn't I say, how could this guy summon such a powerful beast?"

"He doesn't even have the will to order a goat - loser!"

Actually, after seeing such a good natured young man, Norr did not plan to be his usual self. As long as he could sense the young man's *will*, he would gladly help.

But, right through to the end, he never sensed it.