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Villainess: Reloaded!

BLOWING AWAY

BAD ENDS

with

Modern Weapons



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Prologue

Through various twists and turns, I'd become the girl who slew the dragon. Looking back, it was impressive that I'd been able to defeat such a monster. It made me feel a little sad to think that, in terms of my abilities, I was becoming more and more monster-like myself.

Anyhow, I'd gained a heap of reward money big enough to make my purse celebrate, but I still didn't have much saved in preparation for becoming a fugitive. I wanted four million marks in my savings at the very least, and I had no idea how many times I'd have to risk my life before I got to that point. But still, I was glad that I had a surefire way to earn money.

If things went badly, I'd have to work as a mercenary or an adventurer while in exile, which would mean saying goodbye to my glamorous noble lifestyle.

In other news, I'd recently gotten on good terms with the members of the Witches Association. I'd been able to improve the firing rate of my 120 mm rifled gun using the spatial distortion magic I'd learned from Valentine, and I was steadily powering up. The plan was to stay friendly with the Witches Association and inherit their lost magic so that I could steadily gain the power I'd use to overthrow fate!

However, I wasn't expecting things to keep going smoothly much longer. I'd finally encountered Elsa, also known as the heroine. It wouldn't be long before she entered high school. That would finally set the story in motion.

Gah! I've got no idea what'll happen from here on. Well, whatever. I'll just keep getting ready to conquer fate! Just you wait, fate! I'm about to tear you to shreds!

To that end, I was visiting the Witches Association headquarters again that day.

Huh? A familiar?

Chapter 1 — The Villainess and Familiars

“A familiar?”

I was at the Witches Association headquarters, and I was staring blankly at Serafine, unsure what she meant.

“So no one told you yet? There was a time when witches employed familiars. A familiar is a beast that protects its mage, becomes their eyes, and serves as their partner.”

“Isn’t that what fairies do? I’ve already got a fairy, you know.”

I gave my breast pocket a light tap. Blau came crawling out with a sour expression on her face.

“Master...this is a bad place... There’s no wind, and the stench of death hangs in the air...”

“There you go again. All I smell are books, Blau.”

She was right about the lack of any wind, but there was no smell of death.

“Oh, a fairy with a good nose. Were you aware that a massacre once took place here?”

“Huh? I never heard about that...”

“Really? It happened fifteen hundred years ago. The knights foolish enough to attempt an assault on the Witches Association became a mountain of corpses. There wasn’t much more to it. How I’d love to play with human beings with such abandon once more...”

Huh? What? Did she just casually reveal that she took part in a battle fifteen hundred years ago?

“Um... How old are you, Serafine?”

“You should never ask a woman her age.”

This must be that “She looks like a kid, but she’s actually centuries old!” trope...

“Now, as I was saying, a familiar is more than that pitiful fairy. Fairies do have their uses, but they’re incapable of defending their master.” Serafine shrugged her shoulders in disgust.

“What? But Blau really tries her best!” That was all I had to say.

“Let me show you my familiar.” She grinned wickedly as she used spatial distortion magic to open a rift in midair.

“Whoa! A cerberus?!”

The magic beast that appeared from the rift was a three-headed cerberus!



The three heads of the cerberus each spoke separately as it stepped out from the rift.

“Oh?”

“It was you our master spoke of.”

“A new witch?”

It's... It's huge! Like a small truck. I'm glad we weren't too close to the bookshelves.

“That's right,” Serafine said. “This is the new witch. But she doesn't even have a familiar yet.”

“N-Nice to meet you,” I greeted it.

The cerberus was peaceful, perhaps as a result of it being submissive to Serafine. But I'd heard that cerberuses were magic beasts every bit as dangerous as fire dragons. They could use magic, and they would ravenously feed on humans while lurking in the shadows. One story told of a lone cerberus that destroyed an entire city. How much of that story was true and how much was fiction was unclear, but I had no doubt that this beast posed a serious threat...because it was real big!

“How's this possible?” I asked.

“It's bound to me as my familiar by blood. This is a type of lost magic, though if I had to classify it, I'd call it blood magic. You can form the same bond with a fairy, but a bond with a magic beast is far more useful.” Serafine petted the cerberus's head as she spoke.

“Truly,” the cerberus agreed.

“Wow. Does that mean I can bind Blau to me like this?”

“Only if your insignificant fairy so wishes. A familiar contract requires mutual consent. They can't be formed unilaterally.”

I see. If it were a one-sided agreement, that'd be like making a slave.

“Now I have to ask, how'd you get that cerberus to agree to be your familiar?”

“I drove it to the verge of death and demanded that it accept the contract if it

wished to live.”

“And you call that mutual consent...?”

You clearly forced it! Thanks a lot.

“Well, why not try it for yourself with that fairy? It might be willing.”

“Blau, would you make a contract with me?” I asked Blau in my breast pocket.

“Only if you absolutely insist, master...”

“I do.”

“Shouldn’t we give it more thought?”

Wow, Blau’s so selfish...

“Come on, let’s make this contract.”

“All right,” Blau said as she floated up out of my pocket. “It’s just that lost magic creeps me out.”

“What do we do now, Serafine?”

“First, you both need to exchange blood,” she replied. “Try it.”

“Blood?”

I shut off my sense of pain and drew blood from my index finger with my knife.

“Blau, do fairies have blood?”

“We do. But if it’s painful—Oww!”

I made a small cut on Blau’s index finger.

“M-Master! How mean!”

“Sorry, sorry. But we’ve gotta exchange blood somehow, haven’t we?”

“Ugh...”

I placated Blau with a smile. “Now for the exchange.”

“All right,” she agreed.

I touched my index finger against Blau’s.

“Next, channel your mana into the fairy,” Serafine instructed.

“Roger.”

I channeled mana into Blau just as she’d said.

“Next, you must incant, ‘Thy blood binds mine, my blood stains thine, and we become one through blood.’”

Oh. Must be a magic incantation.

“Let’s do it, Blau. Thy blood binds mine, my blood stains thine, and we become one through blood.”

“Ah...”

As I recited the incantation, I began to feel what Blau was feeling.

“I see it was a success,” Serafine said. “You should try some things right now. Is your fairy able to share its vision with you?”

“Let me share your vision, Blau.”

I released her from my hand, but her senses remained linked with mine. And then...

“Oh?! I can feel what Blau is touching! I can see what she’s seeing! I can see my own face through Blau’s eyes!”

A window had appeared in my vision, and my own face as seen by Blau was displayed within it. *What in the world? So this is what it’s like to have a familiar!*

“This is amazing! It must be because of our familiar contract!”

“You shouldn’t be so amazed by this,” Serafine said. “There’s little that a fairy can do. They’re useful for scouting, but not much else. If it were a magic beast, however, it could be your shield or your sword. Every witch should have a familiar or two.”

I guess a witch just wouldn’t be a witch without a familiar. A black cat was standard back on Earth, but here it must be magic beasts like this cerberus. Personally, I’d prefer something a bit cuter, but whoever heard of a cute magic beast?

“Perhaps you’re unsure what sort of familiar you’d like?” Serafine asked.

“Yes. A little...” I replied with a troubled look.

Something tells me that Serafine would give me a hard time if I asked her to recommend some cute magic beasts. I’d better keep my mouth shut.

“In that case, accept the lotus fruit gathering quest once it’s posted at the Adventurer’s Guild. Then you’ll find a fine magic beast. Drive it to the brink of death, and then force it to make a contract. Remember, you must accept the lotus fruit quest.”

“Lotus fruit gathering quest. Got it!”

I wonder what kind of familiar I’ll find waiting for me. If I had a griffin or a wyvern, I could ride around on its back. Though that wouldn’t compare to the 04-type flight unit I made!

You know, being able to perform aerial reconnaissance using shared vision is going to be handy. And the idea of having a creature around to defend me when I’m in trouble is something I can’t pass up. I’m going to need power of all kinds while taking on the low-life trash known as fate!

Petra and the others should be back from that expedition soon. I’ll ask them to take on that lotus fruit gathering quest! I’m so excited I can hardly wait!

Chapter 2 — The Villainess and a Divine Beast

There I was, at the Adventurer's Guild.

"Hey, Astrid. You're looking full of energy as always." I was greeted by Petra, who'd recently gotten back from an expedition.

"Petra! I'm back for more adventures today! How'd your expedition go?"

"We barely gained anything from it. We already knew that the chaos caused by the fire dragons had to have messed up the ecosystem around here, but we still don't know how bad things are. We reported everything we saw to the guild, but we only got a tiny reward for it."

Ah. I remember how that fire dragon gobbled down those orcs. I can imagine how it could wreck the ecosystem.

"The real problem is that magic beasts are on the move. They scattered in all directions in fear of the dragons, so there's a massive monster migration in progress."

"Oh, that sounds like trouble..."

If the fire dragons are like nomads invading from the east, that makes the situation something like the Migration Period...

"Anyhow, they're not near any densely populated areas, so it's not too much of a problem," Gertrud told me. "If they do start moving toward somewhere populated, the adventurers currently out scouting can report back, and orders of knights and parties of adventurers would do something about it."

"So, what kind of quest are we gonna accept today?" Ernesta began looking at the quests posted up on the bulletin board.

"I have a recommendation!" I quickly pointed out one in particular. It was, of course, the lotus fruit gathering quest that Serafine had told me about.

"A lotus fruit gathering quest?" Ernesta asked. "Why would you recommend this?"

"Well, lotus fruit is in demand lately, so I figured it should sell at a good price.

See, the reward is pretty high, isn't it?"

The reward really was high. Serafine had probably posted it herself and put an unusually high price on it. It was double what we'd gotten for the mandrake gathering quest. It made me wonder why no one else had claimed it yet.

"Hm, I know this area," Gertrud said. "There aren't any particularly ferocious beasts around there. If we can get that reward for gathering in that area, it'll make us a good profit. Though I don't get what the client was thinking when they set a reward like this."

"Th-They must have really wanted that lotus fruit."

Eek! I have to avoid making them suspicious!

"If you recommend it, then I guess we'll go for it. It's not like there's another quest we had in mind. The money we got from the dragon subjugation quest won't last much longer."

"Huh? We got six hundred thousand marks each, right? Did you spend it?"

"Pretty much. We donated some of it to the orphanage we came from, and the rest didn't last very long because we bought new equipment."

Wow! She used up six hundred thousand marks...

"Gertrud still feels indebted to the orphanage. We told her she didn't have to make such a big donation, but she did it anyway. I think she gave them enough to rebuild the orphanage."

"Gertrud must be a good person..." I replied.

Meanwhile, the only thing I ever think about is saving money for the sake of being a fugitive. I feel bad.

"Anyway, let's go with this quest. Any objections?" Gertrud said while picking up the quest announcement.

"None," Petra agreed. "Let's do it."

"Let's go for it!" Ernesta agreed too.

That's a relief. Now I can get myself a familiar. I feel a little bad for misleading them, but hopefully they'll forgive me if I get a familiar and become more

reliable in combat.

But wait... Didn't Gertrud say that there aren't any dangerous magic beasts in the area where the lotus fruit is? Maybe Serafine put a good beast there herself, especially for me? No, that's a bit far-fetched...

I'm starting to feel that something's not right here. But we've accepted the quest now, so we'd better do it!

....

We were preparing to embark on the lotus fruit gathering quest. The weapons I'd brought were the machine gun, the shotgun, and an anti-materiel rifle!

The anti-materiel rifle was a big gun that used high-caliber, .50 rounds. It'd be enough to take out most enemies. A direct hit from one of its large-diameter bullets would send the enemy's flesh and blood flying as it reduced them to mincemeat.

Well, those were the weapons I had on show. Using the method Valentine had taught me, I'd made several spatial rifts that were storing my 120 mm rifled gun together with explosive and HEAT rounds. Both the explosive and HEAT rounds had been stored near the rift entrance on an incline so that they could be loaded automatically.

I won't be fighting any dragons today, so an anti-materiel rifle is all I need. At least I hope so. I'll be in big trouble if I encounter a magic beast that an anti-materiel rifle doesn't work against...

"We're all set. Let's get moving."

"All right!"

Gertrud had finished the procedure for accepting the quest, so now we were heading straight to the battlefield! By carriage, it would take about thirty minutes each way to reach the place where we'd be gathering the lotus fruits, so it was close enough for a student like myself. I was hoping to avoid any more situations where I wouldn't have enough time unless I waited for the weekend.

And so, we headed to the place in a swaying horse-drawn carriage.

“A student? You must be an assistant mage,” the coachman said as he looked me over.

“That’s right. I need the money...”

And I’m hoping to get some real-life firing practice too.

“I heard that all the academy students are sons and daughters of nobles. Life must be tough for nobles too. It’s a cruel world.”

“Y-You’ve got that right.”

My family has plenty of money. It’s just that I don’t want to be left penniless after our domain gets seized. That’s the thing making life tough.

“Well, take care out there.”

“I will!”

We arrived. As the coachman waved us off, I turned and waved back at him.

“Hm. Lotus fruit is used to make sleeping draughts, isn’t it?” Petra asked.
“Why’s there such demand for that? I’ve always slept like a baby myself.”

“I’ve never had any problem sleeping, either,” Ernesta replied.

I’d always slept well too. I had no need for medicine.

“Either the client has something making them worry, or they’re dealing with someone who does,” Gertrud answered. “As long as there’s nothing illegal going on, it’s not for us adventurers to ask clients for reasons. Got to admit that I’m curious though...”

We passed through a gap in the undergrowth and reached the spot where the lotus fruit was. Our formation was the same as always, but now the party members had new gear. Gertrud had a shiny new claymore and plate mail, and Petra had gone from having one bow to using a decorated shortbow and a longbow that she wore on her back. Ernesta had also switched to plate mail and a new longsword.

I wonder how much it all cost. If their reward of six hundred thousand marks didn’t go far, then it must have been a lot. I guess their armor must wear down with every hit they take too.

Maybe I should be wearing at least a bulletproof vest myself...

“Here it is: the lotus fruit,” Gertrud announced, standing before a tree with twisting branches.

“How many were we meant to gather?”

“It was twenty. I really thought we’d find more lotus fruit than this here. Something’s odd...”

From what I could see, there weren’t even twenty ripe fruits on the tree in front of us. At most, there were five or six.

“At least there’s nowhere for dangerous magic beasts to nest around here. We can take our time.”

“That’s true,” I replied.

Hmm. Maybe the idea is that I’ll start with a gentle magic beast as my first familiar rather than something dangerous? On the other hand, Serafine seems a little sadistic, so I can’t imagine her setting up anything so kind.

“These lotus fruits sure smell good,” Petra said. “Sadly, you can’t cook with them because anyone who eats them falls asleep.”

“Yeah,” agreed Ernesta. “And they taste real sweet too.”

I couldn’t say anything because I’d never tried eating a lotus fruit before.

“Mm?”

“What’s up, Petra?”

“Nothing. I just thought I heard a wolf howling in the distance...”

A wolf?

“In which direction?” I asked.

“Three o’clock. Quite some distance away.”

Oh? Could this be my chance to get that familiar Serafine was talking about? I’m not much of a dog person, though... I would have preferred some kind of cat-like beast...

“Could I go take a look?”

"Hold up. It's not safe to go off alone," Petra warned me. "I'll come with you."

"I appreciate it," I replied.

I was getting Petra caught up in a personal affair of mine, but letting her come with me was better than making her worry.

I began making my way toward the place that the howl had come from. The undergrowth was thin, but we kept our bodies low to the ground as we advanced. Since we were assuming that the creature was a wolf, we made sure to approach from downwind.

"Looks like you've gotten the hang of this. I'm not sure there's anything left to teach you."

"Not at all. I've still got much to learn."

Most of my knowledge came secondhand from the military books I'd read.

"What's...that...?" I spoke before I could stop myself.

There was a massive wolf in the direction that Petra had heard the howl coming from. It was a true monster: it had a body as big as a bus or a large truck, and it was covered in silver fur that glistened in the light of the sun.

I heard a gasp from Petra. "Whoa... It can't be... That's a fenrir..."

A fenrir's a giant wolf, isn't it? If I remember right, Fenrir was the uncontrollable monster that kept breaking loose from the chains that the gods made to bind him. That same creature exists here as a magic beast? What a terrifying world.

Suddenly, I heard girls' voices in my ear.

"Miss Human! Miss Human!"

"Shh! We'd better keep our voices down, or that thing will notice us."

"Fairies?" I said.

"Yes. We're fairies of this forest. Are you a mage, Miss Human?"

Floating to my left and right were two fairies that looked a lot like Blau. One had reddish-brown hair and a red dress, while the other had blonde hair and a yellow dress. They looked almost identical, as if they were twins.

“That’s right,” I replied. “What’s wrong?”

“We want you to take down that big wolf.”

Huh? They’re telling me I should fight that thing?

“Why do you want me to do that?”

“The wolf’s after us. There used to be a lot of fairies here, but then that thing came along and gobbled everyone up.”

That reminds me. When I first met Blau, she was about to be eaten by a griffin.

“Hmm. I’m not sure I can handle that thing...”

“Please, Miss Human. We’ll form contracts with you if you do it.”

“That’s right! We’re begging you.”

What? I can make contracts with two fairies at once?! It’s normally just one at a time!

“Blau wants you to do it too, master,” Blau appeared from my pocket. “Please save these fairies.”

“Hey, who are you talking to, Astrid?” Petra asked.

“Fairies. They’re asking me to fight the fenrir.”

“What? Are you kidding?” Petra said with a look of disbelief.

“Petra, please stay back. I’ll do something about this.”

“You’ll do something...? What do you think you can do against that monster? That thing’s big enough to eat a whole city. You think you can handle it alone?”

“Yes. I’ve got a few tricks up my sleeve.”

As I spoke, I was putting the machine gun in its trunk and swapping it for the anti-materiel rifle. I used a small amount of mana to synchronize the rifle with my body before taking aim at the massive fenrir. I couldn’t kill it if I wanted to make it my familiar, so I didn’t aim at the head. My target was its abdomen. Just like Serafine, I planned to leave the fenrir on the verge of death so I could force it to accept a contract.

"I can't let you take on that thing by yourself," Petra said. "I'll help. Don't worry, we can let it run off if it comes to that."

"Thanks. I appreciate the help."

All right, wolfling, let's get this party started!

Chapter 3 — The Villainess Fights a Divine Beast

“Engage combat preparation measures.”

I began to secrete adrenaline, and my perception of time started slowing down at the same time.

I exhaled the air from my lungs with a great sigh and aligned the reticle with the fenrir’s abdomen. The creature wasn’t moving. It was standing still on four legs, reigning over the forest as its sovereign.

But now your reign is down to its last few minutes.

Then I pulled the trigger. Blau muted the thunderous noise of the gun; there was no sound.

“It repelled it?!”

I heard something like a crash against metal as the bullet I’d fired bounced away. It was as if it had hit the armor of a tank.

Impossible! It couldn’t have repelled a .50 round!

“Who’s there? Show yourself.” The fenrir spoke in a low voice while looking around.

“Wh-What was that?” I asked.

“A boundary,” Petra replied. “This type of magic beast creates them. Want to run before it notices we’re here?”

Making boundaries is a coward’s trick! Even lost magic doesn’t include boundaries!

“Could I break through it with force?”

“You’d need some incredible force to break through that. It would take about ten dozen mages.”

Ten dozen mages? Can I really handle this?

“I’m going to try breaking through it.” I stored away the anti-materiel rifle and

pulled the 120 mm rifled gun from a spatial rift.

“Wh-What? Are you serious?”

“Yes, I’m serious.”

I’m ready for this. I’m making it my familiar. I want it.

“There you are!” The sharp eyes of the fenrir were facing us.

“That’s right, you dumb wolf! Here we are!”

I used blood magic to give my strength a sudden boost as I moved through the undergrowth. All the while, I kept the muzzle aimed at the fenrir and prepared to fire the first shot.

I’ve got to keep moving...

“A lone human intends to challenge me? How amusing!”

The fenrir closed the distance between us with a single powerful leap.

Just as I thought. It’s well-built. No mistaking those muscles.

“That’s some real big talk, wolfling! But you won’t put a scratch on me!”

With a grin, I pulled the trigger of the 120 mm rifled gun. I didn’t get to enjoy the sound of it firing because Blau was muting it, but that was just as well because it would have ruptured my eardrums. The shockwave from a weapon of this caliber couldn’t be taken lightly.

“Hngh?!”

Heh heh. That was a HEAT round. These pierce through armored cars with ease. You think your boundary can hold up against that, wolfling?

“Hmpf! Was that it?!”

“Tsk! You’re a stubborn one!”

The HEAT round did nothing more than graze the fenrir’s cheek. The metal jet then created an inferno that got close, but the fenrir was able to twist its large body to avoid being burned.

No mortal creature should have been able to dodge a shell launched from a tank gun after it had been fired. This was a monster to be reckoned with.

You're special. I like you!

"Why don't you dance with me a little longer? I'm in a good mood today."

"Spare me your drivel, human. I'll be the one toying with *you*."

This wolfling needs to learn some manners. I do like its spirit though.

"HEAT rounds! Continuous fire!"

I positioned myself beside the fenrir with a light sidestep as it charged toward me, and with my slowed sense of time, I took aim at its abdomen before firing multiple shells in succession.

One shot didn't work, but how about four?!

The fenrir couldn't completely dodge the attack this time. A storm of metal jets seared its abdomen and then broke through.

"Reloading!"

I created five spatial rifts, loading shells into all chambers of the revolver at once.

"Lost magic...? Then there are still humans capable of using it... Now I see. You intend to make me your familiar, do you?"

"That's the plan. I don't suppose you'll accept quietly?"

Once the shells had finished loading, I aimed the 120 mm rifled gun at the fenrir once again. Killing it would be a terrible waste, but I needed it near death if my plan was going to work.

This is tough.

"Bwah hah. Very well. If you're able to land a hit on me with your next attack, then I'll be your familiar. But first, there's something you must know: the folly of challenging the divine beast, Fenrir!"

Oh? The fenrir just changed somehow... It got faster! Several times faster!

"So this is what you're truly capable of! I'm liking you more and more!"

"Everything until now was a mere game!"

The fenrir moved so quickly that I couldn't keep track of it, even with my

slowed sense of time.

I see. It really was just playing. I can't underestimate this thing...

"But I haven't run out of tricks just yet."

I induced the release of more adrenaline, raising my heart rate further. The faster my heart beat, the more my sense of time slowed. My field of vision also narrowed, but my concentration was good enough that I wouldn't lose sight of my target once I'd taken aim.

"Come, young wielder of the arts of ancient witches! Show me your true power!"

To make things even harder, the fenrir now understood that I needed to keep my gun aimed at it, and its movements were making that difficult. Simply put, it ran with a zigzagging motion. Maintaining my aim was tough. My slowed time perception and the fenrir's swift movements were evenly matched.

"A human-powered fire-control system can't keep up with this."

But I wasn't done. A sadist like Serafine wouldn't have set this up for me if it hadn't been such a challenge. And besides, the creature wouldn't be worthy of being my familiar if it hadn't been so strong.

"What's wrong, human? Your attack hasn't hit me! Bwah hah hah!"

"Talk all you want," I replied sullenly.

"Well, well, well! Let's hear your battle cry, witch! Show me your courage! Your power!"

The fenrir's enjoying this. It's getting real full of itself.

"Haah!" The fenrir lunged at me.

At the same time, I charged toward it ready to attack.

"Wh-What?! Are you trying to get yourself killed?!" Petra fired an arrow as quickly as she could, but unlike my HEAT rounds, they couldn't even scratch the surface of the fenrir's boundary. But that was fine.

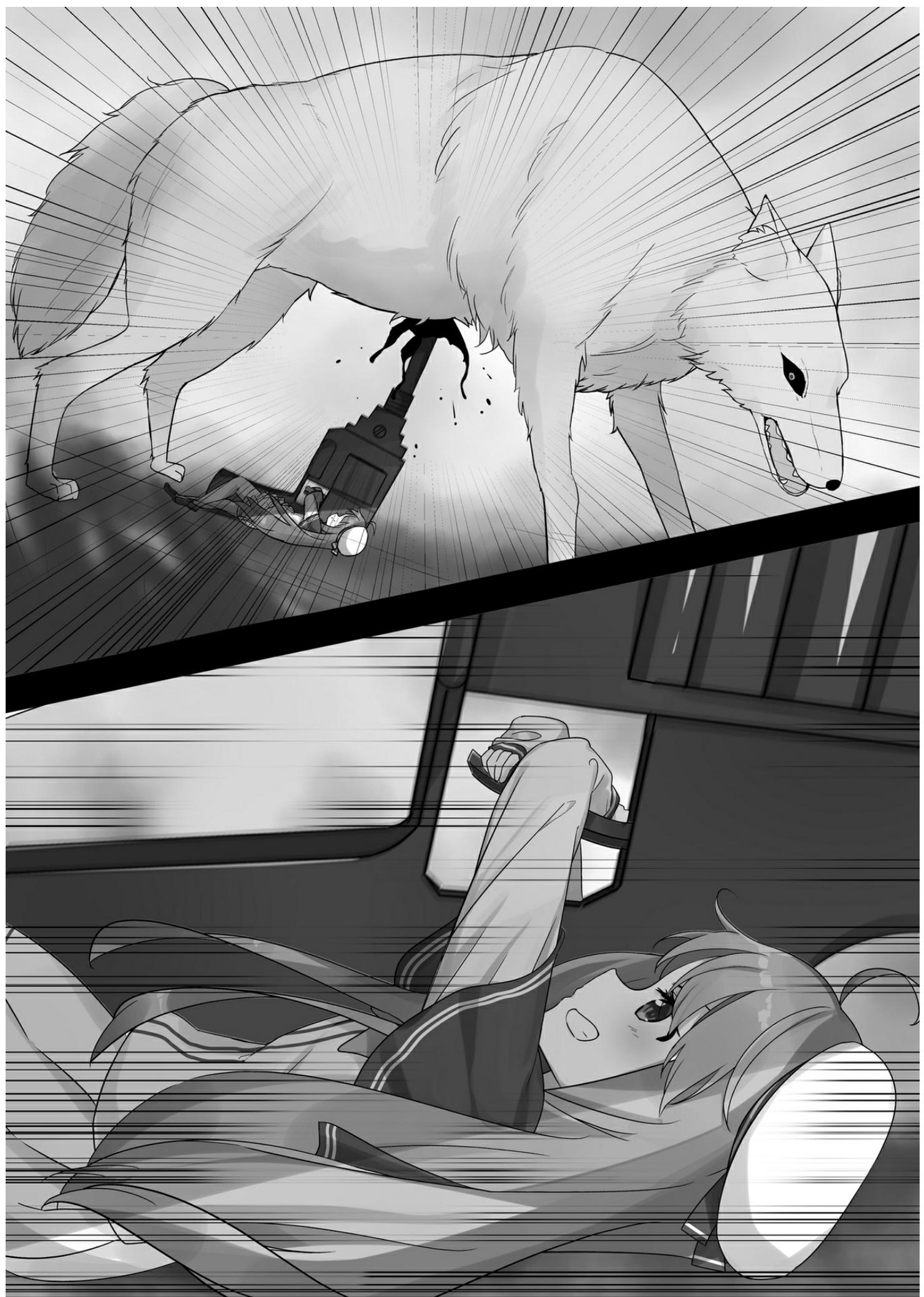
If it's courage and power you want, Fenrir, then here it comes!

"I'm going to make my attack..."

The fenrir took a great swipe at me with its front right leg.

“...the instant you attempt yours!”

I slid along the ground, dodging the fenrir’s swipe by a hair’s breadth. That slide carried me to the position below the fenrir’s abdomen, where I fired all five rounds loaded into the cylinder.



“Gagh...!”

Got him!

The shells I fired actually hit the fenrir this time. Blood spilled out of its abdomen, coating my cheek.

Oops. If my uniform gets any dirtier, I'll never be able to explain it...

Once I saw the fenrir fall onto its side with a thud, I started moving toward its head.

“Well? Did I hit?”

“You did... I thought no human was this strong...”

The fenrir’s lower half had been torn to shreds by the impact of the shells.

I might have gone a little too far...

“Keep still. I’ll heal you just enough to keep you alive.”

Using healing blood magic, I stopped the fenrir from bleeding out.

“Are you ready to make that contract now?”

“I’ve no objections to serving a witch with your power. You may keep me by your side until your lifespan reaches an end or you tire of this world.”

He still sounds full of himself, but that’s fine, I guess. As long as he accepts.

“Now I need some blood.”

I drew blood from the fenrir by cutting its front paw with my knife, and then I drew a little from my index finger in the same way.

“Thy blood binds mine, my blood stains thine, and we become one through blood.”

“The ancient witches’ words... How nostalgic.”

When I finished the incantation, I could feel that the fenrir’s senses were shared with my own. His field of vision was wide, and I also gained additional information from his sense of smell.

Amazing! I’ve made a fenrir my familiar!

“Now I’ll heal you up fully.”

“Worry not. I can handle that myself.” The wounds on the fenrir’s lower body healed the moment he mumbled something to himself.

“What? You could have kept on fighting.”

“Doubtful,” the fenrir replied. “That was my limit. Another blast from that inferno cylinder would have finished me.”

“Now you’re officially my familiar. For my first request...”

“You are my master. You will not make requests; you will give orders.”

It’s a little hard to tell who’s the familiar and who’s the master right now...

“All right then. Here’s my first order: hide here in the forest for a while. I’ll come for you later.”

“I can’t follow you right now?”

“People would see you. Lost magic was supposedly wiped out, so I’ll be in trouble if anyone realizes that I’ve made you my familiar.”

“Hmpf. If enemies come, they’ll die by my teeth.”

This fenrir has some violent thoughts.

“Either way, that’s my first order. Got it?”

“Yes, understood. Until we meet again, master of mine. Do not forget to come for me.”

Phew. Now that Fenrir’s cooperating, my work here is done.

The fenrir picked himself up and ran off into the forest and out of sight.

“H-Hey. Astrid, are you all right?”

Petra approached after she saw me let the fenrir go. From her point of view, the situation must have seemed inexplicable.

“I’m all right. The fenrir promised to be a good boy from now on, so I let him go. They might be dangerous creatures, but wouldn’t it be a pointless waste of life if I killed one that meant no harm?”

“What? But there’s no telling what an old fenrir like that might do.”

Come on! Just accept the excuse I've given you!

"Well, at any rate, it's gone now, so let's get back to gathering lotus fruit. Yes, let's do that. And let's hurry."

"O-Okay. But you know we would have gotten a real nice reward from the guild if we could have proven that we'd killed a fenrir, right? What a waste."

Some things in this world are more important than money!

"Miss Human, thank you!"

"The danger's finally gone!"

Oh, I totally forgot. These two fairies promised they'd make a contract with me.

"Will you both make contracts with me now like you promised?"

"Yes! Let's make contracts!"

The two fairies landed softly on my left and right hands.



“Miss Human, can I ask your name?”

“It’s Astrid.”

I had a good reason for not giving them my full name. Petra was still here.

“By this contract, I, Gelb of Reinhard Forest, shall bind my soul to thee, Astrid.”

“By this contract, I, Rot of Reinhard Forest, shall bind my soul to thee, Astrid.”

The two fairies both said the incantation at once, and then they both spoke the exact words that Blau had spoken when we’d made our contract.

“Kiss me if thou wouldst accept the contract. Close thine eyes if thou wouldst refuse.”

To finish the process, I kissed them both on their foreheads.

“I hope I can serve you well, master!”

“I hope we get along well!”

“Likewise. Nice to have you both with me.”

All right! My long-held plan to gain more fairies went well. All that remains is to gain the trust of these two, and then we can make the same familiar contract that I made with Blau. Having three reconnaissance drones should make it easier to locate enemies.

“I’m guessing you’re talking to a fairy, but to me it looks like you’re acting weird because I can’t see anyone else.”

“P-Please don’t say it like that...”

I bet that whole conversation looked comical to someone who can’t see fairies...

“Anyway, let’s head back, Petra. They might have finished gathering the fruit already.”

“You’re right. Let’s go.”

And with that, Fenrir had become my familiar. I declined the quest reward this time, and later I went back to that same forest to put Fenrir inside a spatial

rift. He was reluctant to enter, but how else was I going to keep a monster that size around without everyone seeing?!

I have to feel a little sorry for him now that he's locked up inside an empty void. I'll have to talk with Valentine and see if there's something we can do.

Chapter 4 — The Villainess's Renovation Spree

I'd successfully made Fenrir my familiar. But I still had a problem.

"I loathe that black space."

We were at the Witches Association headquarters, where Fenrir was being awkward.

"And here's the problem," I said.

"Ah, this is a difficult issue," Valentine replied.

"What a whiny familiar," Serafine said. "It's hard to tell which one of you is the master."

"She has a divine beast as grand as myself as her familiar. She owes me the deepest gratitude."

"I think you should try throttling it, Astrid."

Serafine had come to see my new familiar with high expectations, but her and Fenrir weren't getting along in the slightest. *Fenrir, you'd better not bite her.*

"Valentine, isn't there something I can do?"

"Well there are some options, but..." Valentine seemed reluctant to continue. "There's a type of spatial distortion magic known as mirroring. It's a troublesome form of magic, but it would help with your problem."

"Tell me more!" Fenrir was in a sulk because he hated being in the rift so much, so I was feeling like my efforts to make him my familiar were going to waste.

"It's the same magic we used to create this library. You can mirror scenery from the outside world and then place it in the rift. That'll allow you to replicate the bright sunlight and lush vegetation of the outdoors."

"I see."

If it's mirrored, does that mean everything's inverted?

"I once tried to create a paradise for myself within a rift. I intended to create

somewhere I could disappear to instead of being constantly pursued. This was the result." Valentine opened a rift in space and stepped inside, and then she urged me to follow with a jerk of her chin.

"Ooh?!"

I saw a forest filled with dense vegetation, and within it was a building that looked like a witch's house, straight from a fairy tale. It was a slightly weathered, European-style building surrounded by a red brick wall. It was exactly how I would have pictured a witch's house.

"What was wrong with this? It looks fine to me."

"Yes, I think it turned out well. But there are problems with it. For example, eating fruit from the trees copied in the mirroring process upsets your stomach."

Huh? Why would that happen? Oh! I know! "It must be because you created optical isomers when you inverted everything by mirroring."

"Optical isomers?"

"You can break things down into these tiny pieces that are too small to see. Those little pieces are called molecules, and when those aggregate together, that's what forms matter. Sometimes this thing called the molecular structure has different properties when it's inverted, especially if you're mirroring these things called proteins."

"Ah. So the material that constitutes matter has properties that change upon mirroring? Well, in that case, it seems there's no solution to the problem."

I just barely remember a few things I learned about optical isomerism from chemistry lessons in my past life. Can I call myself a science girl now? No, I can't get too full of myself... Math is still a major headache for me!

"Couldn't you carry in soil and trees from outside and then plant them in the rift?" I asked.

"No. That's the next problem. This world is constantly sunny; it never grows dark. There's no rainfall, no stillness of night. The environment in this spatial rift is forever in the state that I mirrored."

What?! That's no good! If it were constantly morning or something, I'd go mad!

"So even when I brought in plants from outside, they wouldn't grow. I tried a lot of different things, but I could never get it to work."

"Hmm. This is difficult..."

If I leave Fenrir in a place where it's constantly daytime, it'll be a new thing for him to complain about...

"Oh, actually, is it possible to mirror multiple environments inside one spatial rift?"

"You can. I made some cobbled-together spaces of my own... Oh, I see. Do you plan to transfer both day and night into your rift?"

"Exactly!"

Fenrir still might not like it, but there's no other way. I'll create a daytime area and a nighttime area. He can bask in the sun of the daytime area, and when he's bored of that, he can go sleep in the nighttime area. That way he'll have a day and night rotation of sorts.

"There's one more thing I think I'd better ask: is there a risk of me accidentally copying a person when I'm using this mirroring magic?"

"Mirroring magic can only replicate things that have no soul. Plants apparently don't have one."

Plants don't have souls? Oh. I wouldn't have known since I can't even prove that souls exist.

"Have you decided what you'll do?"

"Yes. I'll use this weekend to shape up Fenrir and his spatial rift!"

Let's create paradise! Looking after a big animal takes a lot of effort...

....

I used my weekend to pay another visit to the forest where Fenrir had been living.

"So you're having me choose my preferred location?"

"That's right. Valentine tells me that the more mana someone has, the bigger the area they can copy. You can expect something big from me!" I was confident in my mana capacity.

"Then I shall run through the forest for a time. Ride me, master of mine."

"What? I can ride you?"

"One human girl is no burden to me."

Wow! Awesome! I can ride on a wolf's back!

"In that case, pardon me." I clambered my way up and onto Fenrir's back.

"Hold on tight. Here goes!" Fenrir began to run with incredible speed.

"Whoa! This is awesome!"

It was more or less what I'd expect from a creature who'd given me a tough fight. Fenrir's speed was far beyond that of any horse. He might have even won in a race against a car from Earth.

"Well? A fine forest, is it not? I've journeyed to many forests, but I have a particular liking for this one. Loathsome humans seldom visit, and the region remains in its original state. There are many fairies here too."

When Fenrir licked his lips, it began to scare my own fairies.

"Eek!"

"D-Do you still want to eat us...?"

"Fairies aren't for eating!"

Fenrir let out a small snort. "You think I don't know better than to eat my own master's fairies?"

We continued on until we ascended to the top of a small hill.

"This would be a good spot."

Fenrir stopped, and I leaped down from his back.

"Ah, what beautiful nature!" I cried.

From the hilltop, I could see a lush forest region and the small river that flowed beside it. I could see why it pleased Fenrir; it looked completely

undisturbed by human influence. Nature was preserved here, as it had been since ancient times.

“Can this region be transferred into that space where there’s only darkness?”

“I’ll do just that!”

No time like the present!

I channeled my mana across the ground, just as Valentine had taught me. I’d need space left over for a nighttime area, so I was careful not to use my full mana capacity. I carefully channeled mana over the soil, then from the soil to the trees, and finally up into the clear, bright sky.

“Here goes!” It was like flipping the whole thing over as I opened a spatial rift and threw all of the mana into it.

“You’re finished?”

“I’m done!” I’d copied the forest perfectly. The mirrored scenery lay before us within the rift.

“Hm. Not bad. Might I take a look?” Fenrir looked satisfied as he examined the rift and its copied forest.

“Go for it. Let me know if there are any problems,” I said while sitting down on the ground.

Gelb and Rot came floating out of the shoulder bag I’d prepared for my fairies. Blau was in her usual spot in my breast pocket.

“Master, you use the ancient witches’ magic, don’t you?” Gelb asked.

“It’s lost magic,” Rot said. “I heard there was a lot more magic in this world in the past.”

“It’s really amazing that you’ve made that fenrir your familiar, though” Gelb said in admiration.

“Master is so strong!” Blau said with her chest puffed out proudly.

“The weather’s really nice,” I said. “I brought a boxed lunch, so why don’t we eat here?”

“All right!”

I'd prepared lunch because the plan was to wait in the forest until the sun went down. As for where everyone thought I was, I'd said that I was visiting Minne's place. I was sure she'd back me up if anyone asked.

"For today's lunch, I've brought sandwiches, roast chicken, pork-wrapped asparagus, and potato salad! What'll everyone have?"

"Blau wants sandwiches!"

"Potato salad for Gelb!"

"Rot wants the asparagus!"

Here you are, my cute little fairies. I made plenty of food, so eat as much as you like.

"You're eating, master of mine?" Fenrir returned from inside the rift after soon we'd started eating.

"That's right. You wanna eat too, Fenrir?"

Keeping the rift open was using up my mana, so I was glad Fenrir had come back quickly.

"Hm. Cooked meat is not to my liking. I'd accept raw meat."

"I didn't include any raw meat in our lunch..."

Come to think of it, how am I going to feed Fenrir?

"Fenrir, how much do you eat?"

"I'm a divine beast. Eating is a pastime, not a necessity. I'll accept whatever tributes you lay before me, however."

It's really hard to tell who's the master and who's the familiar here...

"In that case, I'll prepare some raw meat for you from time to time. Don't expect it every day though. I don't have much money since I'm a student."

"Very well."

Sigh. Do I have to spend money on food for Fenrir now? I really need to earn more...

"Should we just relax here until nightfall? Or do you want somewhere else for

the night region?"

"I'd prefer somewhere different. Somewhere where the light of the moon illuminates the lake surface on a clear night."

Oh? I didn't know Fenrir had a romantic side.

"We'll head there in that case. Just make sure the lake isn't too big, okay?"

"Fear not. It isn't so big."

And so, we rode on Fenrir's back once again. I waited for night to fall before using mirroring magic to copy the scenery.

Fenrir's spatial rift is now complete!

"I can run toward the sun each day, and toward the moon at night. It reminds me of Sköll and Hati." Fenrir appeared satisfied with his rift where day and night coexisted.

Well, that's the living space for my familiar finished! When my showdown with fate comes around, I'll have a fenrir at my side! I've joined forces with a magic beast that'll take ten dozen of this world's mages to defeat! Now I'll win for sure! At least, I hope so...

Chapter 5 — The Villainess and the Season of Partings

Time passed quickly, and the season for graduating and advancing grades had arrived.

I was about to move up into my third year of middle school. The free spirit Waltrud would be graduating along with a few other Round Table members, and I was at the Round Table saying a few words prior to her graduation.

“Waltrud, thank you for everything you’ve done for us. Your impulsive behavior was sometimes difficult for us to handle, but without you, we wouldn’t have had so much fun here at the academy. Please go on living your life to the fullest!”

Normally, a third-year middle school student would see off the Round Table’s graduates every year, yet somehow it was me, a second-year, performing the role this year. That was down to Waltrud, ever the free spirit, assigning me the task.

She’s unbelievable! But I have to admit that I’ll feel lonely once Waltrud graduates. She might have been a free spirit, but she was fun to be around.

I wonder who’ll be her replacement. I don’t think it’s decided yet.

“Thank you, Astrid. My wish for all of you is that you can find joy in living freely. Fortune favors the bold: whether it’s love, hobbies, or studies, keep rushing forward, and life will never be boring!”

Yeah. Those are the kind of parting words I expected from Waltrud.

“And today we’ll have the graduation party! Astrid’s going to be there as the representative for the remaining students!”

“Wh-What?!”

That’s way too sudden!

“Th-This is all rather sudden. Does that mean I absolutely must attend?”

“Of course! In fact, every Round Table member will be there!”

Whoa! A free spirit to the very end!

“That’s a fine idea,” Friedrich said. “Those of us who’ll be staying here at the academy will have a chance to see off the graduates. If it makes your last memories of the academy pleasant ones, that would be wonderful.”

And now here’s Friedrich... It’s his fault that there’s never any stopping her.

“But won’t we need to arrange a venue?” he asked. “Did you have somewhere in mind?”

“We’ll use my manor. Catering and whatnot have already been arranged, so please enjoy yourselves.”

That’s awfully scrupulous for someone as whimsical as her. But what would she have done if we’d rejected the idea?

“And what about the time?”

“If we were to head there now, that would be a little sudden,” Waltrud replied, “so let’s make it this afternoon, at five o’clock. That would be just right, wouldn’t it?”

“Any time today is a little sudden...” I told her, but it was impossible to reason with Waltrud at this point.

“I’ll await you all at my manor. Be sure to come along so we can make some final memories together. I’ll cry if you don’t show up.”

Without saying anything more, Waltrud waved us goodbye and then left.

“A graduation party? Sounds fun, but it’s so sudden. She could have at least given us notice in advance,” I grumbled.

“Well, we’re all close friends, so it shouldn’t be a problem,” Friedrich chimed in.

Just let me whine a bit! I don’t need your feedback. What a jerk! “Even parties between close friends require some preparation. The gentlemen simply need to put on tuxedos, but we ladies have to pick out dresses.”

“Yes, that’s true. But even so, it’s between friends, so I don’t think any of that requires too much thought.”

Gah! He thinks he can just say “between friends” and smooth everything over like it solves anything. I’m done talking to him. I’m going to see Iris!

“Iris, we’re having a graduation party. Are you prepared for it?”

“It’s so sudden that I’m not sure what to do... I suppose it doesn’t require too much thought since it’s a party between members of the Round Table, though. At the very least, Waltrud can’t be expecting us to go to great trouble.”

Yep. It’s just like Iris says: we don’t need to give it too much thought since only Round Table members will be there!

“But what do you think we’ll have to do at the graduation party?”

“We probably just need to be there and make merry. I doubt we’ll be asked to show off our special talents or anything.”

“Special talents?”

My special talent, by the way, was a reenactment of the Omaha beach landing operation.

“Anyhow, we can just relax while we’re there. I don’t think there’s anything to worry about. Even Waltrud has to understand that she sprung this party on us with no warning.”

“Yes. I’ll look forward to it.”

I won’t have to go through all the hassle of finding an escort this time, so I should be able to take it easy. I’d also love to see Waltrud’s manor.

I guess simply showing up to see off the graduates isn’t too much effort. And that’s all I’ll have to do, right? She’s not going to spring something unexpected on us, is she?

....

And so, I was at the party! At Waltrud’s manor!

It’s so spacious! Just what I’d expect, given that Marquis Vito is known for being a wealthy noble! A family like this would be a dependable ally when trying to fight against a fate that’s pushing me toward destruction. I need to stay friends with Waltrud for that reason. Gotta keep those connections connected!

“Astrid, Iris, welcome!” Our hostess, Waltrud, greeted us as we arrived in the entrance hall.

“Has it already started?”

“Yes, the graduating students are all here, but out of the other students, you’re the first to arrive.”

Oh. We’re the first ones here?

“Now, come on in, come on in.”

Iris and I did as Waltrud said and headed into the Vito family manor.

“The interior’s splendid,” I told her. “There’s so much furniture that I’ve never seen before.”

“Everything here is bespoke. Oh, but there are also a few items that we brought in from overseas.”

There was glossy wooden furniture, beautiful paintings, and ceramic vases with flowers, and they all complemented each other. I didn’t know what to say about the weird ornaments that looked like they’d come from overseas, but they certainly didn’t ruin the overall appearance of the manor.

I wouldn’t dare ask her how much it cost for all of this. I’d better make sure I don’t break anything.

“Here’s where we’re holding the party. Please make yourselves at home.”

The graduating students were all gathered in a reception hall serving as the party venue. Each and every student was wearing a tuxedo or dress.

I was wearing a dress that mother had picked out for me, but I was as flat as ever, so I felt as though it didn’t look right on me.

“Waltrud, what will you do after graduating?”

“I’m getting married to someone six years older than me. His name is Marquis Gustav Ernst von Gret. He’s the head of the Gret family, and we’ve had various business dealings with him before now. The marriage was decided to ensure that business between us will continue to run smoothly in the future.”

“I take it that the Gret family is also rich?”

“I hear they’re slightly more prosperous than my family.”

“Waltrud, I do hope we’ll always be good friends.”

If I get two rich marquis families on my side, they’ll definitely be useful during my showdown with fate! Let’s always be good to each other, Waltrud!

“But of course. You’re such a good girl, Astrid, so I want to get along with you too. And we will, won’t we, Dragon Slayer Witch?”

“Huh?”

What? What?! What?!

“A servant recognized you while my household was issuing a magic beast eradication quest to the Adventurer’s Guild. They told me that everyone was calling you ‘Dragon Slayer Witch.’ I was so curious that I just had to investigate.”

“Y-You’re sure you didn’t imagine all of this?”

Oh crap. I’m in big trouble.

“When I heard that it was an academy student with bright red hair, I couldn’t think of anyone else matching that description—especially once I heard that the student was using strange tools.”

“Umm... You see...”

I’m busted.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. That said, if my family is ever having trouble with a magic beast disturbance, I do hope you’ll be able to help us solve the problem.”

“Ha ha ha... You think too highly of me. I’m a mere student.”

“You know we’ll pay you well?”

“But I’m a...student...”

I almost gave in to temptation just now. Waltrud’s someone to be reckoned with...

Well, now I know that I’ve gotten too famous at the Adventurer’s Guild. I’d better be more careful when nobles are putting out quests. My fake glasses and

ponytail clearly aren't cutting it. But I can't think of any other way to disguise myself...

"You'll have to tell me the heroic tales of your exploits someday. I'll look forward to it."

"I...I haven't got any heroic tales... I'm serious, I'm just a student."

If she pries any further, I'll be in real trouble!

"Are you sure? Single-handedly fighting a fire dragon sounds rather heroic to me."

"You've got the wrong person."

"But what I really want to know is how a duke's daughter like you winds up working as an assistant mage. Are you having money problems?"

"Yes. I need some savings for my future."

If I'm defeated when my day of destruction comes around, I'll need those savings to support me while I'm in exile in another country. I desperately need more money. And I've got to pay for Fenrir's food somehow too.

"If you're saving, I can recommend a good bank. I have various connections to a bank in the Republic of Helvetia. It's the perfect place for asset management."

"I'd love to hear more!"

Wow! I knew Waltrud would come through! I can always count on her!

"I'll introduce you. It's a highly reliable bank. They know what they're doing: they're careful not to leak client data, and they always pay what they owe."

"I'd really appreciate it!"

By this point, I'd saved up two million marks after finishing many quests with Gertrud, Ernesta, Petra, and other adventurers. I wanted to carefully manage those funds for the sake of my future.

"Now then, make sure you enjoy the party!" Waltrud said before going to greet some other students who'd finally arrived.

"Astrid, what were you two talking about?"

"Heh... Waltrud seems to have gotten me confused with someone else."

That was a close one... Iris almost found out that I was working as an assistant mage.

"Whom were you confused with?"

"Someone at the Adventurers' Guild. Some mage there defeated a dragon more or less single-handedly. Can you imagine me doing something as dangerous as that?"

Heh heh. Now, even if the story spreads further, Iris won't think that this assistant mage is me.

"But you could defeat a dragon, couldn't you, Astrid?"

"O-Of course not. Do I really look like I'm that powerful?"

"You do. You did defeat the kelpie and those mermen by yourself, after all."

Agh! What kind of image of me does Iris have?! Does she not see me as a gentle-hearted big sister anymore?!

"Listen, Iris. Even I couldn't handle a dragon."

"Are you sure? I think you could..."

No, no. Please don't look at me with those admiring eyes.

"Astrid." Just when I was trying to get over the shock of knowing that I'd destroyed Iris's impression of me, who should appear but the root of all my troubles, Friedrich himself.

"Good evening, Your Highness. Your tuxedo suits you well."

"Thank you, Astrid. Your dress suits you too."

Getting compliments from you doesn't please me one bit!

"I know that this is a celebration, and it's hardly the right time, but I was hoping we could talk. Would that be possible?" Friedrich asked.

"Y-Yes. I'd be glad to be of service."

Wh-What is there to talk about? Please tell me it's not the discussion that brings about my family's destruction.

“Perhaps we could step outside for a moment.”

I let Friedrich lead me away, and he took me out onto a balcony that was a little separated from the graduation party.

Is this allowed? We’re just walking around someone’s house without asking...

“What would you like to discuss?”

“I’m to be the next emperor. I expect I’ll soon be conferred the title of crown prince. But, as emperor, what sort of person must I become?”

What? Why would he ask me about that? “I’m afraid the question of how an emperor should be is beyond me.”

“That’s precisely why I’m asking you. Should I remain true to myself even when I’m emperor, or should I strive to become the ideal emperor that the chancellor, the ministers, and my father would have me be?”

Bleh. Looks like Friedrich’s problems are about to get more serious now that we’re close to becoming high schoolers.

“Your Highness, you’re free to decide whether you will try to be more like His Majesty the Emperor or remain true to yourself. Personally, I think that as long as your approach achieves the right results, it doesn’t matter whether you control the population with military might or you lead them with compassion.”

“I just need to achieve results?”

That’s right. Don’t just think about yourself; spare a thought for the pitiful citizens of the empire, like me!

“I believe the emperor should be a politician who serves his nation. Ideally, the citizens forming that nation should be able to live without uncertainty. We’re living in a time where the age of iron and fire is drawing closer. His Majesty Wilhelm III is preparing the military, so using military might to reign over the people seems only natural.”

“I see. Perhaps my father had the right idea after all...”

I have no interest in any arguments you’re having with your dad.

“However, I expect that the world will be very different by the time you

become emperor, Your Highness. So why not choose your approach to suit the situation at that time? If you're able to rule effectively by remaining as you are, then you may do so. However, if that doesn't produce the intended result, then you could change your approach until you do achieve results. That's how I view the issue."

Yeah. You've got to stay flexible. Rulers in this country aren't chosen by an election, so everyone suffers if they can't adapt to suit the changing world. You got that?

"If the age of iron and fire should drag on, would I be best suited trying to be more like my father?"

"That's your decision to make, Your Highness. Conflicts can sometimes be resolved through diplomacy. If you were to concentrate your efforts on diplomacy, you might avoid a war entirely. However, we must always consider the worst-case scenario. That's why I see no contradiction between preparing your military while also approaching your citizens with compassion."

Even in the United States—the land of the free—the world's largest military coexists with free speech.

"I don't fully understand, but I understand enough, I think. I'm glad I talked to you, Astrid. You've given me a new perspective on everything."

"As I've told you before, all I can give you are the silly notions of a young girl."

Give me a break! You should be talking about this stuff with Adolf and Silvio.

"Why don't we return to the hall? We have to give Waltrud and the others a proper send-off."

"Yes, let's do that."

Yeesh! He watches me get all flustered as I think my destruction might be set in motion, and then he just shrugs it off. He's unbelievable. I wish our heroine, Elsa, would get here! She needs to diffuse this nuclear landmine!

But ranting about it would achieve nothing. We made the most of the graduation party that would see off Waltrud and the others.

I need to talk to Waltrud about that bank later. Gotta make a mental note.

Chapter 6 — The Villainess Goes Abroad

“Father! Father!”

The graduation ceremony had been held, and I was starting my spring break with all my preparations for entering my third year of middle school complete. Now there was another thing I had to take care of.

“What is it, Astrid? Magic again?”

“N-No. It’s not about magic. I was hoping we could go on a small trip.”

Everybody thinks I’m a total magic maniac...

“A trip? That reminds me, you’ve been getting home late recently. What’ve you been up to?”

“I-It’s because of my club activities.”

It wasn’t a lie. I had been doing club activities, I just happened to also be going to the Adventurer’s Guild.

“I hope these club activities of yours don’t involve more eccentric behavior. Just the other day you came home covered in mud, and you told me it was because of some light exercise. I know you’re not the type who’d get bullied, so I’m guessing you were involved in some kind of odd experiment.”

Oh. Most families would worry that their daughter is being bullied if she came home covered in mud, but I get this reaction. I can hardly explain that I was fighting with Fenrir...

“W-Well, I did fall over... But I’ll be more careful in the future, so I believe that’s the matter settled.”

“Really?” mother said. “You looked as though you’d been playing with a dog.”

Yikes! How’d mother figure that out? Did it show on my face again?

“Hm. A dog?” father asked. “Were you missing Kai?”

“Y-Yes. That’s what it was.”

Kai was the name of the hunting dog we used to keep, but he’d died of old

age around the time I entered middle school. He'd been more than ten years old. In a world with no veterinary clinics, such things were just a fact of life.

Ahh. Now I really am missing him...

"I see. You don't pay much attention to Genie, though."

"Genie doesn't seem to like me..."

Genie was a puppy that Kai had left behind. Much like Kai, she'd been raised as a hunting dog. The difference was that she'd never gotten used to me and would act aggressive whenever I got too close. *What did I do to make her hate me?*

"Hmm. Maybe you're not the type of person animals like. Or maybe it's because you were too rough when petting her. Which could it be?"

"Wh-Who can say?"

I did pet Genie back when she was a puppy...

"But let's talk about this trip, father. Let's go traveling!"

"To where, exactly?"

"To the Republic of Helvetia!"

That's right. Waltrud wrote me a letter of introduction for a bank big enough to earn fame in a financial hub like Helvetia. I've gotta get my money deposited there right away! I've been careful with my allowance, and I did all that assistant mage work at the Adventurer's Guild, so now I've got a whole two million marks ready to deposit! I'll need all of that money to make a fresh start in a foreign country if I'm ever exiled. I need to manage it carefully so my savings can grow at least a little. Even if I lose my noble status someday, money is all I need to get by.

"Helvetia? What would you do in a country like that?"

"Well... I've heard there are beautiful mountain ranges, and I just have to see them."

I can't say that it's because I want to visit the bank. Most of my savings is money I earned at the Adventurer's Guild. From father's point of view, it's

money of unknown origin. If he finds out about it, he'll eventually realize that I'm working as an assistant mage.

"Yes, I hear the mountains of Helvetia are very beautiful indeed," Father concurred. "I'm relieved to learn that you're interested in such things. I take it you've nothing magic-related in mind?"

"Of course not! I would never do anything that would bring shame on me as a duke's daughter."

I'm glad that father's an optimist...

"Well then, let's spend your spring vacation in Helvetia. Should we invite Iris? Assuming the Braunschweig family has no objections, of course."

"Great idea! Great idea. I'd be delighted if we could invite Iris and her family."

All right! I'll be getting my fill of sightseeing too!

"Helvetia happens to be a country of finance," mother said. "Though it's probably a little soon for you to be thinking about that, isn't it, Astrid?"

"Naturally," father replied. "The girl would have no business with a bank."

Ugh. Does mother know what I'm planning?

"I'm h-happy just knowing we'll see those magnificent mountains and the beautiful Helvetian streets."

"Really?" Mother was staring at me with the same enigmatic smile as always.

I can't help but feel nervous...

....

It's spring vacation! And I'm spending it in the Helvetia Republic!

"Oh? Those must be the famous mountains of Helvetia."

Magnificent mountains with snow-covered peaks were visible up ahead. I'd heard that the area was famous for its scenery, but it was beyond what I'd imagined. I couldn't help but feel a sense of wonder.

"Iris, are you seeing this?"

"I see it, Astrid. It truly is splendid scenery."

Iris was sitting opposite me in the Oldenburg family's horse-drawn carriage.

Iris will be entering her first year of middle school soon... I have to worry when I see that my little sis is barely growing at all. Meanwhile, big sis here was 168 cm last time she measured her height. I feel like I'm getting too tall. Maybe Iris just needs to eat well, exercise well, and sleep well, but she never seems to eat a lot.

"You'll be starting middle school this year, Iris. Are you nervous?"

"Not at all. I've made friends outside the Round Table recently who'll be starting middle school at the same time, so I have nothing to worry about!"

Oh! Despite her shyness, she made some friends!

"What are your friends' names?"

"It's Werra's group. We've been getting along well since the incident."

Huh? Wasn't Werra that girl who bullied Iris?

"Oh? You get along now, even though she was bullying you?"

"Yes. She can be somewhat distant because I'm a duke's daughter, but I often speak to her in class. We study together too. Werra and the others have been so kind to me since then."

I'd kept them under surveillance for a while, but I eventually stopped because there was no sign of the bullying problem resurfacing.

I can't believe they're friends now. Iris is such a good girl. If I'd been in her shoes, I'd have cursed their families for three generations to come.

"You're so kind, Iris."

"Am I really?" Iris looked doubtful.

Ah. I'll bet Werra was overcome by Iris's cuteness.

"Well, I'm glad that you've made some friends. It's a relief."

"I'm glad too. You're still my best friend though, Astrid."

Guh! My little sister is so cute! Maybe she'll start acting a little more rebellious once she reaches middle school age, but I hope she never gets like Silvio.

Eventually, we entered the Helvetia Republic. Once inside the country, we found rooms at a high-class hotel in the capital city of Lindenhof, and then my parents relaxed by drinking tea with the Braunschweigs. As for me...

“Astrid, where are you headed?”

“Th-That’s a secret! I’ll be right back, so just stick close to our parents!”

Iris seemed eager to follow me, but with a heavy heart, I talked her out of it and headed to the bank alone.

“Umm... It’s the second block on Rudolf I Street in Lindenhof...”

I carried my meager stash of two million marks and Waltrud’s letter of invitation through the streets of Lindenhof. Naturally, I knew better than to use blood magic in the middle of a city street, and I walked with elegance. I was starting to feel as though I’d been using blood magic to run everywhere at the academy, though.

“Oh, here it is. Helvetia Cranz Bank. This is the place.”

I found the bank that Waltrud had told me about. It really was a magnificent-looking bank housed in a spacious building with an incredibly sturdy structure. The thought of stepping inside actually made me a little nervous.

“But I’ve gotta do it!”

It’s for the sake of my future!

I mustered up some courage and walked through the bank’s entranceway.

Oh. Just what I’d expect from a bank recommended by Waltrud. No shortage of security guards here, and every customer looks rich. Two million marks might actually be too small of an amount...

“Excuse me.” I was still having my doubts as I spoke to a lady behind a counter.

“How can I help you?” She greeted me with a smile.

“I’ve come here with a letter of introduction from the Vito family of the Plusen Empire. Would you like to see it?” I presented the letter I’d gotten from Waltrud.

“Please wait one moment.” The lady politely accepted the latter and then disappeared behind the counter.

I waited in the waiting area while she was gone.

When I heard the people around me talking, it made me realize that a lot of the customers here were from areas that didn’t speak the language of the Reich. Incidentally, I was considered trilingual because I could speak three different languages.

Ahem. In any case, the various languages of this world weren’t all that different, so I’d quickly gotten used to each language system. I was a literary girl, after all!

“Lady Astrid.” A young man in a suit found me while I was sitting thinking. “I’m terribly sorry for making you wait. We have confirmed your letter of introduction. Please come this way.”

“A-All right!” I nervously stood up and followed after him.

Mnn... I wish I'd saved up a little more before coming here. I brought along something valuable in addition to the money just in case, but I don't even know if they'll accept something like that.

“Would you like to entrust the management of your assets to the bank?”

“Yes,” I said, handing over a trunk that contained my two million marks. “It’s only a small sum of money. Will that be all right?”

“Two million marks, I see. This is slightly below our minimum limit for asset management.”

I should've known...

“However, you are the daughter of Duke Oldenburg. We would be delighted to enter into business dealings with the Oldenburg family. For that reason, we’re able to offer our services on this occasion.”

Thank goodness... I thought he was about to turn me down for having too little money.

“I was also wondering if you’d be able to store this for me.”

“Is this...a fire dragon horn? This is a very precious item.”

The bank employee’s expression was one of astonishment as I presented the fire dragon horn I’d brought.

“I see that it’s an item of great worth. I’ll ensure that it’s stored in a high-security vault.”

“Is it really worth that much?”

“This horn alone is worth at least two million marks. It’s a little damaged, but it can be repaired and used to make a high-class ornament or piece of furniture with great value.”

Oh? It’s a rare drop?

“We can certainly hold it for you. How would you like to be kept informed about the state of your assets?”

“Please send it to my PO box at the Eastern Havel Post Office. The address is...”

If my parents saw me getting notices from Helvetia about the management of my assets, they’d probably call a family meeting. I’d made some advance preparations so that I could give a PO box address. *Ah... How I miss the days when everything was as easy as sending an email...*

“We shall proceed as you’ve instructed. I’d like to thank you for choosing to do business with our bank, Lady Astrid.”

“Not at all. I’m sorry for making you go to such trouble.”

*I’m basically making them take care of a kid’s pocket change (*The average salary for working-class citizens is eighty thousand marks in this world). It’s hardly going to grow very much. But anyhow, I can make it grow if I keep on saving my earnings! Let’s just hope I don’t have any problems with that...*

Chapter 7 — The Villainess Wants to Observe Actual Combat

Sightseeing in Helvetia had been a great way to spend my spring vacation. It'd been a country of stylish streets and environments surrounded by nature's splendor. I'd gotten to experience things that weren't possible in Havel.

Some of my time there was spent shopping with Iris, and we'd bought a matching pair of Helvetia's famous watches. I felt that I'd really made the most of Helvetia, having gotten to experience both its famous financial institutions and its renowned mechanical craftsmanship.

"Astrid, what did you do when you went off alone?"

"Th-That's a secret. A secret."

Iris had been suspicious ever since that day that I left the hotel to visit the bank.

Sorry, little sis. This is one thing I can't share. I risked my life for those savings, and my future depends on them.

In other news, with that spring vacation over, I'd started my life as a third-year middle schooler. Next year would be the year that the heroine, Elsa, would finally enter the academy.

I still don't know whether she'll bring about my destruction or not. Maybe my preparations have got everything covered?

No! I'm not even close to being prepared! I've been working frantically to make modern weapons all this time, but I still don't know a thing about the war potential of the enemy I'm planning to use them on! Even the idea of war potential in a sword and sorcery fantasy world is vague to me! But how am I ever going to solve that problem?

"Astrid, is something troubling you?" As I was lost in troubling thoughts at the Round Table, along came Friedrich.

"Y-Yes. A little."

I'm making good progress with my plan to tear you apart, and you don't suspect a thing. You dumb peace addict.

"I could discuss the matter with you, if you wish," Friedrich offered. "You were kind enough to talk me through my worries recently, after all."

"Ah..."

Should I? It could be the right option if I play this right.

"I was thinking about my life choices. Becoming a battle mage someday is one possibility that I'm considering. However, I can't obtain any information on how battle mages actually fight."

"Oh? A duke's daughter like you, becoming a battle mage?"

"Yes. It's something I'm considering."

I'm basically a battle mage for the Adventurer's Guild already. But despite fighting alongside fellow mages in parties other than Gertrud's, I still don't know how battle mages fight together as groups. There was the dragon subjugation quest, but I felt like they weren't being coordinated through military-style leadership because there was so much variation in their skill levels. That means I need you to spill the beans about the state of your military, Friedrich!

"A battle mage...? There'll be a live training exercise happening soon. Perhaps you'd like to attend?"

"Would that be possible? I'd be most grateful, Your Highness!"

Well, what do you know?! Friedrich is actually useful after all!

"Though I'm not sure I'd recommend it; it'll be quite a shocking sight."

"I think I'll be fine. I have confidence my heart will hold out."

Just let me see the damn thing! I wanna see the military unit I'll be crushing in the future!

"In that case, I'll see to it that you're invited to the next training exercise. Adolf and Silvio are also planning to attend. I'm sure there'll be room for one more."

Bleh! Adolf and Silvio are coming?! You could've told me that sooner!

“I’ll let you know the schedule for the training day later. Please make sure you wear clothes that can get dirty. Although it’s just training, the attacks used by battle mages can be quite extreme.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

I was going to be surrounded by landmines, but I was still grateful for a chance to see how this country’s battle mages fought; I’d be able to confirm whether my modern weapons or this country’s mages were stronger.

If I find out I’m stronger, I can fight without hesitation. If it turns out that the enemy’s stronger, I’ll work on developing more overwhelming firepower. In the worst case, I can start developing gun-type fission bombs without telling Mister Gnome. It ought to be a simple matter of using an explosive to propel some nuclear material.

No... Nuclear weapons are going too far. And the thought of handling radioactive materials scares me.

Anyhow, I’ll get to know all there is to know about this country’s battle mages!

....

And so, there I was on the training ground!

Hmm. The training ground’s spectator area is on a hilltop, and there’s a plain at the foot of the hill. All the battle mages and knights are down there on the plain.

The training simulated a situation where a hypothetical enemy was camped to the east and allied forces were launching an assault on the camp.

I guess you couldn’t call it training if they were throwing fireballs at actual human beings. This looks a lot safer. I’ll think of it like a Fuji Firepower Demonstration. It’s good enough for me to see what the enemy’s capable of. Now then...when’s it gonna start?

“Astrid, you don’t have to lean so far forward to see.”

“O-Oh. I got a little too excited.”

This won’t do. I can’t let anyone realize my true intentions.

As we were talking, the knights of the imperial guard, all dressed in black armor, suddenly appeared and stood at attention.

What's that about?

“Make way for His Imperial Majesty!”

Huh?

When I saw Friedrich and everyone else get up and stand at attention, I hurriedly did the same.

Did they really just say “His Imperial Majesty”? Did I hear that right? Why would the emperor himself attend a minor training exercise?

“Good work.”

All doubt was erased when the emperor himself really did appear before us.

Friedrich! You coulda told me your dad would be here!

“Friedrich, who’s the girl?” His Majesty asked while glaring right at me.

“This is Miss Astrid of House Oldenburg, Your Majesty,” Friedrich replied.

“My name is Astrid. I’m most grateful to have been given the honor of watching the training exercise.”

“Ah...”

H-He’s the last boss? This strict-as-hell military man? I can’t imagine how he’d ever get along with a weakling like Friedrich. He’s like my father, but with the force of presence multiplied by 150... (Figure based on my own research.)

“Do you think women and children enjoy watching military training exercises, Friedrich? When our battle mages throw fireballs, do you think they’re fireworks?”

“Not at all. Miss Astrid is aiming to become a battle mage, and she asked to watch today’s exercise so as to aid her future decisions.”

“That girl’s going to be a battle mage?” His Majesty was glaring at me once again.

I’d really prefer it if you didn’t glare. It’s making me nervous.

“Well, it’s true that the age of iron and fire is near,” His Majesty conceded. “We’ll be mobilizing everyone we can, even women and children. Just recently, I heard tales of a female mage who defeated a fire dragon over a century old. I believe they called her the Dragon Slayer Witch. We’ll need people like that if we’re going to win.”

Right here! That Dragon Slayer Witch is me! But there’s no way I can say that out loud! It’s taking everything I’ve got to keep a smile on my face!

“Adolf, have you learned to use blood magic yet?”

“I’m currently undergoing training at the academy, Your Majesty.”

“In other words, you still can’t.” His Majesty snorted with dissatisfaction at Adolf’s response.

Ah... Now His Majesty’s aiming his attacks at Adolf. Is this like one of those high-stress interviews?

“General Küchler, begin your training exercise.”

“As you command, Your Majesty.”

He totally ignored Silvio! What a guy!

“One of your spectators has been trying to avoid these demonstrations. Don’t disappoint him.” His Majesty finished speaking, and then there was a thud as he took his seat in the spectator area.

Friedrich remained expressionless.

It’s rare that something gets to Friedrich. Does he really get on that badly with his dad? But if that’s the case, why’d he come to watch the training?

Oh, he must have been forced to attend. Anyway, it means I get to see what the Imperial Army’s capable of!

“First, second, third mage battalions. Begin preparatory strike!”

Hm. An actual magic attack by a unit on the scale of a regiment. Let’s see how it goes. I see the battle mages on the field, standing by with their crossbows... Wait, what? Crossbows?



“Fire!”

They all released their bolts at once.

Why crossbows?

I watched as they rained arrows down on the camp where the imaginary enemy was stationed. Then came the explosions. Each was about equivalent to a hand grenade going off, so they were smaller than what the mages fighting the fire dragon had used.

I’m guessing that they used talismans to create explosions, but why are they so weak? It’s kinda powerful when they all attack at once, but couldn’t they have been a lot more powerful than this?

Oh, I get it. They’re firing them from crossbows, so if one of the bolts caused a big explosion, it would throw all the others off course. Either that, or they’re keeping the power to a minimum because making a lot of high-power talismans would be too much trouble.

The whole point of using battle mages is that they can deal damage with magic attacks, so it’s not so surprising that they’d put talismans on any crossbow bolts they use. If they were to attack using the standard method of creating magic with mental images, they’d be limited to a range of about twenty meters, and they’d be much slower. There’s no doubt that talismans are the main force behind their attacks.

But even this method only gives them a range of forty or fifty meters at most. A little bit of wind magic would throw all their bolts off course, not to mention that the explosions are so weak that the enemy could easily take shelter in a building. And even though the bolts explode with similar power to a hand grenade, they don’t send out any shrapnel.

Yeah. This is no threat to me at all.

“First, second, third mage battalions, begin supporting strike! First imperial knight regiment, charge!”

A unit of knights entered the field while the battle mages continued to fire talismans from their crossbows. The bolts flew over the heads of the knights as

they charged toward the enemy camp, but the magic attacks stopped as the knights charged through the enemy camp. The knights then turned back in a wide circle and attacked the camp once more.

These knights look like machine gun fodder. They'd be a little frightening up close, but from here I could mow them down just like cavalry units in the First World War.

I concluded I could win against one mage regiment and one knight regiment from one of this world's militaries. Any more than that would either be too much for me to hold off or cause me to run out of bullets. This meant there was a high possibility that they could use saturation attacks against me, but the enemy would be looking at a mountain of their fallen allies by the time it worked. The knights would literally have to ride over the corpses of their fellow soldiers.

"First, second, third imperial infantry battalions, forward!"

I've clearly won; there are nothing but throwaway matches to see beyond this point.

The battle mages had launched a preparatory strike, the knights had created confusion, and now the infantry were moving in to suppress enemy soldiers.

The infantry are walking targets too. Shrapnel could tear right through armor as thin as that, and they're sticking so close together that they're just asking to be blown apart. But once again, if there are too many of them, I risk running out of mana.

The impression I got from the training was that I could take on an enemy unit the size of a division, provided I attacked efficiently, wore down their morale, and worked closely with my own allies to ensure that I didn't run out of mana or bullets.

The standing army only included the infantry division that was here plus several orders of knights, so taking on the imperial family's forces was starting to look like a possibility.

The problem is the number of local rulers who'd side with the imperials. The imperials have a lot of allies, which means more war potential, so they could be

a handful... I'll have to deal with that by putting more effort into diplomacy and increasing the number of allies that the Oldenburgs have. Being able to defeat a single division is no reason to get complacent.

"Hm. Weak, just like always. This wouldn't even defeat a band of mercenaries." The emperor sounded dissatisfied.

Oh! That's right! I totally forgot the mercenaries! Rather than standing armies that were only formed recently, mercenaries might be this world's true source of power. I know how powerful their magic attacks can be... Wow, I came all this way just to realize that...

"This concludes the training, Your Majesty," an imperial guard soldier in black armor said.

"Good work." The emperor waved him away. "Friedrich, what have you learned today?"

"The power of the magic attacks appears quite low. An attack of this nature would be ineffective against an enemy fortified within a trench."

Oh? Friedrich was actually paying attention to the training?

"Right. Not enough power. And how would you raise it?"

"I've often thought that we could increase the amount of mana used in each talisman."

Please no. Don't increase the power. That'll be bad for me.

"Easier said than done. Our mages could run out of mana while making their talismans. If the magic each one contained was too powerful, we'd end up with too few of them. What matters is that these magic attacks are enough to create confusion during battle. Low-power talismans can be used in overwhelming numbers, making them more effective in actual combat than a single high-power talisman that misses its target."

Ah. So that's the idea. The doctrine behind the imperial army's magic attacks is to overwhelm opponents by sheer numbers. Rather than attacking with a high-power talisman that might miss, it's better to produce more talismans with intermediate power so that there'll be too many of them for the enemy to

handle. It makes sense. But that's no match for me; my modern weapons already combine high power with the ability to fire continuously!

"Think harder, and try to learn something."

"My apologies, Your Majesty."

I'd hate to live with a dad who surprises me with pop quizzes. If I were his crown princess, it would mean gaining a super-strict father-in-law. That would suck. Anyhow, I'll leave it for Elsa to deal with when she finally starts defusing this landmine. I'm sure she'll hit it right off with that humorless dad of his!

Chapter 8 — The Villainess's Love Potion

“My friends, the time has come.”

As I made my announcement in the club room of the real magic research club, the club’s members, Minne, Lotte, Brigitte, and Sandra, looked at me and waited with bated breath.

“We’re making the love potion!”

“Yay!”

That’s right! Minne finally asked me to make the love potion!

“We’re the real magic research club. We form a grand association that explores magic tirelessly. That is why we shall not simply use the standard recipes for love potions that are commonly encountered! Our work will be the fruit of our own inquiries!”

“Yay!” My speech roused cheers of celebration from Minne and the others.



“First, we use blood magic to increase the subject’s heart rate and trigger the suspension bridge effect, which will cause them to mistake their excitement for romantic feelings. Rest assured that there have been numerous experiments on this already. It won’t affect their heart rate any more than necessary.”

I’d learned about this kind of love potion from existing magic research papers. I was sure it was safe because the literature was full of real-life observations. Using it on anyone with heart problems might have carried some risk, but Adolf and Silvio were in perfect health.

“Next, we induce feelings of affection toward another person, based on research by Minne and myself. The problem is that the suspension bridge effect alone will just end as a feeling of excitement if the subject doesn’t feel attraction toward someone. That’s why we need our loving mood magic to create those romantic feelings!”

“L-Loving mood magic?”

I already knew that I was bad at choosing names; I just wished Minne and the others wouldn’t recoil every time. It bothered me.

“The rest depends on your own effort! Make yourself look as attractive as possible before giving it to someone, and then do your best to grab their attention! Got that?”

“Yes, Lady Astrid!”

“Very well! Then let’s make it immediately!”

I’ve gotten everything prepared for this day!

“First, we need to learn the spell. Here’s the blood magic for making a love potion.”

“Okay.”

I placed a drop of blood on some paper so that Minne and the others could touch it to learn the spell. It wasn’t particularly difficult, so I figured they could handle it.

“This is the basic spell, and I don’t recommend making any modifications. You never know what’ll happen. It’s already in an optimized form I developed

through testing.”

“Indeed. We understand.”

If someone’s heart rate were raised too high, figuring out whether they were in love or not would be the least of their concerns. They might even collapse due to cardiac arrhythmia.

“Now that we’ve learned the spell, let’s concoct that love potion!”

Although we could have used the spell on people directly, we were going to go for a more feminine approach that involved enticing them with something sweet.

“First, we cut the chocolate into fine pieces.”

“How fine, exactly?”

“Hmm. I guess we need pretty small pieces so that they’ll melt nicely.”

Through strenuous effort, we each cut a block of chocolate into tiny pieces.

It’s a good thing this world has chocolate. A love potion without chocolate just wouldn’t be right.

“Now we take a drop of the blood that contains the spell from earlier.”

I added a drop of blood to the bowl containing my cut chocolate.

“Is it all right to put blood into it...?” Lotte asked doubtfully.

“We’ll be heating it to kill any bacteria, so that won’t be a problem,” I replied. “And don’t worry: even if the heat denatures the blood, the blood magic’s effect will be unchanged.”

The other girls were reluctant to put blood into their chocolate, but after seeing me add mine first, they made small cuts on their fingers and added some blood into their own bowls of chocolate.

This is like something twisted stalkers do back on Earth, but it’s all for making a girl’s dreams come true. It shouldn’t upset anyone’s stomach, so they should eat it up without complaining. It’s nothing but a bit of hemoglobin and whatnot, after all.

Then we brought some fresh cream to a boil—elemental magic came in handy

there—whisked it a little, and after a few more steps, we'd each made ganache.

"Now you just need to feed it to someone. Remember, you have to grab their attention by making yourself as attractive as possible. This magic could make them fall in love with anyone; it won't necessarily make them fall for you."

"Yes, Lady Astrid."

Although they'd agreed, Minne and the others weren't looking any different from normal.

"You won't hand over the chocolate dressed as you are now, will you?" I asked.

"Oh? Would that be bad?"

Ah. They can try it while dressed as they are if they want, and that might work for Minne since Adolf already sees her as something like a girlfriend. However, Silvio's going through his little rebellious phase, and I don't even know who Brigitte or Sandra's targets are, so I can't predict what'll happen there.

"You can't just let them eat it without any preparation. And look, you need to shorten your skirt a little..."

"Ah! How shameful, Lady Astrid!"

Come on. Don't resist. I might have been a drab girl who followed all the school rules in my past life, but I know how to shorten my skirt at least.

"This is great! Now, if you undo a few buttons to show your chest..."

"That's going too far! I won't do it!"

Tch. She's not cooperating.

"I pray you all fight a good fight! I'm sure Adolf and Silvio will accept these because they like chocolate, but will you two be all right, Sandra, Brigitte?"

"Yes," Brigitte replied. "He tells me that he likes sweet foods."

All right. Then there's no problem. This ganache is super sweet.

"So, who are your targets?" I asked.

"U-Um. Lord Zoltan, son of Count Zinzendorf, and..." Brigitte looked at

Sandra.

“I c-can’t tell you yet!” Sandra said.

Looks like everyone’s chosen their target. Am I the only exception? The only one who has no one? That’s too sad...

“Lady Astrid, who will you give yours to?”

“Hmm. Do I really have to answer that?”

“Lady Astrid will be giving hers to Prince Friedrich, I’m sure.”

“Where’d you get that idea from, Minne?”

Please stop mentioning Friedrich. The heroine, Elsa, will be here in just another year’s time, and then he’ll have no business with me. Also, the fact that Elsa will be here in just one year is all the more reason for Minne and Lotte to make Adolf and Silvio properly fall in love. That should leave Friedrich as the automatic choice for Elsa. She’s not the type of girl who’d go after a boy who already has someone. At the very least, she was a kind person in the game, so I’m willing to bet on that.

“Then who will you give it to, Lady Astrid?”

“Well, the truth is, I’m still thinking about it. I wonder who it’ll be...”

That’s a total lie. I’ve actually decided.

The whole reason I’d gone to the trouble of making my own ganache with the spell contained in it was so that I could feed it to that person.

“You should give it to Prince Friedrich.”

“Minne, I could get executed for using blood magic on members of the imperial family.”

It’s probably true. I can’t just go using blood magic on him since he’s an imperial family member. There’s a chance he already has a blood magic barrier set up, and I’ll be in big trouble if he notices anything. However, that won’t be an issue for ordinary middle schoolers because they haven’t learned to make barriers.

“All right, everyone! Time to move out! I’ll see you off!”

“Yes, Lady Astrid!”

And so, I sent Minne and the others into battle before they could pry further.

I knew Minne would be fine, but I was less sure about Lotte, so it was her I decided to follow. If it worked well for Lotte, then I’d be ready to give my chocolate to my target.

How fiendish of me to use my friend as a guinea pig.

....

I had Blau cancel out the sound of my footsteps so that Lotte wouldn’t realize I was following her.

Now, where will she find Silvio? Ah, there he is. He’s just leaving the Round Table.

“Lord Silvio!”

“Oh, Miss Lotte. Is something wrong?”

Lotte was making good progress with Silvio until his rebellious phase kicked in and ruined it all. Will this go all right? I’ve shortened her skirt, so that should help.

“It’s just that we made chocolates during our club activities, and I thought perhaps you’d like some.”

“Oh. Thank you. I’ll happily accept.”

Don’t just take it and walk away! Eat it right now!

“W-W-Well, I’ve tried them myself, but I worry that they might not be to your liking. Perhaps you might try a piece right now?”

“Oh, in that case, I’ll sample one.”

All right! Silvio’s opening the box, and now he’s gonna try one of our ganache chocolates. Is it gonna work?

“Hm? This is...”

“Wh-What do you think? Is it good?”

The spell appeared to be taking effect. Blood magic’s power didn’t depend on

the amount of blood used, so a single drop should have been plenty to produce a reaction.

“Y-Yes, it’s very good. The texture is unfamiliar to me.”

Oh? Silvio’s looking tense!

“Lord Silvio, will we always be there for each other?”

“O-Of course. If I’m good enough for you, then I’d be delighted.”

She did it! This has been a huge success!

“Well then, Lord Silvio, I hope we continue to get along in future. And...I h-h-hope that the relationship between us grows stronger.”

Oho... Lotte’s quite forward today. I’d expect nothing less from my chosen bomb disposal expert, after all! She’s being real gutsy.

“Yes, indeed. I feel as though the burdens I carry might be bearable with a lady as charming as yourself by my side.”

“Lord Silvio...”

Yes! Landmine defused! Lotte is victorious! Or, at least, that should keep Silvio quiet for a while. He’ll go on being a landmine until he gets through his little rebellious phase, but now I can leave it to Lotte to take care of the small stuff.

Now that I’ve verified the love potion’s effectiveness, it’s time I attempt some romance of my own...

....

I arrived at the battlefield. Indeed, I had entered the staff room! I was gonna give my chocolates to Mr. Bernhard!

My target may be a teacher at the Holy Satanachia Academy of Sorcery, but I’ve incorporated a spell for breaking blood magic barriers into my love potion, so I just know it’ll have a dramatic effect! At least, I really hope so...

All right, let’s not chicken out. Time to give this a shot!

“Umm, Mr. Bernhard...?”

Huh? He’s not here?

“Excuse me, do you know where I might find Mr. Bernhard?” I asked another teacher.

“What? Oh, hmm, he was right there just a moment ago.” The teacher looked confused when they couldn’t see Mr. Bernhard anywhere.

Could he be in his usual spot?

“Sorry for bothering you!”

I sprinted out of the classroom and headed for the athletics club grounds that I used as my 04-type flight unit’s landing and takeoff point.

“There he is!”

“Wh-What?”

As expected, Mr. Bernhard was slacking off in the corner of the athletics grounds. When I leaped in front of him, his eyes went wide with surprise.

“Mr. Bernhard! I have a request!”

“Ah... I’m not sure I want to hear it.”

He’s being like that already?

“Oh, come on. Don’t say that. I made some treats as part of our club activities, so I thought maybe you’d like to try some.”

“Treats as part of the club? Didn’t you create the real magic research club because you had no interest in things like that?”

“We’re allowed to have some fun every once in a while.”

Grr. He’s not letting his guard down. Can I break though somehow?

“Well, fine. You made them yourself, did you? Let me guess, sneeze cookies?”

“No, no. It’s ordinary ganache chocolate.”

He’s suspicious of every little thing... It’s not like I behave abnormally. Sure, I might fly to school sometimes, burst in on the archery club every once in a while, and jump off a roof or two, but I don’t do anything weird!

Well...I guess some people might consider those things weird.

“I’ll try just one.”

“All right. Here you are!” I opened the box and presented a chocolate to Mr. Bernhard.

“Hm. They look normal. I’m surprised.”

Huh? He’s suspicious right from the start?

“Just one.” Mr. Bernhard took one of the chocolates and tried it.

Lotte verified that they’re effective. Could this work?

“Mh...?” Mr. Bernhard’s eyes narrowed soon after he’d put the chocolate in his mouth. “Aha. A love potion?”

“Huh? Wh-What do you mean?”

How’d he figure it out?! The barrier-breaking spell should’ve been perfect!

“No ordinary chocolate would have set my heart racing like this. This sort of love potion has been around since my school days. It’s easy for me to guess what it is. You don’t have to look so shocked.”

“What a letdown...”

I see. He recognized its effects, huh... Maybe trying it on a teacher was reckless...

“Supposing I did fall in love, what were you planning to do next? Were you hoping to get something out of it?”

“No. I just genuinely wanted you to be in love...”

Gah... It worked for Lotte! Why can’t it work for me?

“Listen, the second son of a viscount and a duke’s daughter aren’t exactly a match made in heaven. Besides, if an old man like me fell in love with a girl your age, that’d be criminal.”

I can’t deny that there’s a big gap in age and social status...

“Am I not your type?”

“I’m more into girls who cause a little less trouble. Bigger breasts would also be a plus.”

“You’re a pig, Mr. Bernhard.”

“Says the girl who tried to use a love potion on me.”

“That’s different...”

Flat girls just don’t appear on his radar, huh? Is that the way it is?

“A girl like you will find a better man than me. Aren’t there any nice boys your own age?”

“Nope. I prefer older men.”

Now it’s just turning into a discussion of my love life. I’m the club president, yet I’m failing worse than anyone.

“Don’t go for an older man. There’s nothing good about them. They’ll grow old before you can, so your romance will be short-lived. The charm will wear off before you know it.”

“Is that how it is?”

Hmm. Could I be idealizing older men?

“That’s exactly how it is. Now, I’d better get back to the staff room. If you’ll keep quiet about me slacking off here, I’ll keep quiet about you and your club making love potions. I’m sure you wouldn’t want certain people to find out.”

“I appreciate it.”

Lotte and the others definitely wouldn’t want everyone knowing about their love potions. I wouldn’t want anyone besides me and Mr. Bernhard to know about our spot here anyhow.

“Aghh! When will I ever find love?” I grumbled to myself after Mr. Bernhard had left the athletics grounds.

Chapter 9 —The Villainess Experiments on Humans

It had been several days since I'd made the love potion. Minne and the others had been all smiles as they announced their results to me. Apparently, everything had gone well for them.

Well, that's good. But what mattered most was my own love potion, and that was a total dud!

"We've demonstrated that we can deliberately manipulate a person's feelings of affection. Now, we must move on to the next step."

"What's this next step you speak of?"

"Eliminating the conscience!"

Eliminating the conscience was another ability that I'd been planning to add to my combat preparation measures for a long time.

Humans feel stress when killing other members of their species. I didn't know precisely what caused the effect, but I was guessing it was the conscience. I strongly suspected that there was an innate aspect to conscience that came from human nature in addition to a learned aspect that developed later. Although I couldn't be sure that humans were born with a conscience, it was so common for humans to feel revulsion toward killing other humans that I felt it had to be more than a product of nurture.

Obviously, there were ways to eliminate the conscience in battle without the use of blood magic. That much was clear from the way that soldiers killed each other back on Earth. The way to do it was to dehumanize the enemy being killed to the extent that they didn't feel like members of the same species. Alternatively, a soldier could be trained to act on their reflexes, allowing them to pull the trigger upon seeing an enemy before the conscience had time to kick in.

However, I wanted to eliminate the stress of killing at its root. My goal was to be a smart killer. I'd erase my human emotions with the goal of becoming a

perfect killing machine.

As dangerous as this sounded, the idea had already been researched on Earth. It was a soldier's duty to fight and kill their enemies. Much like office workers handling accounting on computers, soldiers had to ensure the killing proceeded smoothly. When one soldier hesitated to kill another human being, it directly reduced the war potential of the force they belonged to.

I too would have to kill without hesitation on the day of my showdown with fate. I was likely to face forces commanded by Friedrich and the big bad himself, Wilhelm III. I would have to slaughter them without mercy.

So that's why I had to eliminate my conscience!

After slapping Pink the monkey across the head with a ruler hadn't caused me any pangs of guilt, I devised a new strategy.

"I'm putting out a call for research subjects. Of course, I'll be paying people to participate so that it's easy to attract volunteers. Everyone who participates in the research will get fifty thousand marks!"

"D-Did you say fifty thousand? Isn't that a little much?"

Mmm... That's true. The working class in this world only make eighty thousand marks in a single month.

"All right, let's set it at ten thousand marks. It's a small experiment, so a small amount of money should be enough to make the volunteers come flooding in."

"I still feel like that's a lot..."

I want to keep the reward generous so I can be sure people will apply.

"Now then, let's get these recruitment posters up right away! Test subjects, come to me!"

One after another, my handmade ads were stuck on walls here, there, and everywhere. The main entrance to the academy, the elementary school building, the middle school building, the high school building, the dining hall... My posters were put on display wherever people might see them.

"Miss Astrid, would you stop putting these ads everywhere? We've had complaints."

“I’m sorry...”

Sticking posters here and there and everywhere resulted in complaints. Woe was me... But it proved effective anyhow!

Before long, a middle school student had come to me. “Excuse me, I’m here to ask about the experiment mentioned on the posters.”

All right. Looking good.

“First, let me explain the purpose of the experiment. I intend to monitor brain activity in people under stress. I won’t use any kind of blood magic. Please proceed based on your own judgment. Next, allow me to explain the procedure the experiment uses.”

As I spoke, I took out an automatic pistol that used .45 caliber rounds. It was something I’d created recently, and as someone who preferred high calibers, I considered it a beautiful firearm.

“Here I have a mechanical device. When I pull the trigger of this device...”

The firing of the gun made a dry sound as a bullet shot out toward a melon I’d prepared. The melon broke into small fragments, and splatters of juice were sent flying.

“...that happens.”

Test Subject #1 gasped. “Wha... Wha?”

“I’d like you to use this device to shoot a guinea pig.”

“Wha?”

You sure do make that noise a lot, Test Subject #1.

“The guinea pig is right here, so please go ahead.”

“A-Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

I’d taken the guinea pig out of its cage and restrained it on a workbench, but Test Subject #1 merely looked at it nervously.

“Go right ahead. Aim first, then simply pull the trigger.”

I was monitoring Test Subject #1's brain activity while I was talking. What I detected was surprise plus several types of more complicated activity.

"Y-You really want me to kill it?"

"Yes, I do."

This brain activity's too complicated... I must be picking up more than just the conscience.

"You won't get paid if you don't do it."

"Very well... I'll do it."

Test Subject #1 took aim at the guinea pig with the automatic pistol. And then they pulled the trigger...

"Huh?"

However, nothing happened. That was no surprise for me. I'd only loaded one round into the gun, and I'd only channeled in enough mana to fire it once, so it was only natural.

"Good work. Here's your payment for participating. Please don't let anyone else know the nature of the experiment."

"A-All right."

After I'd handed over the ten thousand marks, Test Subject #1 nodded and then left.

The experiment continued in much the same way after that. First, I'd show the test subject that the automatic pistol had the power to kill the guinea pig, and then I'd urge them to shoot it. However, no bullet would fire, and no guinea pigs died. I was continuously monitoring each subject's brain activity throughout the process in an attempt to find the activity that was the conscience.

After Test Subject #1 had left, the experiment went the same for subjects #2, #3, and #4.

I tried using Pink as a target in an attempt to trigger the test subjects' consciences more strongly, but that didn't change their brain activity much at

all. Everyone was just as shocked, and they exhibited the same complex neuron activity. But I was beginning to see a pattern.

When I got to Test Subject #18, I tried a different experiment.

“I’m going to use some blood magic on you,” I told Test Subject #18 after blowing the eighteenth melon to pieces. “But don’t worry, I’ll deactivate the spell afterward.”

“A-All right,” they agreed.

By the way, these were spoiled melons that I’d bought in bulk for a low price.

“I’m applying the blood magic now,” I said while using a certain blood magic spell on Test Subject #18. “Now please use the weapon to shoot the monkey over there.”

“All right.”

Test Subject #18 pulled the trigger with a surprising lack of hesitation. But nothing happened.

“Huh?”

“Thank you for participating in the experiment. Here’s your payment.”

Test Subject #18 wasn’t alarmed by their own willingness to pull the trigger, they were just surprised that the gun hadn’t fired. I undid the blood magic and paid them before sending them on their way.

It was a huge success. A roaring success. I’d used blood magic on Test Subject #18 to block some of the common brain activity that I’d seen during my monitoring, and as a result, Test Subject #18 had aimed at Pink and pulled the trigger without a moment’s hesitation.

It looked like I’d finally found the source of the conscience. I had no other way to explain what I’d just seen from Test Subject #18.

After that, I repeated the experiment on thirty more volunteers to confirm that the same reaction would be seen in everyone. No matter who they were, they could easily pull the trigger once I suppressed certain brain activity, even though they’d otherwise hesitate.

I've done it! I've actually done it! Once I apply this to myself, my combat preparation measures will be complete!

However, there were good reasons for the conscience to exist. It wasn't something I could dispense with carelessly. That's why I came up with three different levels for my combat preparation measures:

My type-1 combat preparation measures involved slight physical enhancement with no conscience suppression.

For type-2 combat preparation measures, I'd have strong physical enhancement with slight conscience suppression.

Lastly, my type-3 combat preparation measures featured my maximum physical enhancement with strong conscience suppression.

I planned to store these three types as blood magic spells. Type-2 combat preparation measures would suffice when fighting a creature like a magic beast. When facing a human army, I'd use my type-3 combat preparation measures.

That said, these were just the spells I was going to keep stored. In practice, I could be more flexible with my approach. For example, when fighting against a magic beast that demanded high physical performance, such as a fenrir or fire dragon, I could switch to using my type-3 combat preparation measures to boost my physical abilities while leaving my conscience unmodified.

Now, whatever the situation, I'd be able to pull the trigger without mercy, even against a human being.

Wait a minute. What if replacing the experimental animal with a human results in different brain activity? Maybe I should've run the experiment with a human target... But I already spent every last penny of the club's research budget. I can't pay for it with my own cash either since I'm trying to put all of my allowance into my savings.

Anyhow, if it's enough to make someone mercilessly shoot Pink to death, then it should make it easy to kill soldiers I've never met. Pulling the trigger will get even easier when those enemies are coming at me and trying to kill me.

Now that I could shut down the complicated brain modules known as the conscience, I'd made another step toward my victory.

This should even help me kill familiar people like Friedrich, Adolf, and Silvio. Nice work, me! I'm ready to use my firepower to crush anyone who stands in my way!

Chapter 10 — The Villainess and Some Outlaws

I was at the Adventurer's Guild once again! What type of quest will there be today?

“Hey, it’s Astrid. Long time no see.”

“Long time no see, Petra.”

I’d recently been watching military training, making the love potion, and experimenting on humans, so I’d been too busy to visit the Adventurer’s Guild. But today I’d made some time, so I was here to earn more cash for the sake of my future!

“Petra, what’s today’s quest?”

“Gertrud’s off choosing one now. Remember how I was telling you about the fire dragon’s rampage causing some weird movements among magic beasts? Well, today’s quest will probably be related to that.”

“I see.”

Essentially, when the dragon was gobbling up all the magic beasts, it triggered their Migration Period and impacted local ecosystems. When those magic beasts encroached on urban and rural areas, it was the Adventurer’s Guild’s job to intercept them.

“You know, you’re getting real famous, Astrid,” Ernesta said.

“Oh? I am?”

“Yeah, you are. I heard that all this talk of the Dragon Slayer Witch reached the imperial household.”

Ah, that’s right. Even the emperor had heard about the Dragon Slayer Witch.

“But no one’s going to realize that it’s me, are they?”

“I’ll bet every single regular at this guild knows it’s you,” Petra replied. “Who else here has striking red hair and an academy uniform?”

Uh-oh! How'd I get so careless?! I was so focused on making money that I got lazy with my disguise! Putting my hair in a ponytail and wearing fake glasses were good ideas, but my super-obvious red hair and academy uniform could be all it takes to identify me!

“I think I might start wearing different clothes... Or maybe I’ll wear a robe.”

“It’s a little late for that,” Petra said. “The receptionists and the adventurers all recognize your face already.”

Gah! I’m too late!

“Wh-What can I do now?”

“It’s no use asking me. It’s just how it is. Anyhow, why do you want to hide your identity so badly? I’d have thought most people would enjoy a little recognition. The name Dragon Slayer Witch isn’t anything to be ashamed of; it’s a badge of honor.”

“Uh... That’s... Well... It’s complicated...”

Everyone knows my face now, but I don’t think they’ve realized that I’m Duke Oldenburg’s daughter. I’ll lose all hope if they figure that out.

“Being an academy student makes you a noble, right?” asked Ernesta. “Are you undercover or something?”

“That’s right! I’m undercover!”

It’s the truth! I am undercover!

“Do your parents not want you to be an assistant mage?” asked Petra. “I guess nobles don’t want their daughters working jobs that commoners and the poor normally handle. You’d be in trouble if they knew, I guess?”

“I’d be in very big trouble.”

We’re talking more than trouble here... All of my future plans would be ruined.

“Then I guess we’d better not mention your name to anyone. Then again, the story about you slaying a dragon is so widespread that I don’t think there’s anyone who hasn’t already heard it.”

“Is there nothing I can do?”

“Not a thing.”

Uh... This is a problem. Combine the name Astrid with red hair and an academy uniform, and everyone's bound to know it's me.

“Have you got money problems back at home, Astrid?” Ernesta asked.

“I expect that things will get difficult in the future.”

“They'll get difficult in the future?”

It's smooth sailing for the Oldenburg family right now, as far as finances go. But having our domain seized in the future would mean losing most of our wealth. That's why I've gotta work for the Adventurer's Guild until I've got enough money to make a fresh start!

“Being a noble must come with a lot of problems. But if you're ever broke, come join the Adventurer's Guild full-time. Our party'll welcome you. We'd never pass up on a mage with your talent.”

“I appreciate that, Petra.”

Petra's friendship is fiery. But getting exiled would mean saying goodbye to Petra and the others...

“Oh, Astrid. You're here too, I see.”

“Long time no see, Gertrud.”

When Gertrud, the party leader, appeared, I greeted her with a nod of my head.

I wonder what sort of quest she picked.

“This quest might be a little tough for you, Astrid. Are you sure you're up for it?”

“Huh? What sort of quest is it?”

“Clearing out bandits.”

Ooh, bandit extermination! That's a standard quest in games.

“Ah, I'm not sure Astrid could handle a fight against people,” Petra objected. “It's not so bad for us because we've gotten used to it, but seeing people

collapsing to the ground with their blood spraying everywhere might be rough for a newbie.”

“You’re right,” agreed Ernesta. “It might be a little much for her when she sees how the blood spurts everywhere and the bodies hit the floor with a bam.”

Ugh. It might be a game-style quest, but the difference is people will actually die here. Spurts of fresh blood, entrails spilling out... It'll look like a splatter movie. But these days, I can handle that just fine! I've got my blood magic spell!

“I’ll be fine! I can kill people!”

“Whoa. When you say it like that...”

I'm not much of a singer or dancer, but this magical girl can kill.

“If Astrid says she can do it, I won’t try to stop her. Are you sure, though?”

“Yes, I’ll be fine. I’ve been preparing magic for this exact purpose.”

Heh heh. Finally, a chance to test my type-3 combat preparation measures. I still haven't tested whether it fully eliminates the aversion to killing people. I'm so lucky that I've been given a chance to kill someone legally!

Okay...now I’m starting to scare myself.

“I’ll accept the quest then. Just don’t push yourself too hard, Astrid.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

Gertrud's such a good person, and I've got Petra and Ernesta too. Eh heh heh... I'm so lucky to have found this great party. I've gotta make sure I live up to their expectations!

....

Everything had started because of the fire dragon’s mating habits. Its attempts to mate had caused the destruction of magic beast habitats, causing the magic beasts to begin their Great Migration. The migration then swallowed up many villages, forcing the inhabitants to flee. I called them the fire dragon refugees.

In the eyes of some people, people fleeing with what little possessions they had made great targets. I’m talking about bandits, of course.

Bandits came in many different forms. There were washed-up adventurers, washed-up knights, washed-up mercenaries, and many others. The most difficult to deal with were the washed-up mercenaries because they knew how to fight as a group, and they were used to fighting. The next worst were the washed-up knights.

Our quest appeared to involve some of those troublesome washed-up mercenaries.

"We don't know the enemy numbers. The group is at least equal in size to a company of infantry. It seems they're using an abandoned fort as their hideout. To get more information, we'll have to visit the site."

Due to the scale of the enemy force, this quest was going to be handled by multiple parties combined. It was similar to the fire dragon subjugation quest in that respect, though there weren't quite so many adventurers here this time.

"Me! Me! I can scout the area!" I put my hand in the air and jumped up and down to grab the attention of the man who was acting as our commanding officer during the bandit subjugation quest.

"Young miss... What was it? Dragon Slayer Witch?"

"Y-Yes, that's me. Though I'd rather that that name didn't spread too widely."

If that name spreads, it'll throw my future plans into doubt...

"Scouting, you say? You don't mind doing it, little miss assistant mage?"

"Not at all. I've got sharp eyes and a keen nose."

Heh heh. I've got creatures that can become my eyes and nose now.

"Well then, I'll count on you. I'll send a few others along in light armor to back you up, just in case. It would be a major blow to the Adventurer's Guild if we lost our Dragon Slayer Witch."

"Please, not that name..."

Ugh. It might just be a matter of time until everything I do here leaks out...

"Well, off I go!"

"Huh?"

The adventurers simply looked confused when I put on my 04-type flight unit.

“What are you...?”

“Takeoff!” I took to the skies before anyone could question me.

Ah... This feels good. If I use aerial reconnaissance, the enemy won't notice a thing. And even if they do, it's basically impossible for them to hit me while I'm flying at this speed! Not to mention I'm not even going to look at them directly.

“Blau, would you be so kind?”

“Yes! I just have to take a look, right?”

I'll get Blau to do the scouting!

It could be a bit of a problem if any of the bandits have aptitude, but even if they do, they'll just think she's a wild fairy. Little will they know that Blau's no ordinary fairy. Now that she has a familiar contract with me, she's a special fairy.

“Vision sharing, commence.”

I slowly came down to land while sending Blau off in the direction of the fort. A window displaying everything Blau could see was fed to my optic nerve via Blau's senses.

Next up...

“Wanna join us, Fenrir?”

Fenrir emerged from a rift and appeared beside me. “Hmpf. Are you unable to handle this trivial matter without my power?”

“Well, there's something I wanna try, so I can't leave it all up to you. I was thinking maybe you could eat up any bandits who try to run away.”

“Very well. I accept.”

If they saw a fenrir show up here, it'd throw the adventurers into a panic. The familiar contract is lost magic, so I'd be at risk too.

“Now, according to data from Blau...” I observed the fort through Blau's vision.

Good, good. The enemy is a company one hundred strong. They're all kicking back right now. Looks like there's wine and treasure hidden in the fort: their plunder, no doubt. None of them seem to have noticed Blau.

I noted the enemy's arrangement on a map.

"I guess we'll head back. Come on, Blau."

"Yes, master."

Blau came fluttering back as I started up my 04-type flight unit once again.

Ten minutes later, I'd flown back from the fort.

"I've gathered information about the enemy camp!"

"Gathered? How?"

"I did my best."

"Your best?"

"My best."

I felt sure I could explain everything away by saying I did my best.

"You've noted their positions with a lot of detail. This looks manageable. Team A will attack from the northeast, and then Team B will attack from the northwest after Team A has commenced their attack. Got that?" the old man in command said.

"Understood!" the adventurers all replied.

"Gertrud, what's our job?"

"We're in Team B. Team A will keep the enemy distracted while we use the opportunity to attack from the rear."

Ah, it's that kind of strategy.

"Let's give it our all!" I replied. "Blow away the bandits! Yeah!"

"Y-Yeah..." Petra replied less enthusiastically.

Thus, our bandit subjugation quest had begun.

Chapter 11 — The Villainess Eradicates Bandits

The bandit elimination had begun.

Team A was going to attack the fort at its northeast gate. According to my diagram of the enemy's arrangement, around a squad's worth of bandits was stationed near that gate. That squad would be blown apart by everyone in Team A, causing the bandits to call out their remaining allies. Then, once the enemy was concentrated nicely around the northeast gate, our team would invade the fort and attack the bandits from behind by climbing over a crumbling wall at the northwest. That was the gist of the strategy.

We weren't mercenaries trained in group tactics, so we'd kept our strategy quite simple. Simplicity meant that our thrown-together party had less chance of messing it up. All of this was explained to me by Gertrud.

"Petra, Astrid. I want you two to go up on the ramparts to support Team A from above, since that way you'll avoid accidentally shooting friendlies. I'm sure you won't have any problems climbing."

"Understood," I replied.

"Got it," Petra replied.

Petra and I would climb the wall to a position where we could attack from a distance, and then we'd rain down arrows and bullets from above.

"It shouldn't be long until it starts."

Gertrud was the leader of Team B. At the moment, we were concealed in the undergrowth, waiting for Team A to begin their attack. I was using Blau to monitor the situation from above, so I could see that Team A's vanguard was approaching the northeast gate.

And then...

"Raid! Raid! Rai—" The yelling bandit fell silent when hit by an arrow fired from Team A's rear guard.

"They've started."

“No signal yet?”

A mage was going to shoot a fireball into the air once Team A had the enemy gathered in one place. For the time being, Gertrud and the others waited impatiently in the undergrowth.

“There it is!”

Team A had finally sent up the fireball!

“Everyone, move!”

“Hoorah!”

Gertrud and the other frontline fighters immediately scaled the wall and entered the fort. Those of us assigned to long-range attacks clambered up the wall. In my case, it was more accurate to say I used blood magic to bound up the wall rather than climbing.

“Now then, how about I show you all the power of my type-3 combat preparation measures?”

I engaged my type-3 combat preparation measures while taking aim with my machine gun. Shots from my 120 mm rifled gun would have hit more than a few friendlies, so I had to rein myself in this time.

“It’s party time!”

I used blood magic to synchronize my movements and sensory organs with the machine gun, and then I centered the optical scope’s reticle on the rearmost bandits.

“Take this!” I pulled the trigger.

There was no noise cancellation this time because Blau was assigned to reconnaissance. A pleasing *ratatatat* rang out from the machine gun. The feel of the recoil and the sound of the gunfire were both a delight to me; I was feeling pure bliss as I accelerated my body with adrenaline secretion and experienced a slowed sense of time.

And, through it all, I was killing people. Nope, not a hint of guilt or revulsion. Even when I saw figures in my gun’s reticle collapse after being torn to shreds, I kept my cool.



It was perfect. A huge success! My type-3 combat preparation measures were complete. I felt no stress as I took out my human enemies.

“You sure aren’t holding back, Astrid.” Petra was beside me, shooting bandits with her bow and arrows.

“Are you all right with this, Petra?”

“With what?” She was calmly shooting bandits and showing no sign of hesitation.

Hm. Most people would feel an aversion to killing other people, but she must be one of those who dehumanizes the enemy. It’s like she thinks bandit scum are less than human. That makes me wonder whether my type-3 combat preparation measures are really working...

“Obviously, killing people is dirty work,” Petra said while unleashing another arrow. “Even if they are just bandits. I’d prefer to be fighting magic beasts. Those don’t cry or beg for their lives like bandits do!”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“Yeah, I’m right. Gertrud and the others are about to make contact. We’d better stop firing.”

While we were talking, Gertrud and the others had charged the bandits from behind. After being distracted by the attack from Team A, the bandits found themselves flanked, which threw them into confusion. Most tried to flee.

“Hah!”

“Yah!”

Gertrud and Ernesta are both cutting down those bandits so calmly. Don’t they feel any aversion to killing?

“Several bandits are escaping to the south! After them!”

“Search the fort’s interior too!”

Several ran off to the south, but that was no problem. In my vision, I was receiving a livestream of Fenrir mauling bandits that tried to flee.

“Fenrir, make sure no adventurers see you.”

“Hmpf. How tedious.”

Fenrir didn’t seem happy, but it would have caused problems for me if he were spotted.

“Assemble!” The old commander yelled.

We all gathered around him.

“You’ve done well. This was a perfect job. The bandits who fled south were killed by some sort of beast, so there were no survivors. Brilliant work.”

“Hooray!”

The adventurers threw up their hands and cheered at the commander’s praise. I happily threw up both hands in the same way. *Hooray!*

“The enemies in the fort have been taken care of. We just need to recover their plunder. Don’t think of pocketing any of it, besides the wine. Otherwise, you’ll be kicked out of the Adventurer’s Guild.”

“Woohoo!” The adventurers cheered enthusiastically at the commander’s announcement, and then they sprinted off like hungry hyenas—or perhaps more fearsome still, like thirsty adventurers.

“Astrid! Did you see where the wine was when you were scouting?”

“Hmm. Well, I saw a few bottles in the storeroom on the first floor.”

“Nice work!” Petra gave me a high five and then ran into the fort with the rest of the adventurers.

“Huh?” I was confused. “Don’t tell me everyone’s looking for wine?”

“Yep, that’s what’s going on,” Gertrud replied. “Think of it like a special reward for dealing with bandits. We can’t keep any of the valuables they plundered, but there’s a tacit understanding that we can finish up the wine while we’re on-site. I wish it didn’t have to be on-site, though...” Gertrud looked troubled.

“On-site...? You mean...?” I had a bad feeling that made my eyebrows knit together.

“Yeah, that’s right.” Gertrud said with a sigh.

“All right! Got some wine!” Petra came running back from the fort carrying three bottles with her.

“Drink up, drink up! We can let loose today!” Petra said.

“I’m pretty sure we let loose every day.” Gertrud sighed once more.

“What’s that? You don’t want any wine?”

“I’ll drink a little to keep you company, but no more. You know how much trouble I am when I’m drunk.”

“Ah... You’re a real handful when you drink, aren’t you?”

So Gertrud’s an emotional drunk?

“Astrid, wanna drink?” Petra swished the wine around in the bottle while grabbing me by the shoulder.

“N-No, I’m still a student.”

I get the feeling that she might be a difficult drunk too...

“Come on, Ernesta. Let’s drink up!”

“All right!”

Petra and Ernesta were both eager to drink.

“Looks like the drinking is off to a start,” I said.

“The drinking is definitely off to a start...” Gertrud agreed.

Petra and Ernesta were both gulping it down.

“Uh heh heh,” laughed Petra. “This is why I can never say no to bandit exterminations.”

“It’s awesome!” Ernesta agreed.

They were both red in the face and drinking happily.

“You might as well have a drink while we’re here, Astrid!” Petra urged.

“N-No. Like I said, I’m still a student.”

“Who cares? You’re telling me the Dragon Slayer Witch can’t handle a drink?”

Petra had gotten fairly drunk.

“Phew! That was a good drink...”

“I can’t drink another drop.”

The bottles Petra and Ernesta were drinking from were empty in no time.

“Le’s go ’ome.”

“Iss time to go.”

Now they can’t even talk properly.

“I’ll carry Ernesta back,” Gertrud said. “Astrid, can you take care of Petra?”

“Sure. Leave it to me.”

I lifted the stumbling Petra onto my back while Gertrud put Ernesta onto hers. We were heading back by carriage, so we could manage two drunkards.

With the bandit subjugation quest complete, we were able to claim the reward from the guild. Given the difficulty and the fact that the enemy were armed humans, it was no surprise that my reward was a whole hundred thousand marks.

Nice! And I got to try out my type-3 combat preparation measures in the process. I’m overjoyed.

“Well then, Astrid, we’ll be seeing you.”

“See you soon, Gertrud.”

I left Petra and Ernesta, who were both in a deep drunken sleep, under Gertrud’s care before I left the Adventurer’s Guild.

Petra had quite the smell of booze on her. I hope it didn’t get on my uniform...

Chapter 12 — The Villainess Worries about Her Cousin

I'd been wondering something for a long time: is Werra really Iris's friend now? To learn the answer, I dispatched Blau to the classrooms where first-year middle schoolers were taught.

"Master, aren't you worrying too much? Blau didn't see anything unusual last time."

"I just don't want to take chances."

That's right. If someone pretended to be Iris's friend, she'd be easily fooled because of her kind nature. As her big sister, that's what I'm afraid of. If that's what's happening, I'll have to have Werra taken out.

"Anyway, off you go, Blau!"

"All right..."

Blau needs to show some enthusiasm. Doesn't she realize that my little sis could be in danger? I need more effort from my right-hand fairy.

"Master! Master!" Gelb and Rot poked their heads out from my shoulder bag. People often found it odd that I was always wearing this bag.

"Don't you need help from Rot and Gelb too?"

"Could I ask you both to help out too?"

"We can help!"

"We'll do anything you ask!"

Yup, these two are cute.

"In that case, would you both be willing to accept a familiar contract?"

"F-Familiar contract?"

"Is that lost magic?"

As I'd expected, the fairies were put off by the mention of lost magic.

"It is, but I'm not forcing it on you. It's just that this contract would really help me out. Blau did some great work for me recently, which is why I gave her my handmade chocolates as a special treat."

"Ch-Chocolates?"

"Sounds delicious..."

Gelb and Rot each held their breath as I took out some of the chocolates I'd made at the real magic research club. These ones didn't contain any blood magic.

"I never struggle with my fire or earth magic, so unless the two of you want to make familiar contracts, I'm not sure how you can be of much use."

Gelb's element was earth, and Rot's was fire. Both of these fairies were actually incredibly helpful whenever I was making modern weapons. However, I needed to use devious negotiating practices to lead my fairies down the path of temptation.

"Let's make a contract! Gelb wants a contract too!"

"Rot wants a contract too!"

"Okay! Then let's do it!"

We were on an academy rooftop; it was the roof I'd once jumped from as part of a blood magic experiment. Camilla had warned me not to use lost magic anywhere that people might notice, given the taboo surrounding it, but I had no worries about being seen here.

"Here goes!"

I cut the tip of my finger to extract some blood and then did the same to Gelb and Rot so we could mix our blood together.

"Thy blood binds mine, my blood stains thine, and we become one through blood."

My two fairies trembled as I recited the incantation.

"Is it over?"

"Hm. Let me check that our senses are shared."

I ensured that everything the fairies could see was being shared with me. I already had a window open in my vision to show me everything Blau was seeing, but I wanted to see how the visual data from Gelb and Rot would be displayed.

“Oh? It worked?”

Two new windows appeared in my vision that displayed visual data from Gelb and Rot. Clearly, the familiar contract had been successful.

“Will we be useful to you now, master?”

“Yep. Now I owe you both one piece of chocolate as a reward for good work.”

“Yay!”

Fairies are so easily won over with a few treats.

“Now, let me tell you both your missions! Line up!”

“Roger!” Gelb and Rot were both floating side by side.

“Now, listen. Your mission is to monitor Werra von Westarp’s flunkies. This requires stealth because we don’t know whether they can see fairies. You’re both small, so use your size to your advantage by keeping out of sight.”

“Yes, master!”

Gelb and Rot both nodded to indicate their understanding as I showed them the names and pictures of Werra’s flunkies.

Blau was keeping watch over Iris, and Gelb and Rot would monitor Werra and her friends. There were no holes in my surveillance system!

“Now, go, my fairies! Defend my cousin!”

“Yes, master!”

Under my orders, Gelb and Rot fluttered off in the direction of the first-year middle school classroom.

Heh heh. Now I can relax while watching it all from afar. Oh, here comes some information about Iris from Blau...

“Lady Iris, might I ask whether you have plans for the upcoming summer

vacation?"

"I don't. I would normally spend it with Astrid, but we haven't arranged anything yet."

"Then perhaps you would like to visit my villa? I'm sure you'll find it's a meager dwelling compared to anything owned by Duke Braunschweig, but it *is* located by the sea."

"That sounds fun! If you'd be kind enough to invite me, I'd be delighted to accept."

"Please! By all means!"

Hmm. Pretty normal conversation between Iris and Werra. I'm surprised they're already making summer plans, though. Seems a little soon, seeing as it's only May...

This smells like an evil plot...

"Oh, Lady Iris, your skin always looks so smooth! There isn't a swimsuit in the world that wouldn't look good on you."

"D-Do you think so? I think my skin is ordinary. Also, my cousin Astrid has much healthier skin than mine."

"Beautiful as she may be, I think you're far prettier than the phantom knife wo— than Lady Astrid. You simply must tell me the secret behind your skincare routine!"

"There's nothing particularly... Oh! I have been using Bartory's Blood Soap ever since Astrid recommended it to me. It has a wonderful scent."

"I see! Bartory's Blood Soap, huh?"

What? They're actually talking normally. Did they really become friends?

Either way, I won't forget that you called me "phantom knife woman" just now, Werra.

"It appears recess is almost over..." Werra mumbled while looking at the clock.

"Perhaps we could continue this discussion during the next recess?" Iris

replied with an angelic smile.

Ngh! My cousin really is cute!

“Y-Yes! N-N-Now, if you’ll excuse us!”

Werra and her hangers-on hastily returned to their own classroom.

Something smells fishy... After them, Gelb and Rot!

Once the fairies’ hovering viewpoints had relocated, I saw Werra and the others were now in another classroom.

“Haah... Lady Iris is so precious...”

“She truly is an angel.”

Hmm? They’re acting different now...

“But Lady Werra! How unfair of you to get ahead of us! It was my intention to invite Lady Iris to my villa!”

“Oh ho ho. Worry not. You shall all be invited. And I plan to take good care of Lady Iris’s used bedsheets, towels, pajamas, and underwear.”

“I’d expect no less, Lady Werra!”

Did I hear that right...? I couldn’t have. I love Iris as much as anyone, but I’ve never considered stealing her underwear. You’re hearing things, Astrid. You’re just tired, Astrid.

No. I have to stop lying to myself and face reality. Did the gang of bullies evolve into a gang of stalkers? Even in a horror movie, that would be a dark twist... Iris could be in real danger unless I do something!

“I believe Lady Iris said that she was using Bartory’s Blood Soap. Do you think we might smell like Lady Iris if we use it on ourselves?”

“I won’t allow that. Lady Iris is special. She is an angel gracing us from the heavens. We can’t be like her, no matter how we try.”



This bunch were bullying her not long ago... I get it. They're that type. They feel the need to bully people they like.

Damn... I was so glad when I'd learned Iris had made friends, but now she's in the clutches of a gang of perverts! It's clearly a turn for the worse. To be more specific, this is equivalent to the Germans getting hit with Operation Bagration and Operation Overlord in 1944! It's a choice between surrendering to the Soviets (the bullies) or the Americans (the perverts).

"Oh, I can hardly wait until our next recess!"

"I would like to speak to her next."

"No, we should all speak with her equally."

Time for a vote. What to do with these perverts?

- (1) Intimidate them into never bothering her again.
- (2) Continue to quietly monitor them.
- (3) Pretend I didn't see anything.

Well, (3) is obviously out of the question. I can't just walk away after seeing what I've seen. But (1) would be unfair to Iris because she'd lose the friends she worked so hard to make, even if they are perverts. Which makes (2) the only safe option...

But even I can't watch them twenty-four hours a day... I'll have to warn Iris to be wary of her surroundings. I'd better teach her about anti-blood magic barriers too. Who knows what tricks these perverts might try? Oh, God, why must you subject my cousin to such trials?

I suppose neither prayer nor worship can fix this. I have to act.

Classes were about to resume for me too, so I returned to the classroom.

Today I'll make a dynamic entrance into the classroom from the roof! I've always wanted to fast-rope into the classroom at least once. I've wanted to be like a member of a special operations unit for so long, and now that I can gain strength using blood magic, I can't resist trying it! I left the window open, so I'm ready to go!

It turned out that the teacher was already in the classroom. Needless to say, my reputation among the teaching staff dropped even further after I was seen entering the room by rope.

Chapter 13 — The Villainess and Lovestruck Maidens

“Then Lord Adolf carefully placed a hand on my shoulder, and then, in a manner that seemed unrefined yet gentle, he asked whether I was all right, and then I felt my heart skip a beat! I suppose this is what one calls love...”

“You’ve told me that story five times now, Minne.”

Minne hadn’t stopped droning on about Adolf since we’d carried out Operation Love Potion. Their relationship appeared to be getting serious, and every time we met, Minne had some new story about Adolf that she felt the need to tell me at least three times, beaming happily all the while.

Well, it looks like Adolf is one safely defused landmine, so I’ve just got to be happy about it. Hearing the same story over and over definitely beats seeing my family’s domain seized.

“How are things with you, Brigitte?”

“Oh, things are going quite well indeed. I think Lord Zoltan has begun paying more attention to me now. The two of us have started going on dates together. Just recently we went to an art gallery.”

Oh? Looks like it’s going well for her too. I’m kinda jealous.

“And you, Sandra? I haven’t heard anything about your partner.”

“Well... I don’t think it worked... They were interested in me for a time, but that’s all... I’m disappointed.”

“Hmm. The potion was quite powerful. Was your target a high schooler, by any chance?”

If they’re a high schooler, it’s possible he had a blood magic barrier that canceled out the effect. I included a spell for breaking through barriers in mine, but I didn’t teach any dangerous spells like that to Sandra and the others.

“No, I gave it to a fellow middle schooler; they were someone in our year.”

Oh? That’s odd. No one in middle school should have been taught about

barriers yet. Maybe she used it on someone who learned barriers early? Or maybe someone who never lets their guard down?

“Was it someone particularly skilled in magic?”

“They were roughly level with me.”

Which means that her target is someone with magic grades in the top twenty, or somewhere close. That would make him a competent mage, but even someone on Sandra’s level shouldn’t have any knowledge of barriers at all.

“Hmm. The only other possible cause I can think of is...”

“That I wasn’t attractive to them at all?”

If it wasn’t a barrier, then Sandra’s love potion must not have worked at all for some reason.

“You didn’t give it to a girl, did you, Sandra?”

I doubt that’s the answer, but the potion wouldn’t have worked on a girl since we designed it for boys. In the case of a girl, you’d just have to hope that they mistake their racing heart for feelings of love.

“W-Well...”

“Huh?”

S-Sandra... What was that reaction...?

“N-No! It’s nothing!”

“I s-see... I won’t pry any further.”

What’s going on here? First the Iris incident, and now this. I had no idea so many lilies were blooming in this academy.

“How’d things go with you, Lotte?” I asked.

“Well...” The question made Lotte frown.

Oh, come on! Yours worked, didn’t it?

“I feel like I’m somewhat closer to Lord Silvio now, but there’s still a wall between us. I get the sense that something’s troubling him, but whatever it is, he won’t discuss it with me. What am I to do, Lady Astrid?”

Gah... That jerk! He's back to his little rebellious phase. He's got this amazing girlfriend, yet he's always sulking. And he calls himself a man? Honestly...

"I'm sure his concerns are about his father. Chancellor Stefan is a man of great renown, and that's bound to weigh heavily on his son. He's thinking about the role of the chancellor. That sort of stuff."

As someone who'd played *Wish Upon a Shooting Star* and once completed Silvio's route as Elsa, it was fair to say that I knew exactly how to win his heart.

It's just that Silvio thinks his dad is basically the emperor's yes-man, and he thinks that's inappropriate for a chancellor. The truth is, he's not a yes-man; he gives the emperor good advice, but Silvio just doesn't know it.

In the game, the heroine, Elsa, used the friendship between Friedrich and Silvio as an example to show how the emperor and the chancellor can simply share the same opinion, which had led to a friendship developing between Silvio and Elsa. Silvio then felt foolish for having been so fixated on the chancellor, and he announced that he would lend his support to the future emperor, Friedrich. Elsa remained at his side all the while.

I was trying to get Lotte to clear Silvio's route, so I needed her to gain some more affection points with him and keep pressing forward until Silvio finally opened up and shared his concerns about the chancellor.

"I believe you're right. I'd forgotten about that. Being the son of the chancellor is a great source of responsibility for Lord Silvio. I'm not sure that I'm able to help him shoulder such a burden."

"You can do it, Lotte. Keep going as you are, and he'll open up to you."

At least, that's how it went when you did it as Elsa in the game.

"By the way, who did you give your chocolates to, Lady Astrid?"

"N-No one! The truth is, I couldn't find anyone to give them to, so in the end, no one got them. Ah ha ha..."

Minne, please don't pry. I can't let anyone know that I gave them to Mr. Bernhard...

"It was Prince Friedrich, wasn't it?"

“O-Of course not! Using blood magic on members of the imperial family is punishable by death.”

Minne! Give me a break! Put those horrible ideas in your head about me getting stuck with Friedrich to rest!

“Even so, someone like His Highness would be a perfect match for you, Lady Astrid. If the two of you were together, I’m quite sure the empire would reach a new level of prosperity!”

“She’s quite right,” Lotte agreed. “Together, His Highness and Lady Astrid could bring significant improvements to the nation’s magic, and Prince Friedrich would achieve great renown. And, of course, the empire’s citizens would hold Lady Astrid in the highest regard as well!”

Nooooo! Now Lotte’s joining in! Getting me and Friedrich together isn’t going to do a thing for the empire’s prosperity! It’ll just ruin my family! And then that could trigger a civil war!

“N-No, I don’t think so. Someone with an understanding of how commoners live would be a better match for Prince Friedrich. He’s such a compassionate person that he must often think about the common people. Wouldn’t a commoner girl be great for him?”

“I believe you’re quite knowledgeable about commoners yourself, Lady Astrid.”

Bah! Yeah, I was a commoner once, and deep down I still am, but in this world, I’m indisputably a duke’s daughter! I’m not standing up for the commoners!

D-Damn. I’m starting to wonder whether I’ll ever be able to saddle Elsa with Friedrich. Uh... I mean, make romance blossom between Elsa and Friedrich.

“Listen, this is just hypothetical, but what would you say if a commoner girl entered the academy at high school level?”

“That’s, um...”

“Well, I wouldn’t be particularly pleased... For better or worse, we’ve worked since elementary school to get where we are. A commoner would have done no such thing.”

That's their reaction, even after I mentioned how much Friedrich cares about commoners? When Elsa enrolls here, it's going to be hell. And I don't mean for Elsa: her efforts will all pay off in the end. It's me who'll suffer!

Damn it! It's beyond a joke! I can't even laugh about this! Unless I can somehow make Elsa settle in smoothly here at the academy, the blame's going to fall on me when Minne and the others cause trouble. Then a duke's domain gets seized, triggering a civil war! We're faced with a serious problem, Your Grace. Elsa's got a lot to answer for too... I'll bet her ears are burning right about now.

"I'd want to be kind toward a commoner. I'm sure she'd be nervous with so many nobles around her. My own cousin, Iris, had a lot of trouble fitting in at the academy, and I'd be reminded of that."

I'd better put the brakes on Minne right here and now. Listen up, I don't want to see any bullying.

"Oh, Lady Astrid, you're such a gentle soul. You have so much concern for commoners. Now I'm quite sure that Lady Astrid is a perfect match for someone as compassionate as Prince Friedrich!"

"I agree. The two would go so well together, and the empire would rejoice too."

This is hopeless. Now if Elsa enters the academy and tries to get close to Friedrich, everyone's going to think she's stealing him from me, even though I never wanted him. What am I supposed to do?! Tell me, game developers!

I yelled at the staff in my mind, but as usual, they gave me no response.

Although I was grateful to see Minne and the others find some success in their love lives, I was now standing on the brink of the abyss, being forced to bungee jump without a cord.

Ugh... Why did I have to be born a villainess?

Chapter 14 — The Villainess and a Dashing Prince

There was something I couldn't stop thinking about—who was Sandra's target?

I'd been born in an era when homosexuality was accepted, so I had no problems with lilies or roses blossoming around me, but when it was my own friend falling for someone of the same sex, I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Who in the world did she fall for? It's a little exciting for me too. Though if Sandra's thinking of stealing this girl's underwear, then I'd better stop her.

That reminds me, the number of friends I've got here at the academy keeps going down. I'm busy with the Adventurer's Guild and club activities after school, I spend recess time monitoring Iris and preparing for classes, and then, if I have any free time left, I visit the Round Table. I mostly talk to the same people day after day. I should use this excuse to see what the other students in my year are doing so that I can widen my circle of friends!

Since my fairies were off monitoring Iris and Werra, I was left with just my own eyes and ears. Why not use Fenrir? Because I didn't want a genocide to happen at the academy, obviously.

“Now, where should I check out first?”

Sandra said it was someone in the same year. Who could she have meant? The third year of middle school has four different classes. I guess I'll check Class A first. That's my class, though, so I doubt I'll discover anything new.

Class A was pure tranquility. Friedrich, Adolf, and Silvio were all at the Round Table, so only Minne and a few others were left. Minne was talking with a few noble girls who were also friends of mine.

Everything's peaceful here. I can't see any girls who Sandra might fall for.

Next was Class B. I'd never visited this class before.

A girl I knew from the Round Table noticed me. “Oh, Lady Astrid? What brings

you here?"

"I'm just looking around to see if anyone looks unusual," I told her casually.

I put the question to her straight. "You don't know of anyone who's popular with the girls in Class B, do you?"

"Someone popular with the girls? Well, several of the gentlemen here come to mind."

"No. I'm looking for a girl who's popular with the girls," I clarified.

"Oh?" The girl from the Round Table looked a little surprised. "I certainly can't think of anyone like that..."

I guess "girl popular with girls" was never going to bring anything to mind.

"Sorry for wasting your time! Pretend I never said anything!"

"A-All right..."

I somewhat abruptly ended the conversation with my stunned acquaintance from the Round Table, and then I used blood magic to speed toward Class C.

I didn't really know anyone in Class C. There was one student from the Round Table in this class, but everyone else was a stranger. It meant that no one was here to guide me, leaving me on my own as I searched for the girl that Sandra had fallen in love with.

Essentially, I'd have to use stealth to look around this class.

I can't see anyone here in Class C who looks like she'd woo the girls. Then again, Sandra might prefer ordinary girls over girls who are likely to appeal to other girls. Actually, no, that can't be right.

Class C had been a waste of effort. I found no one that Sandra might like.

Just Class D to go.

I knew people from the Round Table in this class. I'd be able to get information out of one of them.

I grabbed the attention of a female student who I knew from the Round Table. "Hey, you got a minute? There's something I want to know. Can I ask you?"

“Oh, Lady Astrid. What is it that you’d like to know?”

“Are there any girls here who are popular with other girls?”

“A girl popular with other girls?”

I should have known... The question just confused her.

“Oh, I do, actually! Someone does come to mind.”

“Which girl? Which girl? Is she nearby?”

Oh?! I got a hit?!

“The girl over there. That’s Lady Reinhilde von Radolin. I hear that many girls have confessed their love to her already, and others have given her love letters.”

“Oh...”

I wonder why she’s getting confessions and love letters from other girls... I suppose this Reinhilde does look like the handsome sort who’d suit boy’s clothing. Her features are so neutral and charming that her skirt doesn’t look quite right on her. I can see why Sandra fell in love. Well, I might be making some assumptions about the fallen in love part.



I feel like I might fall for her myself. I had no idea there was a girl like this so close by. The academy barely rearranges our classes at all, so I'm dependent on the Round Table for information about any class besides my own. And the information that reaches the Round Table is limited. Maybe there's still a lot to learn about the academy.

“Lady Reinhilde always plays male roles for the drama club. That’s why people call her the Dashing Prince.”

“Wow.”

Dashing Prince? That’s quite a nickname. It might even be better than Dragon Slayer Witch... Nah, mine wins in terms of sounding badass. “Astrid, the Dragon Slayer Witch!” sounds way cooler. Mine’s secret, though.

“Was there a reason you were looking for Lady Reinhilde?”

“Well, I was just interested because I’d heard there was a girl popular among other girls. I decided to take a look around for her for no real reason. She was worth seeing, so now I’m satisfied.” I was keeping the details of Sandra’s romantic interests secret.

“O-Okay... Have you ever received love letters from other girls, Lady Astrid? I imagine you have.”

“Wh-Why would that be? I haven’t even gotten any love letters from anyone of the opposite sex, never mind the same sex.”

I’m not a popular girl at all. In a way, Reinhilde makes me jealous because she can probably take her pick.

Wait, no. Reinhilde isn’t necessarily popular with the girls because she wants to be. She might personally prefer boys. I wonder about that. Now I’m curious...

“So, Reinhilde has received confessions and love letters already? Is she with someone?”

“If she were, it would cause quite the commotion. Lady Reinhilde has many fans, ranging from her juniors in the elementary school to her seniors in the high school.”

Wouldn’t that make her more popular than Friedrich?

“Hmm. Looks like Sandra chose herself a challenging love interest too,” I said to myself while looking at Reinhilde and the happily smiling girls surrounding her.

....

Time had passed, and now classes were finished for the day.

“Sandra! Sandra!” I called out to Sandra when she appeared in the real magic research club room.

“What is it, Lady Astrid?”

“That person you like. Is it Reinhilde from Class D?”

“Wh-Wh-What do you mean? I’ve never heard of her.”

That reaction proves I’m right.

“Well, by pure chance, I just happened to take a peek at Class D, and I saw a girl who was popular with the other girls. Am I wrong?”

“Uh... I can’t deny it...”

Aha! I knew it. I’ve got a keen sense of intuition.

“How about we make a love potion for girls?”

“No, it no longer matters.”

Huh? No longer matters?

“Lady Reinhilde wins the affection of everyone around her. She is like a sublime rose. It would be blasphemous for someone such as I to claim her for myself. I’d prefer it if Lady Reinhilde could continue to be someone loved by everyone.”

“Oh, okay...”

What? Am I the only one who thinks she’s being irrational? If you like someone that much, you should go for it, yet Sandra’s pure heart won’t allow her to try? I don’t get it.

“What did you think of Lady Reinhilde, Lady Astrid?”

“Well, she’s a strikingly beautiful girl. I felt something for her too.”

I'm no homosexual, but Reinhilde's good looks still interested me a little.

"I think you're someone who would actually be worthy of making Lady Reinhilde your own. I don't think anyone would complain if you did."

"N-No, I think I prefer boys."

"Lady Reinhilde has a boyish side too! When she performed in *The Crystal Princess* for the drama club, she played the role of the prince who awakens the sleeping princess. She was so beautiful and so gallant..."

You're not listening to me, Sandra. Older men are what I like.

"Sounds like you've seen some of the drama club's performances. Does the club look fun?"

"Yes! Oh, but nothing is more enjoyable than your real magic research club, Lady Astrid."

The drama club... That kind of thing is beyond me since I'm a terrible actress...

"Maybe I'll go check it out sometime. Is the club doing anything for the cultural festival?"

"Yes. They always put on a play. You haven't watched any of them, Lady Astrid?"

"Never."

I'm already in my seventh year at this academy, and yet I've never taken interest in the culture festivals. I've never had time for them! With the seizure of my family's domain hanging over my head, I've had to frantically minesweep and work like a mule! But maybe this year I can take it easy and look around at the culture festival...

"Perhaps the real magic research club should prepare an exhibit?" Sandra suggested.

"Sure. Let's try to come up with something."

The love potion's classified information, but maybe we've got something a little more normal to show people. No ideas are coming to mind though...

"What could we exhibit?" I asked myself.

The culture festival wouldn't happen until October at the earliest, yet there I was thinking about it in May.

Chapter 15 — I'm the Villainess, and It's Finals Time Again

The finals that preceded summer vacation each year had come around again. I could declare humanities and magic studies all clear, but science was a problem.

Science just keeps getting harder... It's only a matter of time until my past-life knowledge is useless here. And I'm only in middle school. Am I gonna be a high school dropout?

I was studying hard for the test at the Round Table while these worries were on my mind. I'd made science my main focus while also reviewing the humanities.

I might have knowledge from Earth, but this is another world, so everything's different. There are things like spontaneous generation of fairies that make this world's common sense so different from Earth's. And even my knowledge of Earth is shaky, so now I'm really struggling...

“Astrid, how's it going?”

“V-Very well, thank you, Prince Friedrich. I'm having no problems.”

Don't interrupt people while they're concentrating, Friedrich! I'm busy here!

“Perhaps I could study with you, if you'd like?”

“N-No, it suits me best to study alone.”

No thanks! I won't be able to study at all if you're bothering me!

“I see. That's a shame,” Friedrich said before leaving me.

Friedrich was studying with Adolf and Silvio. Adolf had always struggled with humanities. He was frantically reading through a history book. Silvio appeared to have fixed his poor grasp of geography, as you'd expect from the chancellor's son, and now he was reading math books. Friedrich was simply helping the other two as though he had no problems with any subject.

Look at him acting all laid-back. You deserve to struggle a little too!

“Astrid, do you have a moment?”

“What’s up, Iris?”

“The truth is...I’m worried about practical magic. Would you be able to practice with me after school?”

Hmm. Iris must have blood magic practical exams now that she’s a middle schooler. I can see why she’s nervous. For girls like her, it’s the first time they’ve ever done anything with blood magic.

“Sure! I’ll come find you after classes.”

“Thank you!”

Yup. Iris is cute as always.

Iris had a dangerous bunch of girls hanging around her lately. Werra and her flunkies had turned into evil stalkers who were watching Iris closely, waiting for their chance to strike. I had an Iris defense system—a surveillance network made up of my fairies, Blau, Gelb, and Rot—set up already, but I had to stay cautious. As the big sister, it was up to me to protect Iris.

Iris’s practical abilities in magic could help with that. If some blood magic talent awakened inside her, it would mean that she’d be able to defend herself should Werra and the others resort to force. I never knew when they might attack Iris, and my fairies wouldn’t be able to stop them if it happened. That made me worry for my little sis.

“Have you joined a club, Iris?”

“No. I couldn’t find anything I wanted to do. Oh, but Werra told me that I’ll see a wonderful older student if I visit the drama club, which made me a little curious.”

Huh? Does she mean Reinhilde? Is Iris gonna be infatuated with Reinhilde too?

“What type of club activities are you involved in, Astrid?”

“I’m with the real magic research club. We do a bunch of things.”

I couldn’t recommend our club to Iris because we had way too many secrets.

“If you’re interested in the drama club, why not try joining? You’re cute, so

I'm sure you'd be popular."

"I couldn't. I'm not as cute as you say. And besides, it's your club that I'm interested in. What is it you normally do there?"

Uh-oh. This is trouble. The physical boosts, love potions, and combat preparation measures are all secret from Iris. Her impression of me is already falling apart, and those things would destroy it completely.

"Well... We study each day to improve our magic grades. And then we research new types of magic."

"New types of magic?"

"I just mean that we make things like sneeze cookies." I was describing what I'd seen at the fake magic research club in an attempt to throw her off. "I think the drama club would be a much better fit for you! I'd love to see you up on the stage too! I heard there's going to be a production featuring a princess. Wouldn't you like to play the role of a princess?"

"W-Well, it does sound interesting..."

You'd have a shot at an Oscar, Iris!

"But I'd be too shy to perform in front of so many people."

"Really? I think you've gotten over your shyness quite well."

They might be depraved stalkers, but Iris gets along with Werra's gang, and I've seen her talking normally to people her own age and older here at the Round Table. Could Iris still be called shy after all that?

"There are still lots of things that I find difficult. I don't have trouble talking to people I know in a small place like this, but the thought of so many people watching me makes me nervous."

Hm. So it's like that? I should probably get nervous more often than I do. Maybe Iris is the normal one.

"But wouldn't joining the drama club be a good way to get over that? I'm sure the other members of the club could teach you some good methods for overcoming nervousness. Why not try joining as a temporary member?"

"You're right. I don't know what I'm capable of if I don't at least try. You're always so dependable, Astrid!"

Seeing you think positive makes your big sis happy too!

"Now, why don't we practice blood magic after classes? If you wait in your classroom, I'll come get you."

"All right."

If Iris joins the drama club, I'll look forward to the culture festival all the more.

Oh, wait! Now that Iris knows about the real magic research club, there's a chance she'll come to see what we do... Give it your best, Astrid! Don't make Iris ashamed of her big sis! I need to think of a great exhibition!

"But first, I'd better study for the tests," I told myself.

Iris would be disappointed if I had terrible grades. I've gotta study hard so I can keep being her dependable big sister. It's just that science is so difficult... I knew I'd have to face it sooner or later, but I didn't think science would be a problem this soon. I wish I could see what goes on in the heads of people with scientific minds. Maybe I could even copy their brain structure... Ugh...

After getting some help from the older students, I studied frantically, and I was able to gain a little bit of a scientific perspective on the irrational nature of the world I was in.

Math, however, remained a powerful enemy.

....

"Iris! I've come to fetch you!"

Classes were over. I still had a lot that I needed to study, but after reminding myself that it's important to take breaks, I'd come to help Iris practice her practical magic as promised.

"Whoa! The phantom knife woman!" A boy cried as I entered the building where first-year middle schoolers were taught.

Hey! Who are you calling Phantom Knife Woman? I'm about to get real mad.

"Oh! Astrid!" A smile appeared on Iris's face when she realized I was there.

At the same time, Werra and her flunkies all looked over at me. I saw the same fear in their eyes as the boy who'd just screamed.

I must have really traumatized them... Well, it's probably good to keep Werra's gang a little scared of me. They need to understand that they'll have me to deal with if they ever lay a hand on Iris.

"Iris, should we get going?" I asked.

"Yes, Astrid." Iris then turned toward Werra. "Oh, Werra, would you and the others like to practice with us?"

No way! I can spare some time for Iris because she's cute, but I'm not wasting time on people like Werra. They're not coming.

I stood behind Iris and made a hand gesture that mimicked stabbing my palm with a knife.

"Eeek!"

That really set Werra trembling. *Serves you right.*

"Y-You'll have to excuse us. I hope you can strengthen your friendship with Lady Astrid while the two of you are alone!"

"Oh... I see..."

Iris sounded disappointed, but it was all for her sake. I had to threaten her depraved stalkers a little to stop them from overstepping their bounds.

Having scared off Werra and the others, we headed to the courtyard where I normally practiced magic. The athletics grounds were being used by the athletics club, and there was a danger of breaking things in the gyms and classrooms. Process of elimination left us with the courtyard. Not many people passed through here, so it was ideal for practicing magic.

"All right, Iris. What type of magic gives you trouble?"

"Blood magic. I can't seem to strengthen my body very well."

Ah. It figures that Iris would have trouble getting started with blood magic.

"Then let's start with channeling your mana through your body. Can you do that?"

“Um...”

I took Iris’s hand and monitored the mana within her body, then I watched how the mana flowed through her. If she was struggling just to circulate the mana, as had been the case with Adolf, she’d need intense training.

“Is this good enough?”

“Yep. The mana’s circulating right. Now try using it to monitor your own body.”

“All right.”

Yup. It’s going great. No problems here.

“Next, make the mana flow so that it becomes concentrated in the area you want to strengthen, and then hold a mental image of your strength increasing. Can you do that?”

“A-All right. This is difficult... I’m not sure what it means for someone’s strength to increase.”

Ah. So that’s where she has trouble.

“Then let me give you an example. You can use this in your mental images.”

Back when I’d first been learning physical enhancement blood magic with Professor Wolff, he’d demonstrated by crushing a rock. I’d also seen people achieve peak human performance at events like the World Athletics Championships.

But no one was watching athletics on TV in this world, so forming those mental images was challenging. On top of that, Iris’s sheltered upbringing probably prevented her from watching anyone exercising intensely.

“In what body part do you need to enhance your abilities?”

“In my limbs. I need to throw a ball with my arm and then run one hundred meters with my legs.”

I see... The limbs, huh...

“All right, here I go!”

I gripped a softball that I’d prepared and increased my strength with blood

magic before throwing it hard at the wall of the school building. The ball smacked into the wall, and then, rather than bouncing back, it burst open as a result of the impact.

“Do you think you can use that as a mental image?”

“Hmm. I’m not sure I can...”

She’s right. It’s hard to imagine a ball bursting just because you threw it.

“Then how about this?”

I picked up another ball and threw it into the air as hard as I could. It flew upward without stopping, and for a moment it disappeared from view just before slowly falling back down again.

That was bound to help with mental images of strength. Now what does Iris think?

“Y-You’re amazing, Astrid. Now I can picture it!”

Oh, seems like it worked.

“I’ll try it myself. I’ll picture what you did just now, and...”

Iris focused on her arms, causing mana to collect there. Then she channeled the mana into the muscles of the arm gripping the ball, applied the mental image to them, and threw the ball as hard as she could.

Then came the result. The ball flew high into the air and disappeared from view.

“You did it, Iris! Well done!”

“Yes, I did it! Now the exam will be no problem!”

I’m so glad.

“Next, let’s try enhancing the performance of your legs.”

“Yes, Astrid! Would you be able to give me another demonstration?”

All right! Leave it to your big sis!

“I’m going to run. Watch closely!”

I channeled my mana into my legs and then imagined swiftness. *Run fast, like*

Fenrir!

“Here goes!”

Then I ran as fast as I could.

Oh? I’m running even faster than normal. The wind feels good.

Professor Wolff had once warned me that increasing my power too much could cause my muscles to tear apart, but I could handle this now that I’d gradually gotten used to it. In the worst-case scenario, I could even heal my muscles the instant the tearing started and force myself to keep going.

“How was that, Iris? Have you got a mental image now?”

“Yes, Astrid! I’m all set!”

“All right. Just make sure you don’t overdo it. I’m sure you’ve been taught this already, but using extreme mental images with blood magic can cause serious injury.”

“All right!”

I’m sure Iris wouldn’t do anything stupid.

After gently positioning her feet on the ground, a look of concentration appeared on Iris’s face. Then she began to run. She increased her speed very gradually at first, and then, although she didn’t run as fast as I had, she sprinted across the courtyard at a pace far beyond what any ordinary ten-year-old girl could achieve.

“Phew! How did I do, Astrid?”

“That’s perfect! I’m sure you’ll do just fine in the test!”

I’m glad Iris is a fast learner.

“Thank goodness! I feel relieved. Until now, I just couldn’t hold a good image of swift movement in my mind. I’d never really tried running before, with or without blood magic.”

“Oh? You really should try to get more exercise, Iris.”

Iris would turn eleven this year, but she was still very short. She looked as though she was less than 130 centimeters tall. That was a lot smaller than the

other girls in her year.

You've got your big sis wondering if it's because you don't get enough exercise...

Iris was more of an indoor person, so she didn't move around enough in everyday life. She didn't eat much either, which also could have been down to a lack of exercise. Last time we'd eaten together in the academy dining hall, I'd only seen her peck at her food.

Iris's father, Duke Braunschweig, was a large man of about 190 centimeters, and her mother wasn't particularly small either, so I couldn't blame it on genetics.

"Exercise? I don't really like moving around..."

"I don't want to force you to do anything you don't like, but I worry that you might get sick if you don't have enough strength. Once finals are over, how about going somewhere with your big sis so we can get some exercise together?"

This world's blood magic might be able to heal most diseases these days, but it's still better to avoid getting sick in the first place. I want Iris to get so strong that she won't lose to Werra even if she does get sick.

"I'll do it if we'll be together!"

"All right! I'll talk with my father, and maybe we'll climb a mountain!"

Mountain climbing! The blood of an outdoor activities club member still runs in my veins!

"But I've already made plans to spend some of my vacation with Werra and the others after finals are over. Can we wait until after that?"

"Y-Yeah. Of course."

Ah. Now that Iris has her own friends, it means she spends less time with me... I'm happy, but also sad.

Well, there's no getting around it. A child has to leave the nest eventually. I'll have to find a nice easygoing mountain where I can enjoy at least a little time with Iris! Besides, I've got my own plans to spend time with Minne and the

others right after finals.

Chapter 16 — The Villainess Goes Shopping

Finals were over! Somehow I'd made it through once again! I was quite proud of my grades!

And now, as always...

"Time to celebrate the end of the finals!" I announced in the real magic research club room.

"Yes!" Minne and the others cheered.

My club's members had been studying magic every day, allowing them to get through the tests without problems. It meant that we could all enjoy ourselves without a care in the world!

"Will we be heading to the commercial district once again?"

"Great idea!" I said. "Does anyone want to shop for anything?"

"I'll need a swimsuit and other items so that I'm ready for summer. I've also heard about a café that serves a wonderful strawberry shortcake. How about we pay it a visit?"

"I'd been doing my best to resist it during the tests, but I hear that there's a new romance novel that's causing quite a stir here at the academy, and I would like to purchase it myself."

"Sure!" I agreed. "Let's do it all!"

Ah. I feel like I'm living a girl's life to the fullest. Back on Earth, I used to attend open days at garrisons and military bases, I'd go to see the latest war movies, and I'd read the stack of military magazines I'd bought...

Wow, I wasn't feminine at all...

"Let's meet up in front of the statue in Epenstein Square like always!"

"'Like always' means at 10 a.m., doesn't it?"

I was super-close friends with Minne and the others by this point. We did everything together. That said, the way they still called me "Lady" felt a little distant. But there was nothing I could do about that, so I'd just come to accept

it.

Iris must be about to make her plans with Werra and the others right about now. I've got Gelb and Rot monitoring them, so I can relax. I'd better pick up some treats for those two fairies later.

You know, my fairies eat nothing but desserts. Should I worry about them getting diabetes?

“Ahh. I’m glad that we’ve made it through finals once again.”

“I feel all the more grateful for a vacation after difficult tests. Let’s make the most of it.”

The girls all expressed similar sentiments.

However, there was something specific that I needed to do while we were celebrating. I absolutely had to do a certain thing that would have a big effect on my future. I was worried because I had no idea how well my plan would work.

....

There I was, at the familiar *Here’s a Thought* statue in the square in the commercial district. The area was full of people coming and going, like any other day. Here and there were other students in academy uniforms, and just like us, they were happy to be finished with tests.

“My apologies for keeping you waiting, Lady Astrid.”

“Not at all! I got here too early, that’s all.”

I’d arrived before Minne and everyone else because I couldn’t relax unless I was there ten minutes before we were due to meet.

“Where are we going to start this time?” I asked.

“After picking out swimsuits, we could have lunch and some tea at the café, and then we could visit the bookstore. What do you think? That route seems ideal to me.”

“All right, let’s do it!”

If we want swimsuits, we could visit that same store.

“You can count on me for choosing swimsuits!” I told everyone. “I know a good store!”

“Oh?!” Everyone followed as I led the way.

“Here it is! I’ve shopped here with the Round Table members before! They probably have more swimsuits than any other store in Havel!”

The store I led them to was the place where I’d picked out swimsuits with Waltrud and the others. Ever since then, I’d had dresses made here, and I’d become a familiar face. I was confident enough in the quality of the clothing to recommend it to everyone.

“Amazing... This is where the members of the Round Table come to shop...”

“Is it really appropriate for people like ourselves to be shopping here?”

Why wouldn’t it be, Lotte?

“Come on, let’s head in!” I urged.

Tests are over, and I’m bursting with energy!

“Welcome, ladies,” Daniela greeted us.

“Hello, Daniela! I’m here with some friends from my class today!”

As always, Daniela was full of mature attractiveness and a fashion designer’s sophistication. I’d let her know that we’d be visiting today, so we hadn’t surprised her.

“Oh my. School friends of Lady Astrid? I’m honored.” Daniela laughed a ladylike laugh and then guided Minne and the others into the store.

“We’re here to buy swimsuits today,” I told her. “What have you got for us?”

“Perhaps you’d like to try something similar to what Lady Waltrud purchased on her last visit?”

“I think that’s a little much for us...”

There’s no point in a flat girl wearing a triangle bikini...

“We also have some with attached pareos that are popular right now.”

“No, the problem is more that my breasts aren’t very big, and...”

Wait... Minne and Brigitte are quite a bit bigger in that department, aren't they? Big enough that I'd call them stacked. And I wouldn't quite call Lotte or Sandra flat either. Maybe they could pull it off?

"Daniela, perhaps you could let these four try on some of those swimsuits that you call rearls?"

"Yes, gladly."

Iris and I were aghast when we saw those things. I wonder how these girls will react. I can't wait to see their faces.

"Lady Astrid, I've never heard of a rearl swimsuit. What is it exactly?"

"Just you wait and see, Lotte."

Maybe if Lotte puts on a daring swimsuit, she'll seduce that angsty virg— that rebellious boy Silvio in no time. But if I go on another beach trip, would I really want to put up with Friedrich's gang again?

"Here they are." Daniela reappeared with the long-awaited bikinis.

She'd brought out various swimsuits with different levels of exposure, ranging from swimsuits with tube tops to triangle bikinis. Now, which ones will the girls go for?

"Th-These are disgraceful..."

"B-But the Round Table members tried these on, didn't they, Lady Astrid?"

Phew. I thought maybe Iris and I were weird, but it seems everyone has the same reaction.

"That's right. The swimsuits Waltrud and the other members wore at the beach were like this one," I said while pointing to a triangle bikini.

"I s-see... It's strange how values of the empire are always changing," Brigitte said.

If you ask me, the strange thing is Waltrud and her tendency to do whatever she wants.

"Will you all be trying one on?" Daniela asked.

"Well, if Lady Astrid thinks we should..."

“By the way,” I said, “I’m going to pick this cute one with a tube top and cycling shorts-style bottoms.”

“Lady Astrid?!”

Sorry to pull the rug out from under you, Minne, but it’s a hundred years too soon for a flat girl like me to wear something like that.

“In that case, I’d like to choose the same,” Minne said.

“I-I’ll try this one.”

“If Lord Zoltan sees me wear this...”

Oh? Besides Minne, these girls are surprisingly daring.

“You should wear one too, Minne,” I encouraged her. “Someone with your body just has to pick a swimsuit that’ll make it really hard for Lord Adolf to look away!”

“I d-don’t think Lord Adolf is the type who’d be drawn to this type of swimsuit.”

You could be in for a shock. His eyes were doing a whole lot of cheating when the Round Table visited the beach.

“If we’re all buying new swimsuits, maybe we should visit the beach this year,” I suggested.

“Indeed, we should. The beach sounds delightful.”

“W-We could also invite some gentlemen.”

Yup. Everyone except Friedrich can come.

“Lady Astrid, did you choose that swimsuit because Prince Friedrich prefers to see people dress according to the empire’s moral standards?”

“Where’d you get that idea?”

Minne’s really doing her best to push me onto that landmine. Give me a break!

“N-Now to the café! Thank you for your help, Daniela!”

“There’s no need to thank me. I look forward to your next visit.”

When we'd gotten measured for our swimsuits, it turned out Brigitte was the biggest of us.

I'd love to know what she's eating to make her grow like that...

Chapter 17 — The Villainess Wants Everyone to Learn about Commoners

The café Lotte recommended really was great. The omelets and sandwiches they served for lunch were exquisite, and then there was the sweetness of the shortcake! The five of us each ordered a cake, and then we traded pieces with each other. The chiffon and Sacher torte cakes that the others ordered were delicious.

I'll have to bring Iris here next time. I just know she'll love it!

The café was located in an area where the stores were high-class, even by this commercial district's standards. We were nobles, after all, so it was only natural that we'd eat at places like this. However, those wouldn't be the only desserts we'd see that day because I had business somewhere else too.

“Oh? Where are you taking us, Lady Astrid?”

“Someone told me about a bakery that makes amazing food. I thought we could check it out.”

The bakery I was heading for was, of course, Elsa's place. The plan was to condition my friends to accept Elsa before she arrived at the academy. I also wanted Elsa to get at least a little accustomed to noble girls before she drew the attention of someone like Minne, who had the horrible idea of setting me up with Friedrich.

Once my friends are aware of Elsa's good points, I doubt they'll want to bully her. And if this fails, maybe I could have Elsa taken out? Hmm... No. If Elsa dies, I'll be stuck with the nuclear landmine known as Friedrich. If nothing else, I need Elsa to complete her mission of dismantling that threat for me.

“There's a bakery around here?”

“Yep. It's right this way.”

The bakery where Elsa worked was aimed at commoners, so it wasn't in a high-class area like the one we'd just visited. I knew my friends would be suspicious, but I hoped they'd come along anyway.

“Huh? Astrid?”

Once I’d led my friends to the edge of the commercial district, we chanced upon some people I’d rather have avoided. It was Petra and the rest of the party!

“Oh, it’s little Astrid. You’re going somewhere with your friends today?”

“N-No. You must be mistaking me for someone else.”

Wah! Ernesta, please! Didn’t I tell you that I was working as an assistant mage for the Adventurer’s Guild in secret?!

“Ah. I get it. Come on, Ernesta.”

“What? You sure, Petra?”

“I’m sure.”

Phew! Petra figured it out in the nick of time. I owe her a drink.

“Lady Astrid, who were those people?”

“They looked like adventurers...”

Oops... Now my friends are getting suspicious.

“Th-They were exterminating magic beasts on my father’s land not long ago,” I explained while sounding a little monotone. “They were nice people, so now they’re friends of mine.”

That look on your face says you’ve got questions, but you’d better keep your doubts to yourself, Minne. The fate of the Oldenburg family is riding on it.

“Now, let’s head to that bakery...”

Ignoring the distrustful gaze of Minne on my back, I brushed that incident aside and led us to Elsa’s bakery.

Oh, nice timing! Elsa’s tending the shop!

“Isn’t that girl over there cute?”

“Hm? Isn’t she an ordinary commoner?”

“Isn’t that girl over there cute?”

“No, I’m saying she appears to be an ordinary commoner.”

“Isn’t that girl over there cute?!”

“Lady Astrid, why are you getting angry?!”

Don’t they get it?! Just look at Elsa’s character design! She’s a heroine from head to toe! Every girl has to admire that soft, gentle look with the blonde hair and blue eyes. And then there’s the way she pulls off that apron with all its patches! It would look a mess on anyone else! That’s her character design! And her height’s going to make her look just right next to Friedrich! And look at how they didn’t overdo it with her breasts!

Okay, forget about her breasts. The point is that a commoner side character would never look like that! She even outshines the average noble!

“Um, Lady Astrid? Is this the bakery that you spoke of?”

“This is it. Let’s head in!”

I’ve gotta show them how charming Elsa is while we’re here!

“Welcome.” Elsa was arranging items on the shelves when she greeted us. She sounded completely half-hearted.

Come on! Put a little spirit into it, Elsa! You’re making Minne and the others scowl at you!

“Oh? Are those the Holy Satanachia Academy of Sorcery’s uniforms?”

“That’s right. I’m Astrid. Nice to meet you!”

Anyway, I just need to act friendly. It’s not like my friends are going to get between us.

“I’m afraid this bakery doesn’t offer anything that would suit a noble’s tastes.”

“What? But just recently, Erne—a friend of mine was telling me how good this place is! She also told me there’s a real cute girl here named Elsa. She must have meant you.”

“Y-Yes. I’m Elsa Eckart, but...”

I’d been surprised to learn that Ernesta knew about this place, but it was true

that she'd recommended it to me.

"You'd really like to buy something?" Elsa asked.

"What? You think we're here to window shop?" Minne replied.

Minne! No! Stop! Don't try to start an argument! You're talking to the daughter of the future Duke Franken!

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that we've never had nobles come here before."

"You needn't worry about that. Sorry for showing up unannounced."

First, I need to make Minne back off. She doesn't know who Elsa really is.

Maybe it would be better to tell her that she's secretly Count Franken's child? Then again, that could cause a lot of trouble for the Franken family, and it would all come back around to me, and my family's domain could be seized...

"Another thing I heard is that you're skilled with magic. Is that right?"

"O-Oh. A little... My specialty is healing with blood magic. My skills probably pale in comparison to those of the academy students, though."

"No, I'm sure you've got some real talent."

In the game, this girl had even more mana than I do. Her talent has to be real. If someone like me can vouch for her, then it's beyond doubt.

"Ouch!" I cried out, rather unconvincingly. "Oh dear. I've gone and cut my finger on the knife in my pocket. Where can I find someone with a talent for healing blood magic?"

"Huh? Do all nobles carry knives without sheathes?"

Elsa! I'm giving you a chance to shine here! Don't derail my efforts!

By the way, a knife was an essential tool for a mage. It was often necessary to spill a few drops of blood when using blood magic.

"Elsa, do you think you could heal me?" I said while showing her the fairly deep cut in my thumb (I'd shut off my sense of pain).

"I-If you'd be all right with that..." Elsa began a blood magic spell and softly touched the wound.



When Elsa touched me, I used the opportunity to gauge her mana.

Hmm... She sure does have a lot... Her spell is well polished too. She must have been blessed with a good teacher. I bet she'll be the best blood magic healer in the whole high school.

“Thanks, Elsa. You sure do have a talent for magic.”

“I’m not so sure...”

Have some confidence in yourself, Elsa. That high level of mana’s an important advantage for someone entering the academy’s high school.

“Was your teacher a court mage? Given your level of skill, I’m sure they must have been a former court mage of high repute.”

“Well, I was told that my magic teacher used to be the chief court mage.”

There you go, Minne. She might be a commoner, but she’s a talented mage, isn’t she?

“I hope you get the opportunity to further develop that talent at the academy. I’d love to see it!”

“Thank you!”

I felt a definite bond of friendship with Elsa—at least, I did in my head.

“Now, is there something you’d like to purchase?”

“I’ll have this sweet bread. It looks delicious.”

I’m a commoner at heart, so sweet junk food always interests me! This is what Ernesta recommended.

“Please wait one moment while I wrap it for you.”

Elsa took the sweet bread from the display case, carefully wrapped it in paper, and then placed it in a bag.

“Here you are! Thank you for your purchase!”

“Thanks! See you at the academy!”

Heh heh. I must’ve scored a ton of affection points from Elsa just now.

“Lady Astrid, wasn’t that a little odd?”

“What do you mean by odd, Minne?”

“Well, it was odd how you were so friendly toward that commoner...”

“Well, she’s cute and good at magic.”

I’m begging you, Minne, just accept her!

“Is she? All I saw was an ordinary commoner.”

“She’s not ordinary at all! You’ll see she’s full of charm if you look closely. I’m sure Prince Friedrich would love her, given how much he likes commoners!”

That nuclear landmine is getting handed off to Elsa.

“Oh, now I see.”

You do, Lotte? Well, at least you came around quickly.

“Prince Friedrich is quite partial to commoners, so you’re making an effort to be the same! I definitely see why you’d want to share the same values as His Highness when you love him so. I should have known, Lady Astrid!”

Oh no... Lotte’s thinking has gone off in a whole different direction...

“Th-That’s not it! Suppose Prince Friedrich were to fall for a commoner. How would you feel?”

“That would be unacceptable! If His Highness were to enter into a morganatic marriage, he could even be stripped of his right to inherit the title of emperor!”

Ah... That’s true... In the game, Friedrich declared that he was even willing to give up on the throne. The way he put his right to imperial succession at risk for the sake of dating the heroine made it clear he was serious.

Gah! My friends aren’t showing any sign of accepting Elsa, and now it’s only a matter of time before she gets bullied and everyone thinks I’m the ringleader. I’d better keep saving money to use while in exile and redouble my efforts to be victorious in a civil war!

War is now inevitable, Astrid!

Chapter 18 — The Villainess and Her Cousin

Climb a Mountain

Summer! Yay! Summer means recreation! Recreation means the mountains!

In the outdoor activities club, I used to prepare boxed lunches and bring them camping in the mountains, surrounded by glorious scenery. Now I was heading for the mountains once again this summer!

I was also hoping to teach Iris to exercise more since I was worried about her health. Although she was healthy enough, she was so small that I felt she might fall ill someday unless she got a little stronger. It was making her big sis worry.

Let's climb a mountain and gain some strength!

“Astrid, are we going to climb from here?”

“Yup. This is part of my father’s domain. The view should be amazing.”

Before us was a fairly small mountain with a gently sloping path that led upward. Even a beginner like Iris would feel safe here. There was also a cottage at the peak where we’d be able to spend the night.

There was just one thing that made me have my doubts: I’d heard that this mountain had been “made safe by the Adventurer’s Guild.” I knew that Petra’s party always did a good job, but that didn’t change the fact that magic beasts were often left in areas that the Adventurer’s Guild had supposedly cleared. That’s why I considered the Adventurer’s Guild’s extermination process to be about as reliable as a particular nation’s intelligence agencies in action movies.

In light of this, I’d come heavily armed. I had my automatic pistol and shotgun in a trunk so that I could grab them at any time, and I also had my machine gun and 120 mm rifled gun stored in a rift. I might have struggled to open a rift if I were panicking, so I needed the trunk with me too.

“You can use blood magic, but try to walk normally whenever you can so that you don’t run out of mana. And don’t worry, I’ll let you set the pace.”

“Thank you, Astrid.”

Iris looked nervous at the prospect of climbing a mountain for the first time. She needn't have worried, in any case; I'd have been able to carry her on my back if it came to that.

"All right, let's go!" I cried.

"Yay!"

So it was that the two of us trudged our way up the mountain, aiming for its peak.

Naturally, we couldn't wear dresses for mountain climbing, so we were both wearing pants. These outfits were also bought from Daniela's store. We could have worn our academy gym uniforms, but those weren't exactly stylish.

"Lady Astrid, would you like me to carry the trunk?" Erhard asked me.

"No, I'll hold on to this."

Erhard was with us as a bodyguard and luggage carrier. He was growing old and would soon have to retire from his job as a knight, but father intended to grant him a domain of his own. I hoped Erhard would eventually spend his old age in comfort, but for now, I wanted him with us.

"Iris, drink some tea if you get thirsty," I warned her. "Dehydration can lead to heatstroke."

"Heatstroke? What's that?"

This world still doesn't know about heatstroke? Even on Earth, it's a serious problem that claims a lot of lives each year, yet people here don't know about it?

Well, I brought some salt just in case. I'd better share some with Iris later.

"Whew. It really is hot today," Iris said.

"Well, it is summer. I think it'll be nice and cool at the peak though."

It was July, which was the hottest part of the year. It was relatively cool here, considering the Plusen Empire's location was a so-called cold climate zone, but the summers were still hot.

As someone born and raised in Kyushu, it'll take more heat than this to make

me surrender! It could be tough for Iris though... As a former outdoor activities club member, climbing a mountain with our parasols up feels kinda wrong, but it'd be awful if Iris's pale skin got sunburned...

“Oh, Astrid, there’s a fairy over there!”

“Oh?! Where?!”

A fairy’s a rare sight! I just know Iris is jealous of my collection of three fairies. I’ll bet she wants to make a contract with a fairy herself.

“It’s over there! In the bushes!”

“You’re right. It’s a fairy, Iris!”

All the fairies I’d seen up to now were about to be eaten by something, but this one was just peacefully fluttering around in some bushes.

“All right. Leave it to big sis to catch it for you.”

“Wait a moment, Astrid! I’ll do it!”

Oh? She’s handling it herself? I was about to grab that fairy and force her to make a contract with Iris.

“Miss Fairy, Miss Fairy,” Iris called out as she approached the fairy.

“Hm? A human?” The fairy turned to face Iris.

This fairy was wearing an indigo dress and had indigo hair and eyes. I could guess that its element was water.

“Have some candy,” Iris said.

“Wow! Thank you, Miss Human!”

Iris must have noticed how my fairies were always hungry for desserts at the Round Table, because now she was luring the fairy with candy.

Hm. This cousin of mine has quite the cunning strategy... I was just going to squeeze it until it agreed to come with us.

“Miss Fairy, would you please make a contract with me?”

“Oh? Are you a mage?”

“That’s right. I’m still an academy student, however.”

Oh? Iris is suggesting the contract herself. But what'll the fairy say?

“Will you give me more treats if I agree?”

“I will indeed. And plenty of them.”

This one's a greedy fairy. Seems they're awfully demanding when their lives aren't in danger.

“Then let's make a contract! Could I ask your name, Miss Human?”

“It's Iris!”

Oh? She did it!

“Well then.” The fairy landed softly on Iris's palm and recited the same contract as always. “By this contract, I, Yurika of Mount Vaalserberg, shall bind my soul to thee, Iris. Kiss me if thou wouldst accept the contract. Close thine eyes if thou wouldst refuse.”

Iris gave the fairy, whose name was apparently Yurika, a quick kiss on the forehead.

Oh! Now this is what I'm talking about! This combination of an ephemeral beauty and a fairy! I can't believe I don't have a smartphone on me!

“The contract is complete, Iris. I hope we can get along!”

“I hope we get along too, Yurika.”

When Yurika smiled, Iris smiled back at her.

This is like something out of a fantasy novel.

“Astrid! I made a contract with a fairy!”

“Well done, Iris. You've realized a long-held dream.”

I couldn't help but smile too as Iris came back with Yurika following.

“So, little Yurika, what's your element? Water, I guess?”

“Yes. Yurika's element is water. For anything water-related, just leave it to me!”

Hmm. I would have preferred to see Iris with a fire fairy if possible. If she were to have a fire fairy, she could give Werra and her gang of depraved stalkers a

few burns if they ever try anything.

“Can I ask your name?” the fairy asked me.

“It’s Astrid. And these three...” I gave my breast pocket and shoulder bag a light tap.

“Ugh. Master... So hot...” Blau and my other slightly stewed fairies appeared.

“From right to left, this is Blau, Gelb, and Rot. Look, everyone! It’s a new fairy!”

“Ah! Nice to meet you! Blau’s name is Blau!” Blau was the most outgoing of my fairies.

“Wow! You must be an incredible mage if you have three fairies with you!”

“It’s true,” Iris said. “Astrid is a magic genius!”

Getting showered with praise from Yurika and Iris feels a little awkward. Cut it out.

“I think you might even be able to defeat the undead...” Yurika said.

“Huh? Undead?”

Hey, don’t go turning this from fantasy to horror. I can’t stand horror.

“An undead dragon appeared nearby. It roams the forest each night, gobbling up animals and fairies... The undead dragon scared me so much that I fled all the way here. It never seems to leave the forest.”

“Undead dragon...?”

Some kind of dragon zombie? Sounds gross.

“Erhard! This area is under the care of the Adventurer’s Guild, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it should be,” he replied. “Did a beast appear?”

Hmm. I can’t really rely on the Adventurer’s Guild to have taken care of this, especially not if we’re planning to stay here tonight. I think I’d better be on my guard.

“Well, let’s just head for the summit. We can submit an undead dragon subjugation quest to the guild later. I’m sure some highly reliable adventurers

will show up to exterminate it!"

"Astrid, couldn't you defeat the undead dragon yourself?"

"D-Defeat it? But how could I fight a dragon when I'm just a student?"

Stop looking at me with those glistening eyes, Iris!

"Come on, let's head for the peak. I'm glad you could make a contract with a fairy."

"All right!"

With the fairy encounter over, we continued climbing toward the peak. I worried that Iris might collapse with exhaustion before we got there, but she reached the top without giving up. That might have been thanks to her joy at getting herself a fairy.

Iris is such a hard worker!

"What a great view," I remarked once we'd reached the top of the mountain.

"Yes," agreed Iris. "It's wonderful, indeed."

We appreciated nature's splendor while enjoying our lunches. Looking out from the mountain's peak, we had a clear view of the surrounding area and the ancient woodland that covered it. Because it was possible to make fire using elemental magic in this world, the people here didn't need to cut down very many trees for fuel, so much of the woodland's natural vegetation was preserved. Magic had protected the environment.

"Did you enjoy climbing the mountain, Iris?"

"Yes. It made me realize that moving around a lot can be a good thing. I think I'll try to get more exercise from now on."

Yep. Iris is such a straightforward girl. A certain son of a chancellor could learn a thing or two from her.

"This sandwich belongs to Blau!"

"Yurika wants some too!"

Meanwhile, the fairies were embroiled in a dispute over sandwiches. All was at peace.

Now, we're supposed to spend the night here, but I can't help but worry about that undead dragon...

Maybe I should walk my pet and do some dragon hunting while I'm at it tonight. I don't want there to be any chance of it attacking Iris! I'd never allow that!

Until then, I was going to make the most of my peaceful time spent with Iris.

Peace, peace, peace. Isn't peace great?

“It’s Blau’s sandwich!”

“Yurika’s!”

Peace, peace.

Chapter 19 — Villainess versus Undead Dragon

It was late at night, and I decided to investigate this undead dragon thing that Yurika mentioned.

I crept out of my room, checked on Iris's sleeping face, and exited the cottage while Blau canceled out all sound to make sure I wouldn't wake Erhard. Once I was outside, I unleashed the full power of my blood magic and headed down the mountainside.

"Phew. This must be the forest where Yurika said the undead dragon appears."

Considering Yurika had called it an undead dragon, it was certainly no ordinary dragon. I'd brought my 120 mm rifled gun just in case. It was good enough to knock out just about any enemy. It was this weapon that had brought down the fire dragon, so maybe it was my weapon that truly deserved the name Dragon Slayer.

"Fenrir, I'll need your help."

"Hmpf." Fenrir stepped out from the open rift. "An undead dragon? A fairy's word cannot be trusted." He snorted with dissatisfaction and examined our surroundings.

"You can get out for a walk while we're at it. I'm sure you were bored inside the rift."

"Perhaps. It's not an unpleasant place, though I do appreciate the untouched natural world."

Can't Fenrir just admit that he's happy?

"Neither of us knows anything about this undead dragon, but your sense of smell should pick up on anything unusual. That's all we've got to go on. Well? Do you smell anything funny, Fenrir?"

"Yes. I do smell something strange. I remember encountering this same smell somewhere before..."

I was right on when I thought that Fenrir's sense of smell would pick up on the

undead dragon or whatever it might be. As he caught the strange scent, the information also reached me through our shared senses.

“Care to go undead dragon hunting, Fenrir?”

“Very well. I gladly accept your offer.”

Fenrir and I set off running in the direction of the scent.

There were no sources of light in the forest at night, so I was running alongside Fenrir through pitch black forest. Thankfully, his night vision was keen enough for us to see what was around us. I could have asked Rot to create fire, but I decided against it because that might have given away our position to the enemy.

I wish I could use blood magic to give myself the eyes of a cat somehow, but I can't think of any technique for doing that. Even better would be to have the senses of a snake, so I could have a kind of thermal sensor that I'd use for attacking enemies through clouds of smoke.

“It's close,” Fenrir said.

“I noticed. We'll approach from downwind. Let's get a visual first.”

I figured that approaching from downwind would be safer.

The smell was growing in intensity. We were drawing near something, whether it was the undead dragon or some other type of magic beast. We had to proceed with caution; I liked the idea of a surprise attack, but not if we were the ones on the receiving end, and all the more so when the nature of the enemy was unknown.

Fenrir snorted and then muttered quietly, “This scent...”

“You know what it is?”

“Yes. Quite a rare scent. I remember encountering it just once, long ago. I believe that humans once called this creature the Bringer of Confusion.”

Fenrir's nose was picking up the scent strongly now. We concealed ourselves in the undergrowth while Blau ensured that we approached without any sound of footsteps or leaves rustling.

“Bringer of Confusion... A jabberwock.”

As Fenrir spoke the words, an unsettling form of dragon came into view before us. Although it had a small body—far more slender than the fire dragon’s—it was covered in shining scales, sharp fangs protruded from its mouth, and it watched its surroundings through glaring fish-like eyes. The creature beat its wings, flying close to the ground with its head thrust into the undergrowth, perhaps looking for prey.

“Is that thing strong?”

“I do not know, but the last one I fought gave me trouble. It used four types of elemental magic, and its scales were hard as rocks. It also moved with great agility, though I doubt speed will be of any concern for me.”

“Four types of elemental magic...”

Even fire dragons can only use fire and wind magic, and that’s saying nothing of how only earth spirits tend to the poor little earth dragons!

“But this one isn’t such an old dragon. No boundary surrounds it.”

“By the way, how old are you, Fenrir?”

“Over two thousand years old.”

Whoa! He’s everyone’s senior by a long shot! That has to make him a creature of legend!

“I’m a divine beast. I am immortal. Be honored to have such a familiar.”

“S-Sure...”

Remind me, who’s the master and who’s the familiar here?

“How shall we approach it? If the thing notices us, that could be troublesome—it’ll attack with magic. If possible, I’d prefer for us to strike before it can sense our presence, though biting through those scales will be no easy task. I don’t particularly enjoy eating these creatures.”

“There’s no need to eat it... I can tell just by looking at it that it’s not safe to eat! I’m surprised you ever even considered it!”

“It merely ended up in my mouth after I’d bitten it.”

I don't think I'd ever want to eat this freakish combination of an eel and a snake...

"Now, let's hit it with all the ammunition we've got while we have the initiative. This weapon broke through your boundary, so it ought to be enough to damage that thing."

"Hmpf. Its power has been proven, but take care. I don't know the creature's vital points. It can heal itself from anything other than a critical hit."

"S-Seriously...?"

Well, it's certainly bringing me confusion.

"Anyhow, let's just hit it with all we've got!" I aimed the muzzle of my 120 mm rifled gun at the jabberwock.

Ammunition, HEAT rounds. Continuous fire.

"Go!"

I fired the first shot, and it flew straight toward the jabberwock.

"Wha?!"

But the jabberwock became aware of our attack just before I could land a direct hit, as if the sound of the bullet itself moving through the air, unsilenced by Blau, was enough to alert it. The creature's body contorted, and the bullet simply grazed its scales before disappearing into the distance. An explosion from deep within the forest followed.

"Keeeeeeeh!" The jabberwock produced a howl that sent shockwaves through the vegetation around us.

It's using more than its throat to produce a howl like that. That's a sonic weapon powered by wind magic! Like a stun grenade!

"My ears can't take this!"

"Do not retreat so easily, master of mine!"

While I was wincing at the jabberwock's howl that threatened to rupture my eardrums, Fenrir leaped out from the undergrowth and charged at the creature.

"Haaah!" Fenrir roared as he charged toward it.

“It lies there drained upon the soil, plants grow wild, and withered things scatter.” The jabberwock uttered a few nonsensical words, and fluid sprayed from its mouth as it spoke. It was immediately clear that it wasn’t merely saliva.

“Acid? Pathetic.”

As the fluid spread across the ground, the plants growing where it landed began dissolving loudly.

I get it. It’s using water magic to spray acid. But acid, of all things? I could barely break through Fenrir’s boundary myself, so that’s definitely not gonna work on him.

“Fenrir! I’ll cover you!”

“Yes. Very well!”

I continued firing HEAT rounds in an attempt to restrict the jabberwock’s movements. When it began to move more cautiously, Fenrir used the opportunity to lunge at it.

“Its scales are as tough as ever!”

As Fenrir’s fangs cracked the jabberwock’s scales, there was a crunching sound much like concrete breaking. Thick drops of purple blood began to drip from its body.

And Fenrir tried eating one of these things...?

“Damn! This is causing such little damage that it might take until daybreak! Master, hit it with your power! I’ll prevent it from moving!”

“Got it!”

Fenrir could move a lot faster than I could, but he lacked firepower.

“Type-3 combat preparation measures!”

I boosted my physical abilities to the limit, causing my vision to narrow as my time perception slowed down. There was no need to suppress my conscience; I just needed to hit the jabberwock with all I had using my maximized reaction speed.

“Ammunition, HEAT rounds! Continuous fire!”

I loaded every round into the cylinder at once and then pointed the muzzle toward the jabberwock. My current time perception meant that I was aiming at the jabberwock as precisely as possible. Meanwhile, Fenrir had the writhing body of the jabberwock pinned down.

“Burn in hell!” I fired at the jabberwock.

The first round missed. The second missed. The third was rendered ineffective after being blocked by a steel wall that the jabberwock created with earth magic.

“Hurry, master! It’s about to use its breath!”

“Gah!”

The jabberwock opened its massive mouth, unleashing several vortices of flame toward me at once. Six fiery spindles threatened to close in on me from all sides. I dived to the side and evaded the breath attack by a hair’s breadth.

“Give me a break!”

The fourth shot hit, but it wasn’t critical.

“You’re a stubborn little one, aren’t you?!” I yelled.

Fenrir had said that it could heal from any non-critical damage, and he was right. My shot had torn through the jabberwock’s body without hitting any critical points, and sure enough, the wound healed in an instant and its missing body parts regrew.

This thing’s unbelievable!

“This time I’ll send you hell for sure!”

I aimed at the jabberwock’s head, which was sure to be a critical point, and I fired another HEAT round.

Shot five, direct hit! Wait...I was slightly off target.

Half of the jabberwock’s head had been blown away, but it wasn’t enough. What was left was regenerating like a video being played in reverse.

Damn it. By the time I reload and take aim again, it’ll be fully healed. Fenrir was right: this’ll take all night.

“Fenrir! Crush what’s left of its head!”

“Very well!”

Fenrir released his grip by throwing the jabberwock down against the ground as it frantically tried to heal the damage I’d caused. Fenrir’s front paw came down on what remained of the head.

There was a sound like a mound of jelly being torn apart as the jabberwock’s head was crushed. It was clearly fatal; the jabberwock’s body twitched violently and became motionless where it lay.

“Phew. That was a close one. That jabberwock was quite a strong enemy.” I wiped the sweat from my brow and approached the jabberwock that now lay dead.

“Master of mine, it’s known that this creature’s blood can increase the effectiveness of elemental magic. Witches say you need simply wear it on your person to gain the effect. Will you take some?”

“Oh! A rare drop! Let’s collect it!”

I created a glass bottle using earth magic and let a few drops of the jabberwock’s blood drip into it.

Blood successfully collected!

“So, I can just hang this from my neck?”

“The scales and flesh are also valuable, as is the hair on its face. They say the hair has the power to suppress aging, although all witches eventually offer up a sacrifice in a ritual of immortality regardless.”

“Sacrifice...?”

The reason Serafine looks so young is because of some sort of sacrifice?

“Well, if it’ll be good for my skincare, then let’s tear off some of this hair! I’ll collect some of the scales and flesh as souvenirs for the Witches Association too!”

Valentine and the others at the Witches Association had been good to me, so I wanted something to give them. Besides, I couldn’t think of anyone else who’d

be happy if I gave them a jabberwock's body parts.

"Now that we've defeated the undead dragon, we can head back!"

"Indeed. This was most enjoyable. You must allow me more such opportunities in the future."

"If only I could get you in on the Adventurer's Guild quests."

In the end, Fenrir and I had made short work of the undead dragon. Or jabberwock, rather.

Fenrir's strong. He just took on a dragon and won without a scratch. He even dealt the final blow. And his agility's even greater than mine with my physical abilities boosted to the max. Without careful planning, Fenrir would've defeated me too.

Having Fenrir hold back an enemy while I create and load new rounds works pretty well. We're coordinated, like soldiers in forward and rear positions. I'm sure the two of us would be able to fight an army for as long as I had the mana.

My showdown with fate might be looking unavoidable, but this gives me hope.

Watch out, Friedrich! If you try to bring down my family, that's not gonna end well for you! Fenrir here is gonna tear you to shreds!

Chapter 20 — The Villainess and Alchemy

I descended the mountain with Iris the next morning, with the parts I'd torn from the jabberwock stored inside a rift. Neither her nor Erhard seemed to realize that I'd been out fighting a jabberwock.

“Oh? Astrid, what do you have around your neck?”

“This? It’s a charm for improving my magic. Would you like one, Iris?”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course.”

I doubted that anyone who saw the purple liquid would guess that it was the blood of a jabberwock. I gave her a vial containing some blood, just like mine, and warned her not to drink it.

It'll be great if it improves Iris's magic!

When the trip was over, I went to visit the Witches Association so I could give them the parts of the jabberwock I'd defeated.

“Oh, jabberwock parts. How rare.” Serafine curiously examined the parts that I'd torn from the jabberwock and stored within a rift.

“These are rare?”

“Yes. Jabberwock parts were once treasured by mages. There used to be more jabberwocks around in the past, but most of them disappeared because the world isn’t so hospitable to them anymore. Defeating one is no small task, but once you do, the rewards are great.”

Does that mean they disappeared because of excessive hunting? Or was it something else?

“You should leave these parts in Camilla’s care. Maybe she’ll tell you

something important.”

“Something important?”

“That’s right. She was an alchemist back before she became a witch.”

Alchemy? You know, despite this being a sword and sorcery world, I have yet to meet a single alchemist. They’re usually commonplace.

“All right, I’ll go talk to her.”

If Valentine’s thing is spatial distortion and Serafine’s is blood magic, I guess Camilla’s is alchemy.

I found Camilla reading a book full of unfamiliar words that must have been written in a language from another era.

“Camilla, I thought you might like these jabberwock parts.”

“Oh my! They’re really from a jabberwock? This is rare indeed.”

“Serafine said that you might tell me something interesting if I show you these. What did she mean?”

“Something interesting?” Camilla replied with a slight smile. “I’m not sure whether alchemy is interesting, but I can tell you a few things. Perhaps you’re aware that alchemy is another form of lost magic?”

“It’s lost magic?”

“It sure is.”

Wow. Why would alchemy be lost magic?

“Alchemy was once a well-known form of magic developed for the purpose of creating gold. However, once it was found that gold could be created using elemental magic, the aim of alchemy changed.”

“Changed to what?”

“The creation of poisons.”

Huh? Why would they start making poisons after realizing that gold was easy?

“Alchemists had dealt with myriad drugs in the course of their work, and more than a few of them were harmful to humans. Alchemists used these to

create various types of poisons, including drugs that could even kill those protected by a blood magic barrier.”

Ah. Alchemy was essentially the foundation of modern chemistry back on Earth. I guess it's obvious that you can use chemistry to make poisons.

“The poisons made by alchemists were powerful substances that killed rulers, ruined towns, and weakened armies. People came to fear alchemy and chose to abandon it.”

“And now it's lost magic...”

But wouldn't banning alchemy cause problems? That surely must have slowed the progress of the chemistry and physics we learn at the academy.

“Even when alchemy was forbidden, people found ways to achieve similar effects through magic. They found new processes for making drugs to cure diseases and new methods for learning the truths of the world.”

Oh, so those things came back?

“I use the alchemy of ages past. I can, of course, make poisons. I could make something rather deadly with those jabberwock parts: a poison strong enough to kill every inhabitant of Havel.”

“Ugh...”

That's disturbing... But with a poison that powerful, I might be able to cripple an army. Maybe I could ask her to teach me...? No, that's too inhumane.

“I don't mind teaching you about poisons. Though I don't advise using them.”

“N-No, that's quite all right.”

Poisons just don't feel right. I think I'd be crossing a line.

“Then how about we make a ring that can produce a wall against magic? Or perhaps we could make an accessory that strengthens your blood magic. Jabberwock parts are brimming with power.”

“I'd love to!”

Yay! I'll be able to create a boundary just like Fenrir!

“First, I must teach you how to create items using alchemy.”

“Yes, please!”

Looks like I’m about to use up the materials that were meant to be gifts...

“First, we grind these items into small pieces. Likewise, we finely cut the scales and flesh and then pulverize them. This gives us materials we can use in alchemy. Then we add them to this concoction. The recipe for the concoction is here if you’d like to take a look.”

Hmm. Umbilical cord, infant’s blood, sulfur-treated fly eyes... Nothing pleasant here.

“We’ll use the jabberwock scales and blood to make the ring that creates walls. If we mix in eight parts scales for every two parts blood, we can form a red jewel like this.”

As she spoke, Camilla weighed the blood and scales on weighing scales while carefully adding jabberwock parts into the concoction of strange ingredients. She stirred everything into the bubbling solution.

“Now you need to channel your mana into it, Astrid.”

“A-All right.”

This has the weirdest smell... I don’t even want to channel mana into it. But if I’ll be able to make boundaries, then it’s totally worth it!

I began channeling mana into the jabberwock parts that were now reduced to a strange-smelling liquid. *Here! Have some mana!*

“That’s about enough. If you add more mana than the ingredients can withstand, it might destroy them. And channeling in more mana won’t make the wall any stronger. It’s the ingredients that limit it.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

So alchemists have to carefully consider the ingredients too? Must be tough.

“To finish, we need mercury and some of your blood. Please add a teaspoon of mercury and two or three drops of blood.”

“Aye, ma’am!”

You can’t have alchemy without mercury! No one’s allowed to touch mercury

back on Earth these days, but it wouldn't be alchemy without it! It gives it that fantasy feeling!

I followed Camilla's instructions by adding a teaspoon of mercury plus a few drops of blood that dripped from my fingertip when I cut it with a knife. It all went into the boiling pot of jabberwock parts.

"Yes, nicely done. We're finished now, Astrid."

Camilla dipped a spoon into the boiling pot and scooped out a gleaming red gem that she then placed on some cloth.

"We did it!" I cried.

"All that's left is to wipe away the concoction and coat the gem with perfume or what have you. It's still hot right now, so please don't touch it with your hands."

It's finished! As bad as the smell is, I'm sure it'll go away with time. Once the heat dies down, I'll wipe off that concoction of nasty ingredients and then add a little perfume. Then I'll wear it as a ring!

"Is there anything else we can make with the jabberwock parts?"

"How about we make an accessory that increases the efficiency of your blood magic? Again, it's a simple process because jabberwock parts are great materials to work with. It's what you'd expect from the magic creatures of ancient times."

And so, we used more jabberwock parts to create a gem that would make my blood magic more efficient. I worried that wearing a lot of rings would look a little garish, so I made this one into a bracelet.

"By the way, did you collect the eyes?" Camilla asked while examining the remaining jabberwock parts.

"We crushed its head, so..." I said in a slightly apologetic tone.

Yeah... I blew away half of its head with a HEAT shell, and then Fenrir smashed what was left.

"Oh, that's a shame. The eyes would have made useful materials."

I don't think I'd want an accessory made from eyeballs...

"If only you could have captured it alive for us... Thanks to their incredible regenerative powers, you can harvest six or seven jabberwocks' worth of materials from just one once captured. And if you can breed them, then you'll have limitless materials."

"Wow."

Wow, that's an evil idea! Anyhow, it took all we had to defeat it, so there's no way we could catch one alive. It's asking too much.

"Well, we can do quite a lot with what you've brought. Are you sure we can have the leftover materials?"

"Yes. That was the whole reason I brought it all back."

I'd originally intended to give it all to Camilla as a gift before we'd gotten into some unexpected accessory making.

"So, how do I actually use this wall jewel?"

"You activate the jewel by supplying it with mana. You point the shining surface in the direction you'd like the wall to face. Why not try it?"

"All right!"

I feel like a kid who just got a new toy!

"I'll throw this coin at you. See if your wall can block it."

"I'm ready!"

I took the jewel and pointed the shining side at Camilla before channeling mana into it.

"Here goes." Camilla flipped the coin into the air with her thumb, and then with a smack, she launched it at me.

The coin was headed straight for me, but then...

"Oh?"

I heard a high-pitched sound as the coin was repelled just before hitting me.

"That's the wall," Camilla explained. "Some would call it a boundary, but it's

less powerful than a true boundary. However, it's good enough to block flames and arrows."

"Wow! Thank you, Camilla!"

I've not just increased my offensive capability, but also my defenses!

"This goes without saying, but since it's a form of lost magic, please don't use it in public places."

"Of course!"

The jewel that makes the wall was a product of alchemy too, wasn't it? I'd better keep it a secret.

Mweh heh heh. This just doubled the power of my army! My victory draws nearer!

Chapter 21 — The Villainess Takes a Dip in the Sea

Summer means the beach!

A while back, I'd climbed a mountain with Iris, and now I was at the beach. I really felt I was making the most of the summer.

I was heading out with Minne and the others since we'd bought new swimsuits a few days ago, and I'd also told them, "Feel free to bring along some friends!"

I waited for everyone at our rendezvous point near the harbor, from which we planned to take a boat to Drachevör Island. I didn't know who they'd bring with them. As for me, I hadn't brought anyone; I had no boys to invite. I'd considered bringing Iris, but she couldn't come because she'd been invited to visit Werner's home.

I'm sure she'll be safe with Werner's family. The problem will be her visit to Werra's villa. I'll have to mobilize my fairies to keep watch over them when that happens.

"Lady Astrid, I'm sorry I kept you waiting."

Minne was the first to arrive, but the carriage that delivered her didn't belong to her family.

"Miss Astrid, maybe it's an odd thing to say in this situation, but I hope you'll take good care of us."

Oh, Adolf's here. Nice job, Minne.

"No, I'll be the one in your care today," I replied.

Adolf was getting on so well with Minne lately that he didn't feel like a landmine anymore.

You've turned out so well, Adolf. Anyone who doesn't cause trouble for me is fine in my books.

Apparently, he's still struggling with blood magic as much as ever, but I'm sure

he'll improve eventually if I keep feeding him advice via Minne. Probably. Hopefully. Maybe. Our practical blood magic lessons should get serious once we enter high school, so he'd better hurry up if he doesn't want to fail. In the game, his problems dragged out into high school, but this time he has Dietrich vying with him to be the next captain. Hurry, Adolf!

“Lady Astrid! Good day.”

“Good day, Lotte.”

Lotte had appeared, but she wasn't with Silvio.

“Are you alone, Lotte?”

“I did invite Lord Silvio, but...”

Don't tell me he's being awkward again?

“He said he'd arrive later by a different carriage.”

“Oh. I see.”

Well, he's coming at least. That's good. Lotte's going to floor him with that swimsuit she bought!

“I believe this is him now,” Lotte said.

Whuh? Already? If they're going to arrive at the same time, they should travel together.

“Hello, Miss Astrid. I'm most grateful to have been invited here today.”

Now Silvio was here. He was dressed in casual clothes rather than his usual school uniform. He always came across as sullen, stubborn, and rebellious, but today this jerk actually looked pretty good. I'd felt bad about forcing this landmine on Lotte, but this made me feel better.

“Sandra, Brigitte! We're over here!”

A few minutes later, Sandra and Brigitte had arrived.

Brigitte was together with Lord Zoltan—the boy she'd mentioned before. I'd expected him to be someone in the same year as us, but he was fairly tall, looked a little older, and I hadn't seen his face among our classmates in the same grade. He had an air of maturity about him.

As for Sandra, she was alone. Inviting Reinhilde had, of course, been out of the question.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting, Lady Astrid. Lord Zoltan, this is my dear friend, Lady Astrid of House Oldenburg.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Miss Astrid. My name is Zoltan von Zinzendorf.”

Oh, a dashing young man! Nice catch you’ve got there, Brigitte!

“Nice to meet you, Lord Zoltan. Are you in high school, perhaps?”

“Yes, I’m a second-year.”

She got herself a boyfriend two years older than her. Nice going, Brigitte!

“Now that we’re all here, let’s get moving!”

We left Friedrich out! Yay!

“It was Drachevör Island, wasn’t it? Do any of you know someone there?”

“Lotte’s family villa is there,” I replied. “And it faces a good beach, doesn’t it?”

Our destination was Drachevör Island. We’d chosen it because Lotte’s family had a villa there.

Incidentally, I didn’t have any villas by the sea. Multiple generations of my family seemed to have preferred the mountains.

“Let’s get going!”

And so, we headed to Drachevör Island on one of the ferries that regularly left the harbor.

We’re not going to encounter any dragons just because it has Drache in the name, right?

....

Drachevör Island.

Although it was an island, it was quite a large one. Lotte’s villa was on the coast that faced away from the mainland, and the sprawling coastal scenery surrounding it included multiple other villas that belonged to rich merchants and other nobles.

“Lotte, can we leave our things here?”

“Yes, Lady Astrid. Please, make yourself at home.”

Lotte’s villa belonged to a count, so it was as grand as you’d expect. The boys and girls chose separate rooms, and we deposited our belongings before getting changed.

“Heh heh. Looks like you’re going all out, Lotte.”

“D-Do you think so?”

Lotte had gone for a daring bikini that exposed a lot of skin. Minne and I had gone for swimsuits resembling tankinis, but Lotte and Brigitte were more adventurous. I just wished Minne had been a little more daring, given that she’d invited Adolf.

Me? I had no one to impress, so there was no use in me being daring!

“So, how’s it going with Lord Zoltan, Brigitte?”

“Well, our families have already started spending time together, and just recently I was invited to a banquet celebrating the birthday of Lord Zoltan’s father.”

“Wonderful! By the way, where’d you meet Lord Zoltan?”

“Lord Zoltan is a member of the archery club. He expressed some concern after that time you paid them a visit...”

“Ah...”

I remember that. Well, I guess there was a silver lining to all the fuss it caused!

“Now, Minne, Lotte, Brigitte! Enjoy some romance while you’re out there! Sandra and I are rooting for you all! Right?”

“Y-Yes!”

Since Sandra and I don’t have anyone, we’ll form a duo to support these three!

“Lady Astrid, it’s a shame you didn’t invite Prince Friedrich.”

“I wouldn’t even want to, Minne...”

Minne! Give it a rest! I don’t feel like stepping on a nuclear landmine!

“Now that we’re done changing, let’s head out! Let’s go!”

Before Minne can get any more horrible ideas, let’s set out for the shore! It’s time to hit the beach!

“Oh, this is...”

The boys had already finished changing, and they were waiting in the entrance hall.

Silvio and Zoltan look shocked to see their girlfriends in such revealing swimsuits. But it’s not a bad reaction. Their eyes are full of male lust! They can’t take their eyes off you two!

“Y-You don’t think this is indecent, do you?”

“No, not at all, Brigitte,” Zoltan replied. “It’s what’s in fashion, after all.”

Ah. I knew it. Zoltan handles it all with mature confidence.

“Lord Silvio!” Lotte said. “Let’s make the most of today! I suspect you’re tired, so please get as much rest as you need by basking in the sun!”

“Y-Yes,” he replied. “That’s a g-good idea.”

You looked a little flustered when Lotte took your hand there, Silvio. No maturity or confidence there.

“Lord Adolf, we should join them,” Minne suggested. “It would be a waste to remain here with the beach so nearby.”

“You’re right. There’s nothing like the beach.”

Adolf was more composed, but that was probably just because Minne’s swimsuit wasn’t as revealing.

“Sandra, we should go too!” I told her. “Let’s enjoy the beach!”

“Yes, Lady Astrid!”

Sandra had resigned herself to admiring Reinhilde from afar, so she had no one with her for the time being. I hoped that she’d keep me company as a fellow loner for now.

The only one who seems to like me is Dietrich, but that’s probably just a

childish whim of his. He'll fall for a girl his own age soon enough. And things aren't exactly going well with Mr. Bernhard...

Brigitte must know a trick or two if she can grab herself a laid-back older boy so easily. Maybe I'll get her advice on winning over the older boys some time. There's no way they built up a relationship of trust based on my love potion alone.

I noticed that the conversation between Adolf and Minne was flowing well as they walked along the water's edge.

Now that they've gotten so close, I can probably stop worrying about that landmine. I doubt that Elsa would go after a boy who already has himself a girlfriend.

As for Silvio...he was acting a little weird.

He's pathetic. Looks like Lotte is taking the lead. Sure, Lotte has a nice body, and she's also wearing that sexy bikini, but he's reacting like a total virgin...

"Those three couples look like they're getting on well..." Sandra was looking at Lotte and the others as if they were something dazzling.

"Isn't it nice?" I agreed. "If their relationships keep on developing like this, then all the better!"

If this eliminates the landmines Adolf and Silvio, that just leaves Friedrich for Elsa to take care of, and then my family will be safe. But are things really going to go that smoothly? I can't help but worry.

"Sandra, what type of girl do you think would be good for Prince Friedrich?"

"Well, His Highness is a member of the imperial family, so I think he should wed a member of a duke's family, like yourself, or a member of a foreign nation's ruling family. I actually think that it's too soon to decide while His Highness is still at the academy. Our approach to diplomacy with Österreich and Mellaria could change in the near future."

"Oh! You're a real thinker, Sandra!"

She's right! It's way too soon to decide on an imperial marriage when he's not even twenty years old yet! He'd make a great bargaining chip if he could enter

into a strategic marriage!

No, wait. What would happen to Elsa? If she follows the game's story, she has to pick someone out of Friedrich and the other love interests. And if Sandra thinks the matter of the prince's marriage should be handled strategically, that'll put her at odds with Elsa when Elsa chooses Friedrich.

"I th-think maybe a member of Duke Franken's family would suit him!"

"Oh, Lady Astrid. It's true that the Frankens are a very powerful family, but they only have two sons and no daughter."

I wish I could tell her right now that Elsa is secretly a member of the Franken family! I wanna tell her everything! But spilling secrets could turn everyone against me, and I can't prove anything anyhow!

Damn... I can't do a thing right now.

"Maybe I should drown myself at sea," I sighed.

"L-Lady Astrid? What could have made you so unhappy? Lady Astrid?!"

I slowly trudged toward the shore. I wasn't actually going to commit suicide; I just wanted to swim a little. I figured a little swimming would brighten my mood...but no.

"Sandra... They're so radiant..."

"Yes, radiant..."

I'd like you all to enjoy the happiness that I can't...

Somehow, I'm going to win in a civil war in the Plusen Empire, and then perhaps the guillotine can rid me of Friedrich... That's right! I'm not losing in love or in war!

Hm, I'm not exactly taking a feminine approach here.

Chapter 22 — The Villainess Wants to Adventure in Peace I was at the Adventurer's Guild.

"You're the Dragon Slayer Witch everyone talks about?! You killed that century-old fire dragon, right?! That's amazing! I heard you made dragon killing look like taking candy from a baby! What magic did you use?!"

"You're amazing! I'll bet you've mastered the magic you learned at the academy! Can you teach me how to use magic? Even a little bit?!"

Lately, the name "Dragon Slayer Witch" had gotten a little too widespread—it was known all across Havel, even to people who'd been using other branches of the Adventurer's Guild. I knew that news traveled slowly in this world, but I hadn't expected everything to hit me after such a time lag.

"No, I only used basic elemental magic. And you know it wasn't really just me fighting, right?"

"But Astrid was the only one who—"

"We all beat it together! Together!"

Petra! Don't encourage them!

"Well, we're not gonna be outdone! We've fought many monsters up to now, but fighting a fire dragon without help seemed impossible. Now that you've done it, we know that we can do it too!"

Stop! That'll be extreme suicide!

"Did you really defeat the fire dragon by yourself?" asked a boy who was clearly another adventurer.

"Like I said, I wasn't alone..." I replied with a sigh.

"But the rumors going around aren't totally false, are they? You still went toe-to-toe with a dragon, didn't you?"

For the first dragon, I'd been able to keep it held down thanks to my

disposable howitzers and a lot of help from the other adventurers. But the second dragon was a tougher fight. Fighting dragons that could fly around was hard work.

“I’m not convinced. Are you really that powerful? How about a duel?”

“D-Duel?”

An adventurer had just used a word I wasn’t expecting, and my brain was struggling to keep up.

“Yes, a duel. A fight, one-on-one, with your honor on the line. Or are you gonna tell me that you can handle fire dragons but not humans?”

Grr... Well, I can’t back down from that.

“Fine. I’ll take you on.”

“W-Wait, Astrid,” Petra said. “You don’t have to listen to anything a no-name adventurer says.”

“I can’t back down while my honor’s on the line,” I replied.

It’s about time someone gave this cocky adventurer a hard dose of reality.

“Let’s take this outside the guild,” he suggested. “It’ll cause trouble in here.”

You caused trouble the moment you suggested a duel. But all right, I’ll play along.

We both left the guild and headed outside, where we found a large crowd of onlookers was quickly gathering after hearing about a duel at the Adventurer’s Guild.

I was supposed to be keeping a low profile... Now I feel dumb.

“The rules are simple,” said the adventurer, who was dressed like your typical adventurer. “You leave your opponent unable to stand, or you make them surrender. You ready?”

“Ready when you are!” I replied with a grin.

All he has is a sword and a shield. Me, on the other hand...

“Here I go!”

While the adventurer who'd picked a fight with me was drawing his sword, I'd applied my type-3 combat preparation measures to myself. His movement looked slow to me as he swung his sword, and I was calm as I drew a weapon that would bring this fight to a neat conclusion.

"Take this!"

It was my shotgun, loaded with rubber bullets. I'd fired it at the adventurer's lower body, where his armor didn't protect him. In other words, a shot to the groin.

"Ughf!"

No one could take a hit like that and shrug it off. But don't worry: I'd used ammunition with reduced power. It was something I'd made for ending fights like this, so it wasn't enough to change his sex.

"Still want to fight?"

"I surrender," the adventurer said with both hands between his legs.

His sex might not have changed, but he was going to be in too much pain to stand up for a while. *Don't blame me. You started it.*

My honor had been defended!

"Little lady, you're amazing! What is that thing?!"

"Is that what you used to beat the fire dragon?!"

I figured it would turn out like this...

I pushed my way through the crowd of onlookers and headed back to Petra and the others.

"Oh? You're done?" Petra asked.

"Yes, I'm done."

"Oh, good. You made mincemeat of him, I bet."

"I did nothing so extreme."

What kind of person do you think I am?

"Can we go out on a quest? Anything will do. This place is full of people

gawking at me. I'm here for money, not fame!"

"Gertrud's choosing one now. Most of the adventurers were off watching you, so she got to take her pick."

Oh? Is that right? The bulletin board with all the quest notices is always crowded, but Gertrud took the opportunity to pick one at her leisure while I had everyone distracted with the duel?

"Ah, here's Gertrud now," Ernesta said.

"I wonder what kind of quest Gertrud will have gotten for us." I was trembling with excitement as I waited for her to reach us.

"Hey, Astrid," Gertrud greeted me. "You shouldn't be causing scenes. Aren't you here in secret?"

"Eh heh heh..."

Yeah, I am. I'm hiding my status as a noble and visiting the Adventurer's Guild in secret. So why did I think it would be a good idea to cause a fuss by getting involved in a duel? How stupid am I?!

"So, what quest did you choose?" Petra asked her. "Something good?"

"Yeah. I found two quests that looked manageable," Gertrud said while placing two quest acceptance forms on the table. "One of them's more of a personal thing, so I can't really recommend that one though..."

"Hmm, orc subjugation. 'Orcs from the forest have advanced into a rural village as a result of fire dragon activity. Please dispense with as many as possible. Base reward of sixty thousand marks with an additional five thousand marks for every orc killed.'"

"This sure looks like a profitable one," Petra said. "Even a small herd will have at least twenty orcs. That'll make us a bonus reward of a hundred thousand marks, and then we can claim eighty thousand more from the government. Sounds like a killing to me. We're lucky that a good quest like this wasn't taken already!"

A base reward of sixty thousand, plus an additional reward of at least one hundred thousand, and then another eighty thousand from the government

because of the orc eradication order... That's a total of two hundred forty thousand marks! That's amazing! Even with my usual twenty percent share, it's still a huge sum!

"So, what's the other quest...?"

Ernesta read the details aloud: "Exterminate goblins in the vicinity of an abbey. Reward of five thousand marks.' Oh, this is a measly quest."

The reward doesn't match the job in the slightest. What was Gertrud thinking when she picked this up? It's not worth it for that tiny amount.

"Oh wait, it's that abbey. Now I see why you chose it."

"I know this one won't mean much to you, Astrid," Gertrud said, "but would you consider it?"

Huh? What's special about the abbey?

"Oh!" Petra cried. "This abbey's Rangeld's place!"

"That's right," Gertrud replied. "She probably thought that the reward would chip away at what little savings they've got."

Rangeld? Who's that?

"There's an orphanage in this abbey, and it's where we grew up," Gertrud explained. "The person who taught us to read and write and gave us the education we needed to become adventurers was Rangeld, the abbess of this abbey."

"I see."

Ah. I remember Gertrud telling me that they were raised in an orphanage. And then she told me that they made a donation to the orphanage using money from the dragon subjugation quest.

"All right!" I said. "In that case, let's accept it!"

"Are you sure, Astrid?" Gertrud asked. "You don't owe the abbey anything."

"Yes, I do. Your party has been looking out for me all this time. Anyone who's helped you has helped me."

That orc subjugation quest looks tempting, but accepting the quest from the

abbey is the right thing to do. As much as I want money, the relationships I have with other people are more important.

“Thanks, Astrid. So, we’re going with this quest?”

“No problem,” Ernesta said.

“Sure, if that’s what you want,” Petra agreed.

And so, we unanimously agreed to accept the quest.

The abbey in question was close to Havel, so time wasn’t a problem.

Now, let’s head for the abbey where Gertrud and the others grew up!

Chapter 23 — The Villainess and the Abbey

Like Earth, this world had religion. It had only really been relevant during marriage ceremonies, and it felt as though the game developers had been thinking of western religions when they'd come up with it, resulting in a sort of pseudo-Christianity.

However, the details appeared to have been filled in when the game became real. Some people would now say grace before meals, there were funeral services, and religion would crop up in various different places. Maybe it had even grown beyond the control of the game's developers.

I'd participated in religious events when ceremony called for it, but I'd never had much belief in any god. If there were a god, I'd keep them at gunpoint for about an hour while we discussed the reasons for me being reincarnated as a villainess. Hey! Show yourself!

But thinking about it was a waste of energy.

“This is it.”

Before long, we'd arrived at the abbey. It was a cozy little place with what looked like living quarters to the rear. There were also well-tended fields around it. I saw some livestock and several chickens roaming freely nearby.

Maybe we could grab some eggs here?

“Wow. So this is the place where you all grew up?”

“Yeah,” Gertrud replied. “They took good care of us here. It’s this place that made us who we are today.”

If these people were good to Gertrud and her party, then we need to clean this place up thoroughly!

“Excuse me.” Gertrud knocked on the door to the abbey before stepping inside.

The inside was well cleaned, and there was a lone woman there to greet us.

“Oh, is that you, Gertrud?”

“Long time no see, Abbess Rangeld. We’re here on Adventurer’s Guild business today.”

“Oh! You must have accepted the quest! I’m ever so grateful!”

The woman named Rangeld looked like she was in her forties. She was dressed in the red and white vestments of this world’s religion—the Church of the Light God. She wasn’t wearing any sort of makeup or cosmetics.

“Hey, Abbess Rangeld.” Petra stepped out from behind Gertrud. “Long time no see.”

“It’s been so long,” Ernesta said.

“Petra and Ernesta too? It has been some time. I’m glad to see you all. But who’s this girl you have with you?” Rangeld was looking straight at me.

“She’s our party’s assistant mage,” Gertrud explained. “Her name is Astrid.”

“I’m Astrid,” I greeted Rangeld with a bow of my head. “Gertrud and her party are always taking good care of me.”

“If you’re the party’s assistant mage, then you must be the girl Gertrud told me about who defeated the fire dragon single-handedly.”

“N-No, I didn’t do it by myself. We did it together.”

So, this is how that rumor’s spreading?

“I’m grateful that you’re here. To be honest, the reward was so low that I didn’t think anyone would accept the quest. I’m so glad it was your party that came.” Rangeld made a gesture of prayer.

“Well, we do owe a lot to you,” Gertrud replied with a smile. “Now, could you tell us where these goblins were sighted?”

“Yes. Please come with me.”

Rangeld led us outside.

“They were first seen stealing from this field. Goblins wouldn’t normally appear in this region, but lately they’ve started living quite close. I can’t even let the children go outside now because it’s too dangerous here.”

“Ah. So they’re ruining your fields,” Gertrud replied.

Goblins steal from fields? Sounds like they're no better than Japan's macaques.

"Have they left any tracks, Petra?" Gertrud asked.

"Yeah, I see their tracks clearly. They must have moved here after the business with the fire dragon."

Those fire dragons sure caused a lot of trouble! What nasty creatures. Well, they're dead now.

"We'll follow these tracks and find their dwelling," Gertrud said. "We should be able to finish the job today, Abbess Rangeld."

"Oh, really? I pray that God's blessings are upon you," Rangeld said with a nod.

"All right, let's go exterminate some goblins!" I said.

Petra guided us as we left the abbey and entered some nearby woods. This time, our formation had Petra lead the way while Gertrud and Ernesta were positioned to provide her with backup. My job was to follow behind and guard the rear.

The weapon I'd chosen for today's goblin extermination was my automatic rifle. I could have used the machine gun, but using it against goblins felt like a waste of ammunition, and I figured low-caliber bullets would be effective enough against the small body of a goblin.

I had spare magazines and grenades stored inside a tactical belt that I'd sewn myself in an unusual display of feminine behavior. I'd made it from tough cloth, so there was no risk of it breaking.

Unfortunately, not even elemental magic could create cloth, so creating a bulletproof vest would be a difficult task. Instead, I had the ring for creating walls that I'd made using the jabberwock materials.

"We're close. The tracks are getting more concentrated...and I can smell them."

"I think you're right," Gertrud replied.

Petra's sight and smell were as sharp as a police dog's. She was always able to

zero in on the exact location of magic beasts even when I had no clue. The gap in experience between us seemed to make a huge difference.

“They’re here. A swarm of them. Must be about sixty. It’s a midsize herd, and it’s not newly formed. Looks like they really were chased here by the fire dragons.”

Just as Petra had said, we found a goblin settlement in the forest. There were about sixty of the little green demons. Their weapons included sharpened sticks along with axes that they’d probably stolen from humans. As primitive as their weapons were, it wasn’t pleasant to imagine being attacked by one.

“Petra, Astrid, get to high ground,” Gertrud said. “We’ll attack them from below.”

“Got it,” Petra replied.

It was the standard approach: we would launch ranged attacks from higher ground with a good view of the surroundings while using close-range attacks from the low ground to restrict enemy movements. When the enemy had no guns or long-range weapons of their own, this strategy generally proved effective.

“I’m not seeing much high ground. Is that area the best there is?” Petra said.

“It looks that way,” I replied.

We positioned ourselves in the undergrowth on a rather small hill that could barely be called high ground at all.

“We’ll start as soon as Gertrud and Ernesta attack. Are you ready?”

“Ready whenever!”

I was lying on the ground with my automatic rifle in position. I hadn’t used the automatic rifle much, but it was based on a weapon from Earth known for its safety, reliability, and performance, so I wasn’t expecting it to malfunction in any way.

“Looks like you’ve got a different weapon again today,” Petra said with a smile.

“I can assure you it’s powerful,” I replied with a grin.

“All right,” Petra said. “Gertrud and Ernesta have come out of the forest. Let’s go.”

“Roger that!”

At Petra’s signal, we began the fight.

“Here goes!” I set the rifle to semiautomatic mode, aimed at a goblin’s head, and fired.

Headshot!

Cerebral fluid sprayed from the goblin as it fell to the ground.

Yup, this gun has great accuracy. Someday I wanna make a designated marksman rifle too. Having a precision mid-range weapon would be useful at times like this. I don’t need a real sniper rifle though; I’ve got an anti-materiel rifle already.

All right, let’s keep shooting! Type-2 combat preparation measures, engage!

I continued to aim and fire at the heads and chests of the goblins while in my state of slowed time perception. One by one, the goblins fell, scattering their blood every which way.

“Wow,” Petra said while continuing to accurately fire arrows through the goblins. “Looks like you could’ve handled this without me.”

Petra was using a shortbow that was easy to maneuver and had a great rate of fire. She couldn’t keep up with my automatic rifle, but she was still fast.

While we were slaughtering goblins with ease, Gertrud and Ernesta had also launched their assault. I saw Gertrud cutting down goblins with great swings of her claymore while carefully dodging the enemy’s attacks.

If this keeps up, we’ll have this quest finished with no effort.

Just as I had that thought, there was a sudden eruption of flames.

“A goblin shaman?!” Petra cried.

“Goblin shaman?”

“Yeah. They’re especially intelligent goblins. Those irritating little wretches can use magic. Encountering one of those things in the middle of a midsize herd

can mean real trouble.”

There's a goblin shaman? What a pain.

“Watch out! At this distance, we're in range of their magic attacks!”

The shaman was fairly close by. Although we were looking down on it from higher ground, we had no idea when it might focus its attacks on us.

“Incoming!” Petra yelled as the goblin shaman launched a fireball toward us.

I could have dodged, but Petra was in danger. *This calls for...!*

“Wall!” I channeled mana into my ring to create a wall.

“Wh-What...?” Petra cried.

The goblin shaman's fireball hit the wall and vanished, blocking the attack.

“H-Hey... What did you...?”

“Uh... It's a defense technique that uses wind magic. That's all it was. Don't worry about it.”

“O-Oh...”

Phew. That was a close one. If she knew about the wall, she'd know that I was using lost magic. Maybe I'm stupid for letting her see me use it.

“Now, for payback,” Petra declared.

“Let's do it!” I took aim at the goblin shaman with my rifle.

Headshot! Headshot! Headshot!

My shots were perfect since the gun was synchronized with my body. Petra and I made short work of the shaman and the other goblins.

“Gertrud! Are you all finished?!” Petra asked.

“Yeah! We're done! No survivors!” Gertrud replied with a wave of her hand. “All right, our work here's done. Let's get back to Abbess Rangeld and give her our report.”

Nice. It feels great to do a good deed.

The party gave the entire reward of five thousand marks to me. It seemed

they wanted to thank me for taking on a quest that had been a personal thing for them. We also received fifty thousand marks from the state for eradicating goblins, which we shared evenly between the four of us.

It didn't do much to boost my savings, but I felt satisfied because I'd done something to help people.

Anyhow, I'm sure we'll make a killing during our next quest!

Chapter 24 — I'm the Villainess, but the Culture Festival Has Me Worried

Summer had ended, and it was now September.

Here at the real magic research club, we'd begun to fret. We didn't know what to exhibit at the culture festival. It would be taking place in October, so there was little time left to decide, yet we still didn't have any plans at all!

"Are you sure we can't make an exhibit of the love potion?"

"Lotte, that would be like telling everyone that we made a love potion. You wouldn't want everyone to think you drugged Lord Silvio with it, would you?"

"N-No, I would not..."

The love potion was our club's greatest achievement, but it was also top secret. If anyone knew we'd developed such a thing, it would create a crisis for the girls' love lives, so a love potion exhibition was out of the question.

"What about the research that you performed on all of those test subjects?"

"Oh, erasing the conscience? That's too boring for us to make a show of."

Erasing the conscience was another one of the club's great achievements, but it was a little dull. The festival would be full of impressive exhibitions, so we wouldn't attract many viewers by erasing someone's conscience with blood magic.

I wasn't even sure how we'd make an exhibit of it. I could get people to pull the trigger on a pistol aimed at Pink the monkey, like in the original experiments, but it wouldn't be much of a show because no one would understand what was happening.

"What about that technique you developed in the early days, Lady Astrid? The one for boosting your physical ability so incredibly. You were able to stop all the archery club's arrows, so it could create quite a spectacle."

"Hmm. I was considering that. It's a fairly impressive use of magic."

Inducing the secretion of adrenaline as a means of slowing down time

perception was another of the real magic research club's great achievements. The effects were obvious, making it perfectly suited for use in an exhibition.

"The problem is that only I can use that technique, so we'd have nothing to exhibit whenever I'm not in the booth."

"Oh, I suppose you're right..."

Yes, that's right. We might have developed it as a club, but it's only me who can use it. I'd like to enjoy the festival myself this year; I don't want to be stuck in an exhibition booth the whole time. Elsa will enter the academy next year, and then I probably won't have time to enjoy culture festivals anymore.

"Well, how about we use what we learned from the love potion to make desserts that'll create various different emotions?" Minne suggested.

"Oh? That's not a bad idea," I said while leaning forward. "All right! I can monitor different emotions and make sadness cookies, happiness chocolates, loneliness cake, and more!"

Wait... Is this really any better than the fake magic research club getting excited over sneeze cookies?

"Please, allow me to make those desserts," Brigitte said with a smile. "I can prepare something rather good."

"O-Okay, let's go with this," I agreed with my conflicted feelings showing on my face.

Oh well. Our club will have the best exhibit imaginable: me! That'll set us apart from the fake magic research club. I'm sure of it! It goes without saying!

"First, let's start monitoring emotions! Do you think you can gather a lot of people without having to pay them? I want to monitor the emotions of a lot of people, just like last time."

"Very well, Lady Astrid."

And so, it was decided that our club would make emotion-changing desserts.

Ugh. It's a shame that we can't put on a show with more flair despite having all these great members and this amazing club room, but at least we can prove that our club is actually doing things. Iris should be coming to check out the club

this year, so let's give it all we've got!

When we put so much effort into making snacks, it makes me feel like we're the dessert research club rather than the real magic research club... Oh well, it's all for the sake of triggering emotional changes to show what the real magic research club can do! Come to me, research subjects! I must monitor your emotions!

....

The emotion monitoring was progressing smoothly. Minne brought test subjects to me, and they let me monitor their emotions without asking for payment. I worked to observe the subjects' happiness, sadness, disappointment, loneliness, and irritation.

The hardest part wasn't gathering the subjects, but making each of them feel the right emotion. I found I could make them happy by saying I'd give them ten thousand marks, and then I could induce feelings of disappointment and irritation by saying "that was a joke." But without a large sample size, creating the emotion-changing desserts was going to be difficult, so I kept asking Minne and the others to bring me more subjects. I had to consider the differences in emotion between males and females too, so I was going to need a lot of subjects.

While my friends were off gathering those subjects, I went to visit the Round Table. The place was buzzing with talk about the culture festival.

I'll bet it was like this every year, but until now, I've been too focused on minesweeping to realize it. Damn. But this is the one year that I'll get the most out of the culture festival! Next year, Elsa will appear, making the minefield deadlier than ever! This is your last chance, Astrid!

"Will you be presenting something at this year's culture festival, Astrid?" Iris asked me.

"Yep. I'm working on it already, so look forward to it!" I replied with a big smile.

"I will look forward to it. Your club activities interest me, so I'll definitely come to see it."

“Good, good. I’ll be waiting.”

If Iris is coming along, big sis will be more than happy to see her.

“Oh, Werner and Dietrich, you should both come see it too! If I’m there in the exhibition booth, you can expect a good show!”

“I shall look forward to seeing it, Miss Astrid.”

“Y-Yes! I’ll certainly pay it a visit!”

Dietrich, you need to relax a little. Are you okay?

“By the way, how’s it going with the drama club, Iris?”

“Well, I’ve been speaking to Werra and my other friends about entering on a temporary basis. If it goes well, we may all join as official members. Just as you said, even being on the stage in a minor role should be enough to help me get over my fear of people.”

“Yep. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!”

I doubt Iris would get a minor role. She’ll be the main heroine!

“You two could use the culture festival as an opportunity to find an interesting club,” I told Werner and Dietrich. “You’ll probably want to join a club once you reach middle school.”

“Yes. If Miss Iris is going to join the drama club, then I might choose to do the same. I think it would be a great way for us to make good memories here at the academy.”

Hmm. You’re awfully forward, Werner. You wouldn’t think you were younger than her. Hopefully you can keep that momentum going; Iris isn’t exactly the type to take the lead herself.

“Dietrich, what type of club activities would suit you?”

“I’m considering entering a sports club. Archery interests me.”

“The a-archery club...”

That’s the club where I caused a scene... I hope he doesn’t find out about it.

“What sort of clubs are Lord Adolf and his friends involved in?” Iris asked.

Gah! Now Iris is bringing out the landmines...

“Prince Friedrich is in the tennis club, Lord Adolf is in the fencing club, and Lord Silvio is in the literature club, I believe,” Werner explained.

Wow. The tennis club, fencing club, and literature club, huh? Those clubs suit them. Yeah, those clubs suit them so well it makes me sick.

“The sports clubs don’t play much of a role at the culture festival, do they?” I said. “I guess they’re more focused on entering tournaments.”

“That’s right,” Dietrich replied. “They have their chance to shine during tournaments. If I enter the archery club, I’ll be aiming to compete in tournaments myself.”

Ah, I see. Dietrich seems like the type of person that would want to win a tournament. I guess boys have to be like that.

“All right. If you enter a tournament, I’ll cheer you on!”

“R-Really? Thank you, Miss Astrid.”

Don’t blush, kid. I didn’t say anything worth blushing over.

“Those of us involved in indoor activities can give it our all at the culture festival! If you enter the drama club, Iris, I’ll definitely go see that too!”

“Yes, Astrid!”

Well, there’s no way I’ll put on a disappointing exhibition now. Having a tough target to meet is what gets me motivated. Sparta, Sparta! This is Sparta!

They should have some test subjects ready for me by now. I’ll monitor them like crazy after classes!

Given that I’m the club president, should I maybe be gathering subjects too? Nah... I barely know anyone besides my club’s members. The only other people I know are here at the Round Table. It’s a little worrying to see my circle of friends continuously shrinking, but I can’t do much about it because getting too involved with people might mean stepping on a landmine.

Damn it! Damn you, Friedrich! You’re getting in the way of my friendships too! Just you wait! Once the empire’s gripped by civil war, yours will be the first

noble's head to roll from the executioner's block! Then I shall rule over everyone as empress! Mwah hah hah hah!

Or maybe not. I wouldn't mind killing Friedrich, but I'm not sure about being an empress. It sounds like a lot of work.

Chapter 25 — Culture Festival at the Villainess's Booth

The day of the culture festival was finally here.

“Minne, Lotte, are the cookies ready?”

“Yes, Lady Astrid!”

“Sandra, Brigitte, is the tea ready?”

“It’s all done, Lady Astrid!”

All good. My club’s battle preparations are complete. Now, come at me!

“But why does our club’s booth have to be so...”

The first gym was home to a play, and the non-athletic clubs had their exhibitions in the second gym. Unfortunately, the exhibition booth for my real magic research club was in a remote corner of the gym—a place where it would barely be noticed. *How did we end up in this situation?!*

“Sorry. I drew the short straw.”

“Mr. Bernhard!”

Damn. I heard that the club exhibition booths were chosen by a lottery, but I never expected Mr. Bernhard would lose this badly! Now we just look like a joke club, especially with the name “real magic research club”!

As for the fake magic research club, they weren’t exhibiting anything. Well, what do you expect from a fake club?

“Mr. Bernhard, this is no good! We worked really hard to prepare for this, and now it’s all going to waste!”

“That’s where promotion comes in. As luck would have it, I claimed a good spot for putting up an ad, so your poster’s there for all to see.”

“I knew I could count on you, Mr. Bernhard!”

He couldn’t get us a good spot for the booth, but I’ve got to be grateful to him

for getting us a good place on the notice board!

“We have a poster?”

“We do,” I explained. “It’s important to announce exhibitions like this, after all. I put a lot of effort into making it, and my artistic sense really shines through. Now that it’s up in an obvious place, we should draw a crowd even in a remote spot like this.”

The poster said “Visit the real magic research club, for the sake of the motherland,” which sounded like a communist slogan.

That should draw in a lot of visitors... Or maybe not. Maybe something a little more fashionable might have been better.

“Looks like all the clubs are going all out with their exhibitions,” I said. “I can’t wait to take a look at them all later.”

Various different clubs were putting on exhibits at the culture festival. Clubs like the cooking research club were offering delicious food, while the literature club was exhibiting books written by its members. There were also things like stuffed animals made by the handicrafts club. Everyone had given it their all.

We’re not gonna be outdone!

“All right,” I said, “Let’s get some people here. Everyone, let’s draw in some visitors!”

“Very well. We’ll try to attract some visitors.”

We held up placards in an attempt to grab the attention of the students who’d gathered for the culture festival. *Come on over! Step right up!*

Iris was the first person to visit. “Astrid! I’m here to see your club!”

“You sure found us fast! I’m glad you could come, Iris.”

She’d also brought her fiancé, Werner, and the Werra gang along with her. I wasn’t fond of seeing Werra next to Iris, but what could I do? She was Iris’s friend, after all.

“You mentioned that we’d see something unusual if I came along while you were at the booth,” Iris said. “What kind of thing could it be?”

“That’s right! It’s my super magic show!”

Yep! You can only see this super magic show while I’m around.

“Iris, I’d like you and everyone else to throw these balls at me. I’ll either dodge them or throw them back at you. Be ready for a shocking performance! Come on, give it a try!”

Heh heh. They’re bound to be surprised.

“You want us to throw the balls at you? Are you sure?”

“Yes, as hard as you can! Don’t hold back.”

Iris and the others hesitantly picked up some balls, and I amplified my reflexes and engaged my type-2 combat preparation measures so that I’d be ready when they began throwing them.

“All right, here we go!”

Iris and the others all threw the balls at me at once. There were six of them in total, and all of them were flying toward me at high speed.

“Hey! Bam! Whoa! Ho! Hey!”

As each of the balls came flying toward me, I dodged them, caught them, or kicked them back, crying out each time.



“How’s that? Impressive, right?”

“Th-That was amazing, Astrid!”

I didn’t even break a sweat!

“That truly was impressive! What sort of blood magic was that?”

“That’s a secret, Werner.” I wasn’t going to reveal the magic behind this physical boost quite so easily.

“We’ve also got some emotion-changing snacks here too. Try eating one! There are some for girls and some for boys, so make sure you get the right type. Go on, eat up!”

“Thank you.”

Iris and the others picked up some snacks that would cause various emotional changes.

“Hm? This one makes me feel happy, somehow.”

“Mine made me feel sad...”

Oh? Looks like they’re pretty effective. They worked!

“Aren’t they fun? And they taste good too, don’t they?”

“Yes,” Iris replied, “It’s amazing how you can make things like this too.”

Well, it was mostly Minne and the other girls who made the snacks, but I worked real hard on creating the blood magic spells! Our preparations for this exhibition were still going during October, so I barely had time for them all!

“Well then,” Iris said, “you’ve definitely shown us how incredible you are, so we’ll be heading to the next exhibition booth. It looks like a lot of other people are already gathering here after all the attention your performance got just now.”

It was true. Just like Iris had said, a crowd of people were gathering around the real magic research club’s booth. My performance must have gone over quite well.

“See you, Iris! Let’s go see the performance by the drama club later!”

“See you soon, Astrid!”

We can take a look around together later. I really can't miss seeing the performance by the drama club that she plans to join.

While I was thinking, some new visitors appeared.

“Miss Astrid!”

It was Dietrich and a few others. Some of them were unfamiliar to me, but I assumed they were in his year.

Dietrich is pretty sociable, and it looks like he has a lot of friends...yet whenever I see that jerk Adolf, he's always hanging around with Friedrich!

“I'm glad you're here, Dietrich! Welcome!”

I was glad that he'd brought his friends along.

“Now that you're here, I've got to show you my super magic show! Try taking some of the balls from over there and throwing them at me as hard as you can! The result might surprise you!”

“Huh? You'd like us to throw the balls at you...?”

I can't do much if you're backing out already...

“Yes! You can use blood magic, can't you, Dietrich? Use it to throw a ball at me as hard as you can. You'll definitely be in for a surprise!”

“Wh-What...?”

Just do it, Dietrich! I can't attract an audience without putting on a good show. We're in the corner here. I want to bring some life to the place while I'm here at least. I need to make sure the real magic research club can secure new members for future generations!

“You don't have to hold back. Come on. This ball's soft, so I'll be fine even if it hits me.”

“W-Well, if you insist...”

Dietrich and his friends each picked up a ball.

I knew elementary schoolers wouldn't let me down. Dietrich might be

reluctant, but his friends look determined to hit me. Let's see them try!

“All right...” Dietrich got his ball ready and threw it at the same time as his friends.

Hm. The effect of his blood magic is clear to see; that's quite the fastball. This'll make a good show.

That said, he threw it just slightly off target. What a gentle kid.

“How's this?!”

I either caught or kicked back every ball in the hail that came flying at me, and finally, I headed back Dietrich's slightly off-course ball.

“Oh?!”

Dietrich and his friends were looking at me in astonishment. Some of them had blank expressions like they had no idea what they'd just witnessed.

Heh heh. You see that? These are the combat preparation measures created by the real magic research club!

“A-Amazing, Miss Astrid. How in the world...?”

“It's a secret!”

Dietrich was surprised at how the ball he'd thrown using blood magic had come right back at him, but I couldn't explain the trick behind it. This was something I'd need during my showdown with fate.

“Want to try again?”

“Yeah!”

Wonderful! What an excellent reaction for an elementary schooler. That's the right way to be.

“Big Sis Astrid is here to take you on as many times as you like!”

And so, Dietrich's friends threw balls at me like crazy while I kept hitting them back using my combat preparation measures. At one point, Minne passed me a racket, and I started using that to whack them back. The number of onlookers started growing while I was at it!

“This is really amazing...” Dietrich sounded impressed. “Your magic truly is exceptional, Miss Astrid.”

“Oh, this is nothing!” I replied with a bow. “Everyone, step right up and see for yourselves! The real magic research club’s performance will be ending soon! We’ve also got emotion-changing snacks and tea!”

So it was that the real magic research club’s exhibition turned out to be a big success. Along with my performance, the emotion-changing snacks were also well received, especially our happiness chocolates—those were all gone in no time.

All right. Now that my club has made an impression, I can use the rest of my time to enjoy my final culture festival as a middle schooler!

But then, an unexpected visitor appeared.

“Astrid.”

“P-Prince Friedrich... And Lord Adolf and Lord Silvio too... What brings you here?”

“We heard from Werner that you’re putting on an interesting show here.”

Werner! That was the worst thing to say and the worst person to say it to!

“Well, it’s nothing particularly impressive...”

“Your Highness, Lady Astrid’s blood magic is incredible. As a member of the tennis club, I’m sure you’ll agree. No matter what ball you throw, and no matter how you throw it, Lady Astrid can send it flying right back at you.”

Minne! That was the worst thing to say and the worst person to say it to!

“Is that so? I’d certainly love to see it for myself.”

“Y-Yes, very well. Please, take a ball and throw it at me. You may use blood magic, if you please.”

Gah... I thought I’d get through the day without seeing him, but it’s like everyone’s trying to push me onto this landmine. Is this fate trying to put things back on track? Because that’d be a problem!

“You’re sure it’s all right to throw it?” Adolf sounded concerned. “What if it

hits you?"

"Don't worry. I can say with confidence that not a single ball will hit me."

I knew I wouldn't have any problems. I'd had no trouble dodging all the balls thrown full-force by the elementary schoolers, after all.

"Well, here goes." Friedrich threw a ball toward me.

Mm? It's like he doesn't want it to hit me. That's way off target.

But it was still no problem for me while my combat preparation measures were active.

"Here you go!"

I hit back the balls thrown by Adolf and Silvio first, and then I leaped sideways so that I could hit back the ball thrown by Friedrich. *Easy peasy.*

"I should have known, Astrid! I didn't think you'd actually be able to hit that ball back at us. You truly do excel at blood magic. We're forbidden from using blood magic during tennis matches, but I think there'd be much to gain from practicing against you."

"Oh, I don't imagine you'd learn much from me..."

Please spare me. Just encountering you like this is stressful enough.

"So, this is what's possible with blood magic...?"

Adolf was gazing at me with a look of admiration. *Hey, don't cheat on your girlfriend when she's right here.*

"Silvio, what did you think?" Adolf asked him.

"Such things would be impossible for someone with little mana like me."

Pretty much. Silvio's mana capacity is surprisingly low, isn't it? He seems to barely scrape by during practical classes. I can see how that'd give him an inferiority complex, but we've got too many people feeling inferior because of their magic already! We need some balance here!

"You'll have to excuse me," I told everyone. "I've agreed to meet my cousin."

"Very well," Friedrich replied. "This was very educational."

Oh, that's right. Friedrich has the ability to read the flow of mana. He couldn't have figured out how my combat preparation measures work just now, right...?

Chapter 26 — The Villainess Enjoys the Culture Festival

“Iris, sorry to keep you waiting!”

I got to the spot where I’d planned to meet Iris just a little after our arranged time. It was Friedrich’s fault that I was late; that jerk!

“Let’s take a look around, Astrid! Lord Werner and I have chosen some interesting things to visit. Shall we?”

“Let’s!”

We were also going to see a performance by the drama club later. Our schedule was jam-packed.

“So, where should we go first?” I asked.

“Let me see. The food from the food research club was delicious. They were preparing dishes using magic beasts defeated by the Adventurer’s Guild, of all things. I never imagined that magic beasts were edible.”

“Hm. Well, I’ve been moving around a lot today, so I’ve worked up quite an appetite. Let’s go! Let’s go!”

Magic beast cuisine? I wonder what kind. I’m always defeating magic beasts with the Adventurer’s Guild, but none of them ever look particularly tasty. I don’t know which part of a griffin you could eat, I’d worry about being poisoned by a cockatrice, and I wouldn’t want to meet anyone who eats goblins or orcs. I did try kraken a while back, and that was good, so I suppose it makes sense that other magic beasts could taste good if they’re prepared right.

“Ah. Here it is, Astrid!”

The food research club’s exhibition booth was in the most conspicuous spot in the second gym.

Damn. The teacher who’s their adviser must have been lucky with the lottery...

“I do hope there’ll be something left,” Iris said.

"I'd be happy just to talk to them," I replied. "I want to know how they're preparing their magic beasts."

If I can learn what method they're using, I could try it while I'm out questing with Petra and the others. I bet they'd be surprised.

We waited in line for fifteen minutes to see the food research club.

"Welcome to the food research club!" Everyone at the exhibition booth greeted us with smiles.

"We heard that you were cooking magic beasts here," I said.

"That's right! Since magic beasts continue to be killed at an increasing rate, our club has been trying to find delicious ways to prepare their meat. Are you interested?"

"Of course!"

If there's a way, I wanna hear it. Considering adventurers don't drain the blood or process their kills in any way, I can't imagine there being much edible meat to be had though. They're fighters, not hunters, after all.

"First, we have this fried griffin wing. There's also this kelpie carpaccio. Please try some!"

The food they showed us looked so good that I wouldn't have thought it came from magic beasts. The fragrance was also pleasant and didn't smell at all like magic beasts.

"I've already eaten, but please, go ahead, Astrid," Iris said.

"Okay. I'll give it a try."

I started off by throwing a fried wing into my mouth.

Oh?! The meat is really juicy, and there's no unpleasant odor at all. Is this really from a magic beast?

I tried some of the carpaccio too.

Yep! No unpleasant odor here either! The meat is super tender and tastes great!

"Wow... It's so good that I wouldn't have believed it was magic beast meat."

Did you do anything special with it?"

"Yes. We masked the smell of the meat using vegetables and a type of herb that's also used for medicinal purposes. Meat from defeated magic beasts always has a bad smell to it, but we found a way to remedy that after some trial and error. This was the result."

"I see."

So, it's possible to hide the smell of magic beast meat with herbs, making it palatable.

"Does this work with goblins and orcs?"

"I'm not sure we'd want to try that..."

That figures.

"Well, that was great, and I learned something. Thank you!"

"You're welcome! Thank you for stopping by!"

I got a surprisingly good meal out of that.

"How was it, Astrid? I'm impressed that they can make food using beasts that usually just cause harm. Maybe we'll all be eating magic beast meat regularly in the future."

"Maybe. If adventurers could kill them then sell the meat, they'd make more money!"

If magic beast meat gets popular, the Adventurer's Guild might give out better rewards... Heh heh.

"Where should we head next?!"

"Would you like to hear a performance by the wind ensemble club next? The starting time is here in the program."

"All right! Let's go enjoy it!"

I visited the wind ensemble club together with Iris, and then we visited the exhibition booths of the handicrafts club, the art club, and the newspaper club.

The newspaper club's exhibition turned out to be quite surprising. They were

reporting on various happenings both within and outside of the country with the same competence as an ordinary news outlet. I had no idea how they'd gathered the information.

According to their reports, the Plusen Empire and Osterreich Empire were now engaged in a military standoff as each asserted their claim to the Silesia region. I sometimes read newspapers when I was in the mood, but I'd never heard anything about this.

The Silesia region was the source of tensions between the Plusen Empire and Osterreich Empire as they both asserted sovereignty over the reich. This wasn't a simple dispute over some territory. Both countries were staking their national pride on this confrontation.

"It looks like there's a lot of trouble in the world," Iris said.

"Yeah. This could lead us into war."

It definitely will start a war...

The Silesia dilemma was causing relations between the two countries to deteriorate rapidly, bringing on the age of iron and fire. The Plusen Empire was supposed to win in the end, but as the game's sequence of events slowly drifted off course, it felt like anything could happen.

"Now let's go watch the drama club's performance!"

"Good idea, Astrid. We could miss it if we don't hurry."

The drama club's performance was the main event. Iris had been looking forward to it as much as me.

"They're going to perform *Charlotte's Tale*. Do you know what sort of play it is, Iris?"

"Yes, it's a tragic romance. But I can't tell you more, or you might not enjoy it as much."

Hmm. Now I'm interested. I never cared much about theater, but the way Iris describes it makes me curious.

"It's about to start," Iris said. "Let's hurry there."

Iris and I felt excited as we entered the first gym.

Ooh. Looks like they're putting on a big show. The gym's seats are already filling up. I can see Sandra over there, too.

Oh, that's right, we'll see Reinhilde, the drama club's Dashing Prince. I'll bet a good percentage of the girls here are fans of hers.

Someone dressed a little like a jester introduced the performance from the first gym's stage.

"Today's third performance by the drama club is about to begin. The production is *Charlotte's Tale*. This tragic story is sure to bring a tear to every eye. Please enjoy it."

It was the girl named Charlotte who appeared first. Despite being a commoner, she was a talented mage. Her talent had caught the attention of many, making her famous.

Charlotte then saved the life of a prince with an incurable illness, leading to the two of them becoming friends. Charlotte got along well with the prince, who gradually became attracted to her.

However, those close to the prince did not look favorably upon Charlotte. They were strongly opposed to the idea of the prince marrying a commoner. But the prince was unwavering, and he persisted in his attempts to marry Charlotte.

And that's how I thought the story would end. But instead, the prince and Charlotte were both killed by nobles and royal family members opposed to the marriage. The pair, assassinated by blood magic, finally joined hands and died while praying that they might find happiness in heaven.

"Isn't it sad, Iris?"

"It is sad, Astrid..."

Iris and I cried to see how Charlotte was despised by the nobles despite her efforts to be worthy of her prince, and we cried again at the final scene where Charlotte and the prince agreed to meet again in heaven as they lay dying.

Reinhilde really did suit the role of prince. She actually looked like a fairy-tale

prince. Even I fell in love with her during the scene where she boldly faced certain death to protect Charlotte.

“Wasn’t Reinhilde great in her role as the prince? Did you fall for her, Iris?”

“Y-Yes. I certainly admire her for being able to play such a role flawlessly.”

But isn’t this story kinda similar to Elsa and Friedrich’s relationship? It’s a similar romance that transcends class boundaries. I can deal with Friedrich dying, but I wouldn’t want Elsa to be assassinated. She’s so cute and down-to-earth! I’d hate to see her assassinated after getting mixed with Friedrich.

“This is worrying,” I said to myself. “She didn’t get assassinated in the game, but...”

Oh, that’s right. Elsa is actually a daughter of House Franken, so she shouldn’t reach the same ending as Charlotte. But even so, I’m sure a lot of nobles would hate Elsa because she spent a long time living as a commoner. Maybe we’ll see some failed assassination attempts, similar to what was in the play.

I might have to think about how I’m going to protect Elsa from assassins in the future... Not that I can do a whole lot. My hands are already full trying to protect myself.

“Astrid, is something on your mind?”

“Kind of. I’m just thinking about the play we watched. It reminded me of someone who’s in a similar sort of situation.”

“A similar situation to Charlotte?”

I can’t really explain it to Iris because I’m the only one who knows about the game from my past life. I’d better keep it to myself.

“The play really made me interested in the drama club,” Iris said. “Now I’m certain that I should try joining as a temporary member.”

“You should. It’s important to get over the things holding us back.”

If Iris gets over her shyness, she can make friends with some respectable people.

This culture festival was a lot of fun. I just wish that I could have enjoyed it like

this every year. Landmines were getting in my way until now, but I'd like to have a little more fun in the future. I just hope they'll let me.

Epilogue

The culture festival ended without incident! You could even call it a roaring success.

Our exhibition was well received, and the snacks we offered disappeared quickly.

I'd also enjoyed watching a play by the drama club for the first time, so I felt I'd gotten the most out of the culture festival. It was the most I'd been able to relax and enjoy myself since being reincarnated.

But I still had many problems to deal with.

Mr. Bernhard still showed no interest in me whatsoever. I'd tried to turn the situation around with the love potion, but that had come to nothing. Even after going as far as to make a spell that broke through barriers, it still failed because I hadn't considered that he might already know about the effects of love potions.

I really wanted some way to make Mr. Bernhard fall for me, but it seemed I was more like an annoying little sister to him, giving me no chance of ever making him mine. Woe was me.

I needed to break free from my position as a little sister and make him feel some attraction toward me, but due to my lack of romantic experience, I had no idea how. The road to his heart was fraught with peril. Woe was me...

My work as an adventurer was also on my mind.

I'd proven to myself that my combat preparation measures allowed me to fight against people, which was a big step forward. If the empire someday plunged into civil war, I'd be able to pull the trigger with no hesitation when facing an enemy.

In truth, the fact that I felt not even the slightest guilt when killing someone really creeped me out, but I could deal with that for the time being. I wouldn't be much of an adventurer if I felt guilty every single time I killed a bandit, and the onset of civil war could mean that I'd have to kill people in the tens of

thousands. For now, it seemed best to let myself gradually grow used to killing.

Even so, feeling a little shocked each time might have been preferable. But on the other hand, Petra and the others had decimated the bandits without using any combat preparation measures, so maybe it was normal to not feel any particular shock in this world.

And then there was the most important thing of all: the countdown to Elsa's arrival at the academy had begun.

I'd soon be entering high school myself. Once I was a high schooler, Elsa would finally enroll at the academy.

Although she was a duke's daughter, she was still living the difficult life of a commoner baker's daughter. It was she who would have to claim Friedrich as her own.

Adolf already had Minne, and Silvio had Lotte, so Elsa would just have to devote her efforts to the Friedrich route.

I dreaded to think how everyone else was going to react. My friends weren't going to accept the idea of Elsa dating Friedrich quite so easily. It was me, of all people, who they wanted to see get together with Friedrich, and they weren't likely to take kindly to some upstart commoner getting in the way.

I had no illusions about everything progressing smoothly. There was a chance that I'd die from stress soon after starting high school.

Please, Elsa! Do your best to make Friedrich fall for you, and then hold on to him until graduation without dragging me into it!

I said my prayers while facing toward the commercial district where Elsa lived, but there was no hint of a response from her.

This is hopeless...

The only real option was for me to clear the way ahead for her. Once I got her and Friedrich together, I'd be able to graduate safely. Though I had to do it without getting too involved.

But what if I failed? One possibility was that Minne and the others would bully her, and then the blame would somehow fall on me. My friends were good

girls, but they were still nobles, and prejudice toward commoners was very real.

If Elsa tried to get close to Friedrich, my friends might descend on her like Spartan warriors. That was my fear. I knew it would mean a disaster. We'd all be held jointly responsible, which would lead to the seizure of my family's domain.

Once they came for our domain, I'd no longer be living in an otome game. It'd be more like an FPS, or perhaps a strategy game.

I shall show no mercy to those who attempt to lay their hands on the Oldenburg family, no matter who they may be! I shall dispatch them to the afterlife without heeding their excuses!

With the weapons I'd developed and all the connections to influential nobles that I'd worked to build, I would raise an army, destroy the imperial household, and send Friedrich to the guillotine. And if I did somehow lose in the civil war, I'd still have all the money I'd saved, so I could run away to a foreign country. I'd have to, or else it would be me being sent to the guillotine. I wouldn't want that.

The most difficult period in my life of impending doom was now about to arrive. But who would win—me or fate?

I demand a fair battle!

Side Story — The Villainess's Familiars

A total of four familiars were in Astrid's service.

The first was Blau. This fairy was her longest-serving familiar, and they'd entered a blood contract. This was one of the fairies involved in the Iris defense operations. She also silenced Astrid's guns, controlled the wind to help her fly, and provided many other useful services.

The second was Gelb. This fairy joined Astrid after being saved from Fenrir. She'd recently entered into a blood contract and started participating in Iris-defense operations.

The third was Rot. This was another fairy who joined Astrid after being saved from Fenrir. Just like Gelb, she'd recently entered into a blood contract and started participating in Iris-defense operations.

Lastly, there was Fenrir. Serafine of the Witches Association had arranged for Astrid and Fenrir to fight one-on-one, and Fenrir had agreed to become Astrid's familiar after being defeated.

These were the familiars who served Astrid.

Few mages had as many as three fairies, and familiars like Fenrir were unheard of because the magic necessary to bind such a familiar had all but disappeared from the world. Having achieved such a feat, Astrid was clearly an exceptional mage, and one blessed with good fortune.

Now, let us take a look at a day in the life of each of these familiars.

....

Blau's days began when Astrid woke her up.

"Blau, it's morning. We're leaving soon, so get dressed."

"Yawn... Yes, Master."

Astrid tended to fly to school whenever her father wasn't around, and she was once again setting to the sky today after breaking free from her maids.

"Isn't the weather nice, Blau?!"

“Yes! The wind feels good!”

If the weather were poor, then even Astrid would be resigned to traveling to school by carriage, despite her father’s absence. Visibility was poor on rainy days, so flying could lead to a crash.

“T-Touch down!”

With a pleased look on her face, Astrid landed in the athletics grounds, which were almost always deserted.

“What are you looking so pleased about, Miss Astrid?”

“Oh. Good morning, Mr. Bernhard!”

By this point, Blau’s work was over. It was her habit to go back to sleep and then pass the time without a care.

....

Astrid would wake up Gelb and Rot just as morning assembly was about to start, give them cookies for breakfast, and then set them to work.

“I’m relying on you again today, Gelb, Rot.”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Yes, ma’am!”

Work involved just one thing: their mission was to watch over Astrid’s cousin, Iris.

Nothing bad ever happened, which made the two fairies wonder whether there was any point, but Astrid felt certain monitoring Iris was necessary, so her fairies worked hard on their assignment regardless. If you can call lurking in shadows and stalking people hard work, that is.

Either way, utmost care was required because Iris was the type who could see fairies.

“Hm...?” Iris immediately sensed the presence of Rot and Gelb and began looking around.

“What’s wrong, Lady Iris?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. Now, what were you about to tell me?”

“I was about to invite you to join us on a visit to a famous cake store in the capital. I’m sure the others would be delighted to hear Lady Iris is coming.”

“That sounds great. I’ll gladly join you. But are you sure you wouldn’t mind me being there?”

“Not at all! Not at all! We would all love to have you accompany us!”

Iris was talking with Werra. Not long ago, Werra had been bullying Iris, but her attitude had completely turned around since then. She’d branded Iris “an angel gracing us from the heavens” and seemed to be on the verge of founding a new religion. If such a religion ever did get started, however, Astrid would no doubt fight Werra for the title of founder.

“Very well, Lady Iris. We’ll all go there together!”

“All right.”

The sight of Iris’s angelic smile had made Werra’s nose begin to bleed.

“Nothing to report today.”

“It’s all the same as always.”

Rot and Gelb reported their findings as they continued to watch over Iris, floating behind her unnoticed.

....

“Blau, Rot, Gelb, it’s snack time.”

“Snacks!”

When lunchtime came around, the fairies would hurry to the Round Table before flying over to their own territory. There were Round Table members besides Astrid who also employed fairies, and all of the fairies avoided fighting with each other by sticking to assigned territories.

“It’s chocolate cake today. Come here, and I’ll cut everyone a slice.”

“Roger!”

Your average fairy is quite selfish, so they’d always gather for snack time, no

matter the situation.

“Little fairies, would you like my chocolate cake too?” Iris tried to coax Blau and the others over.

“Huh? I like cake, but...” Blau’s gaze went back and forth between Iris and the cake while she considered how to react.

“What’s the problem?” Astrid asked her. “Go get it, Blau.”

“All right...”

Blau nervously approached the cake, but the moment she got close...

“Fairies are so cute!” Iris grabbed Blau and gripped her tight.

“Ahh! I knew this would happen! Gelb! Rot! Save me!”

Blau cried out to Gelb and Rot for help, but they were too busy gobbling up chocolate cake.

“Master’s chocolate cake is so good.”

“You traitors!” Blau cried.

“Iris, I think you should let Blau go now,” Astrid said.

“All right, Astrid. Here’s your cake, little fairy.” Iris released Blau next to her own cake.

“Can I really eat all of this?”

“Yes. It’s all yours.”

“Yay! Thank you, Miss Iris!”

Fairies liked to eat sweet things, but they had no actual need to eat; sweet food just happened to please them. Many had attempted to explain this mystery, but the general consensus was that it was merely a whim of the fairies. Sweet food couldn’t replenish mana, and fairies could also eat things that weren’t sweet. Thus, the whole thing appeared to be just a simple matter of preferences.

When a cake or two disappeared from a bakery, the owner would accept that it was just the fairies’ share, and would expect the favor to be repaid later.

Whether those cakes truly were eaten by fairies was something only the fairies knew.

“Master! No fair! Blau’s getting it all!”

“Gelb wants more cake too!”

This looked less like fairies taking their share and more like fairies being incredibly demanding.

“Then why don’t you go play with Iris?” Astrid suggested.

“Th-That’s not...”

“Well, there’s no such thing as a free lunch. Though I suppose you’ve both been working hard for me, so I’ll share some more of my cake.”

“Yay!”

A fairy’s master should ensure that their fairy lives a happy life.

“Blau too! Blau does her best, master!”

“You just had an entire cake to yourself, Blau. You’ll get diabetes if you eat any more.”

In reality, research suggested that fairies would never turn diabetic, no matter how much sweet food they ate.

“Ugh. I’m not accepting that.”

“You’ll have to.”

This was how Astrid and her fairies spent the day’s lunchtime.

....

Now, for the most troublesome of her familiars.

“Fenrir. Dinner time.”

While using her blood magic to drag some mooing cows along behind her, Astrid entered a spatial rift she’d created using lost magic. There, a forest lay before her, where the sun was high in the sky even though it was already evening.

“I see you’ve come once more to offer up a sacrifice.” The creature that

emerged from the forest was a fenrir.

“Your meals are so much more expensive than everyone else’s. You eat up cows like they’re bite-sized.”

“Though I have no requirement for food, you must consider this the natural cost of having such a familiar,” Fenrir said boastfully. “There are few witches capable of bringing a divine beast such as I into their service.”

“Yeah, sure.”

Astrid more or less ignored him as she brought the cows over. The cows struggled and tried to flee in the face of a predator, but Astrid’s blood magic allowed her to grip the rope so firmly that they had no escape.

“What’ll it be? Same as always?”

“Indeed,” Fenrir said. “I desire the thrill of the hunt. Release them.”

“Got it.” Astrid let go of the rope.

The cows fled in a panic as Fenrir took chase. Then they cried out as he brought them down one after another.

“You’ve really got it easy, Fenrir. This is eating up the savings I’m meant to live on in exile.”

It was true that the cost of Fenrir’s food was eating into Astrid’s savings.

“You mean to say that you still intend to run?”

“Yes. I’ve told you, if I lose the civil war, my family’s domain will be seized, and everyone on my side could be rounded up and executed. I’ll have to run. I don’t wanna die.”

“Hmpf. I sincerely doubt a witch of your caliber could be killed so easily. You’ve defeated fire dragons, and you even bested me. How could an army of pitiful humans stand against you?”

“There’s no telling how it’ll go. I’ve never fought in a war before. How am I to know whether the firepower I’ve got is going to be enough?”

Astrid had indeed defeated fire dragons and this fenrir, but it was far from certain that she could overcome a nation’s army. Humans were far more

numerous than beasts, and they fought strategically. Whether extreme firepower alone would be enough to ensure victory was a complete unknown. Astrid hoped she could win, but there was a chance that fate would force her to lose in order to set the story back on track. She couldn't afford to be complacent.

"You are a coward. Cowardice has its merits, however. Those without fear are easy prey. There's no harm in being ever cautious."

"Doesn't that make you a coward too?"

"What nonsense. I am a divine beast. What have I to fear? I will concede that you defeated me, but my honor as a divine beast remains intact. I remain proud, knowing that none but you will ever defeat me."

"Well, isn't that convenient?"

Fenrir being full of himself was nothing new.

"Well, that's dinnertime over. See you next time."

"Very well. Do not forget that you must bring me live offerings."

"Yeah, sure."

With that, Fenrir's feeding time was finished. This wasn't an everyday occurrence, and it placed great strain on Astrid's purse, so Fenrir was likely to go without a meal the next day. He'd said himself that divine beasts never got hungry, so missing a meal wouldn't hurt.

That was how Astrid justified it. Otherwise, it would have been Astrid's purse that withered away and died.

....

The day was coming to an end. Astrid was worn out from the studies, magic research, personal relationships, and adventuring that kept her busy.

"Come on. You have to soak in the water, Blau."

"Fairies don't need baths!"

Astrid was taking a bath with her fairies.

While Gelb and Rot were at ease in the bathtub, Blau appeared to hate

bathing. She continuously struggled to break free from Astrid's grip.

"Blau, I need you nice and clean because Iris really likes you. If you're dirty, you'll get her dirty."

"Fairies never get dirty!"

"What are you talking about? You've still got chocolate on you from that cake."

Blau became covered in soap bubbles as Astrid scrubbed her clean.

"I love the bath," Gelb sighed. "This is heaven."

"It would be better if it were a little hotter," Rot said.

Even though Gelb and Rot took their baths without complaint, Blau was as unwilling as a cat each time.

"There we go! All clean! You can get out now, Blau. Make sure you get fully dry."

"I'm finally free," sighed Blau.

An exhausted-looking Blau fluttered out of the bathroom.

"I'll need to get you both clean next."

"Yes, master!"

Astrid then soaped up Gelb and Rot before doing the same to herself, and then they finally left the tub.

Meanwhile, Blau was lying down in the dressing room, looking completely worn out.

....

Astrid's fairies had their own bed where they'd sleep each night. Many of the servants couldn't see fairies, so this was necessary to ensure no one would accidentally trip over them.

Blau, Gelb, and Rot fell asleep lying side by side in the same bed. Much like cats, fairies seemed to relax when huddled up with others of their kind.

"Goodnight, Blau, Gelb, Rot," Astrid said before putting out the bedroom

light. The world was cloaked in darkness as Astrid and her fairies fell asleep.

At the same time, Fenrir was gazing up at the moon in the sky within the spatial rift.

"The full moon lacks a certain charm when it's present in the sky every night. But what can one do?"

Fenrir gazed up at the distant moon and howled. Though there was no one to answer his howl, he felt satisfied nonetheless.

This concluded another day for Astrid's familiars. The cycle would repeat once again the following day.

Afterword

Volume 3 of *Villainess: Reloaded! Blowing Away Bad Ends with Modern Weapons* has successfully been released! I'm grateful for your purchase!

Astrid is building an increasingly wide network of friends, but where will it lead her? That's where we've left off at the end of this volume.

With reliable allies on her side, how will it go for Astrid when the day of her fated showdown finally arrives? Will they help her to crush her fate?

Look forward to the next volume!

I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to my editor; to Qs11, who provided wonderful illustrations for this work in place of Wuhuo, who kindly provided the illustrations for the previous volumes; and to my dear readers who chose to read this book. I appreciate your continued support!

I wish you all the best!

616th Special Information Battalion



**“Then
I shall run
through
the forest
for a time.
Ride me,
master
of mine.”**

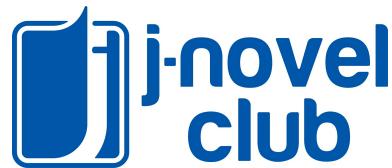
**“What?
I can ride
you?”**

**“One
human
girl is no
burden
to me.”**



*"Now, Minne,
Lotte, Brigitte!
Enjoy some
romance while
you're out
there!"*





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Villainess: Reloaded! Blowing Away Bad Ends with Modern Weapons Volume
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by 616th Special Information Battalion

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with

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